Facilitating Intercultural Competence Development with Intercultural Language

Teaching Approach in a Business English Speaking Class: An Action Research Project

by

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Statement of Originality

I, MU, Yuting, hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis and the material presented in this thesis is my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgement. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright and Plagiarism in writing the thesis and no material in this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or other universities.

Abstract

Developing intercultural competence plays an essential part in language learning. This resonates with Halliday's (1978) apt observation that culture provides meaning to language-in-use. Intercultural competence is a complex concept, including dimensions such as attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness (Byram, 2009). Cultivating students' intercultural competence has become one of the objectives of language teaching, and a range of courses has been designed and conducted for preparing students to take an active part in the global world. As more college students are willing to work in multinational corporations or study abroad, language teachers play an important role in providing students with more opportunities to enhance their intercultural knowledge and skills.

Based on Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model and guided by the intercultural language teaching approach proposed by Liddicoat (2003; 2013), the researcher developed a course that seeks to cultivate students' intercultural competence in four dimensions, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. One class of second-year English major students took part in the 12-week course with another class as the control group. During the course, students experienced a process which involved noticing, comparing, and reflecting through various intercultural activities. This study employed a range of methods including questionnaire, interview, and reflective journals, and it was found that students' intercultural competence was improved, and the course showed significantly positive influence on the cultivation of students' attitudes, facilitation of cultural knowledge acquisition, and the development of intercultural skills and awareness. Further analysis led to identification and detailed discussion of a range of aspects of the four dimensions of intercultural competence such as willingness to explore otherness and enriched knowledge of value systems and various intercultural skills.

The study has shown an example on how to apply intercultural language teaching approach as an intervention in class, which is expected to shed lights on guidance on the provision of opportunities for students to notice cultural differences, compare and analyze intercultural issues, and implement knowledge and skills for intercultural interactions. Suggestions for future language teaching practice and curriculum development are also provided. This study extends the literature of culture teaching in language education both pedagogically and theoretically, and provides important educational insights for resources designers, language teachers, and learners.

Key words: language education; intercultural competence; classroom teaching; intercultural language teaching; vocational education

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List of Abbreviations

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ICC	Intercultural Competence
ILT	English Language Teaching
TS	Teaching Session

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overall introduction

 This section explains the structure of the research about the intercultural competence cultivation in classroom language teaching. The thesis consists of seven chapters, including introduction and the significance of the research, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, implications and recommendations, and conclusion.

 This thesis aims to unravel some of the mysteries surrounding the cultivation of intercultural competence in language education. The overall aim of the action research is to explore the influence of an intercultural speaking course that adapted the intercultural language teaching approach, on facilitating the development of learners' intercultural competence. The primary objective of the research is to explore how the intercultural language teaching approach facilitates the development of the participating students' intercultural competence in attitude, knowledge, skill, and awareness. In addition, the study explores the developmental process that students experience in learning the intercultural speaking course. The other objective of this research is that by conducting action teaching and follow-up reflection, the researcher could find some pedagogical suggestions for future language teaching as well as the cultivation of intercultural competence.

 As action research, two classes of undergraduate English major students were randomly selected and invited to take part in this research, and one of the classes acted as a control group. Questionnaires, journals, and interviews were used as main data collection methods. The first stage of this research focused on collecting students' self-reported intercultural competence reports with the aim to explore the status quo of students' intercultural competence. The curriculum was also developed under the guidance of intercultural language teaching principles and adjusted according to students' views gathered through the pre-course interviews. The second stage comprised of action teaching. In 12 weeks, the researcher taught

the speaking course to a class using the intercultural language teaching approach to explore the influence of the intercultural teaching approach on the development of intercultural competence. Students were guided to go through the intercultural learning process of noticing, comparing, and reflecting. Students in the class taught by the researcher were invited to keep a learning journal and participated in interviews that were conducted during the intervention. The third stage of this research involved collecting post-course surveys of students' self-evaluation of intercultural competence and interviewing students to elicit their views about the learning experience of the course. A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in the data analysis and a range of strategies was applied to enhance the quality and validity of the research. The research provides theoretical as well as a practical contribution to the cultivation of learners' intercultural competence through intercultural language teaching.

1.2 Significance and objectives of the study

Culture is impartial from language learning and teaching since it interacts with language activities in meaning and context (Némethová, 2014). It is broadly admitted that language and culture are inseparable; cultural practice influences linguistic practice (Canagarajah, 2005; Pennycook, 2007; Risager, 2006), and some researchers consider that culture teaching objectives are of great importance in language education (Baker, 2011; Byram, 1997; Hanvey, 1979). Many countries including China have included culture teaching objectives such as cultivating students' intercultural ability and intercultural communication in language teaching guidelines.

However, some researchers and experts pointed out that there is relatively few empirical research concerning this important topic in the context of mainland China (e.g., Shi & Shan, 2016; Song, 2008; Han & Song, 2011). Since the 1980s, research has focused more on the cross-cultural differences in language education and the connection between language and

culture. Research concerning the cultivation of intercultural competence is still a very limited part of the field of cross-cultural communication research. Researchers also propose that issues concerning intercultural objectives in curriculum and pedagogical principles adopted in foreign language classrooms are largely under-explored (Borghetti, 2013; Durocher, 2007). There is research focusing on the influence of overseas experience (e.g., Helm, 2009) or methods such as blogging and online diaries (e.g., Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Vigier & Bryant, 2009) on the development of students' intercultural competence, but relatively limited research on the cultivation of intercultural competence in foreign language classrooms. Research focusing more on the systemic teaching approach and related intervention plans that could promote the development of students' intercultural competence is needed. In addition to research on the usefulness of approaches and intervention design, another theoretical gap is due to the lack of studies exploring the nature of the development of intercultural competence. There is little information about how the competence is acquired, modified, and what specific route we can guide learners in developing intercultural competence (Liddicoat et al., 2003). In other words, the specific acquisition process learners go through while they experience intervention learning is not well-researched.

From a practical perspective, the integration of language skills and intercultural competency could assist learners to be better prepared for interacting in the global world (Moeller & Nugent, 2014). There is, therefore, great need to emphasis the development of intercultural competence for students' future careers, especially, for those who will work across cultures or with partners from other cultures. There is evidence suggesting that we need research on promoting the development of intercultural competence for some practical reasons. Firstly, despite an increasing desire to develop students' intercultural competence, many language teachers have vague perceptions of intercultural competence, its connection with language teaching, and the content and approaches of cultivating intercultural

competence (Han & Song, 2011; Song, 2008, 2009; Xu, 2008; Zhang, 2007). Therefore, in practice, teachers' efforts to assist students to develop intercultural abilities tend to focus on teaching students about the target culture (East, 2012). Liddicoat et al. (2003) also present in a report on intercultural language learning that teachers have obscure perceptions of intercultural competence and intercultural competence education. It appears that culture teaching, especially the discussion of culture-general topics, and the cultivation of intercultural competence have been neglected to some extent (Demircioğlu & Çakir, 2015; Godwin, 2013; Yesil & Demiröz, 2017). In addition, students' current intercultural competence needs to be further developed (Liu, 2016; Qi, 2016; Sun, 2014; Zerzová, 2016). Becoming intercultural competent requires efforts and awareness, and language users need to equip themselves with a set of knowledge of language, culture, and communication for interacting in diverse situations (Baker, 2011). For effective communication in intercultural situations, apart from selecting contextually appropriate language, it is also necessary to relate to otherness and critically consider what is appropriate for the interlocutor in the interaction, both linguistically and behaviorally (East, 2012). If teachers are willing to cultivate students' intercultural competence, they need more training or guidance to do this effectively. In the Chinese context, this also meets the requirement of national guidelines of language teachers and the cultivation objectives of students, especially for language major students. So, for both learners and teachers, research on the development of intercultural competence is necessary for the above-mentioned practical considerations.

Besides the above theoretical background and practical needs, as an English teacher, it is frustrating to find that some students, although they have got a certain level of linguistic knowledge and the basic language they need, could not communicate smoothly with people from other cultures, or have some difficulties in understanding cultural phenomena. The reason behind this problem may be the absence of cultural knowledge and intercultural skills.

It is against this backdrop that the researcher embarked on this study. By constructing and utilizing a set of intercultural teaching means and activities, the researcher conducted an action teaching in a language course, and summarized findings and reflections for future language teaching with the aim of promoting the development of students' intercultural competence.

This study sought to contribute to this growing field of research by exploring the influence of the intervention guided by intercultural language teaching approach on facilitating the development of students' intercultural competence. The significance of the research can be summarized in theoretical and practical perspectives. On one hand, this research aims to enrich the existing intercultural literature by adding empirical information and more underlying qualitative data to the area of intercultural competence research. In addition, it seeks to contribute to the discussion of the developing theoretical framework of intercultural language teaching in addition to addressing the gap of research within Chinese context under the topic. On the other hand, the research seeks to provide useful teaching approaches for language teachers to guide their future classroom teaching practice. It could also act as a helpful guide for practitioners in the field of teaching curriculum development and teaching resources preparation. Taking the intercultural perspective in language teaching and culture teaching has great potential in facilitating the development of students' intercultural competence.

1.3 Research questions

There is a dearth of research focusing on understanding the effectiveness of the intercultural language teaching approach and the developing systematic curricula for cultivating students' intercultural competence. As a result, this research sought to explore the influence of intercultural language teaching approach and provide useful pedagogical suggestions. In light of the conceptual framework and consulted literature, and in an effort to

make contributions to address the theoretical and practical gaps illustrated in the significance section, the following research questions were proposed:

Primary research question: How could the intercultural language teaching approach facilitate the development of students' intercultural competence in attitude, knowledge, skill, and critical cultural awareness?

Sub-questions:

1) What are the changes in students' intercultural competence before and after attending the course?

2) What are the intercultural language teaching approaches and activities that can effectively enhance different aspects of students' intercultural competence?

3) What is the developmental process of students' intercultural competence during the course? How does the course facilitate the developmental changes?

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter presents the literature review. A number of key themes related to the area of study and the main research questions were identified and the literature review is framed around these themes which include: culture, language and language teaching; approaches to teaching culture; intercultural competence in language education and the cultivation of intercultural competence in the Chinese context. In addition, an effort has been made to highlight findings from previous studies focusing on the development of students' intercultural competence.

2.1 Culture, language, and language teaching

In Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996), culture is described as "Formal culture, including the formal institutions, the great figures of history, literature, fine arts, and sciences. Informal culture is those aspects of daily living, housing, clothing, food, tools, transportation, and all the patterns of behavior that members of the culture regard as necessary and appropriate" (p. 40). On the other hand, Liddicoat et al. (2003) interpret culture as a complicated system of "concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviors, practices, rituals and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institutions they create" (p. 45). Nieto's (1999) definition of culture is "the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people" (p.48), which also reflects that it is not easy to determine which aspects of a particular culture should be included in the classroom. Furstenberg (2010) further explains that "culture is a highly complex, elusive, multilayered notion that encompasses many different and overlapping areas and this inherently defies easy categorization and classification" (p. 329). Since the 1980s, the most relevant cultural concept has been the 'little c' culture of daily life, also known as 'small cultures' (Holliday, 1999). It includes how English-speaking people behave, how they eat,

how they talk, how they live, their customs beliefs, and values. Kramsch (2013) further explains the classification of big C and small c. The state and its institutions (such as schools and universities) promote the big C culture as a national heritage. This is a culture traditionally taught in standard national languages. With regards to the teaching of history, institutions, literature, and art of the target countries, the target language is embedded in the reassuring continuity of a national community, making it meaningful and valuable (Kramsch, 2013). However, the focus now is on communication and interaction in the social environment. The study of cultures in language learning has always been a hot topic in the study of sociolingual suitability of language use in intercultural pragmatics and real cultural contexts (Kramsch, 2013).

As a complicated system, culture and language are indivisible, and culture teaching is closely connected with language teaching (Liddicoat et al., 2003; Mitchell & Myles, 2004; Moeller & Osborn, 2014). However, how to integrate culture teaching into language teaching is complex. For one thing, culture is a highly complex, elusive, multi-level concept that contains many different and overlapping domains and is inherently difficult to classify. Another point is that culture is no longer simply viewed as a small piece of factual information that a teacher explains or interprets, but rather a process that allows language learners to develop knowledge of others (Furstenberg, 2010). Until the 1970s, culture was regarded as a humanistic component of language research and was connected with the grammar-translation method for foreign language teaching. In the 1970s and 1980s, along with the communicative shift of language teaching, culture became synonymous with the lifestyle and everyday behavior of members of the language community, linked by shared experiences and memories (Kramsch, 2013). As Kramsch proposes, if culture is no longer subject to the territories and history of a nation-state, then we must regard it as a dynamic process of discussion, carried out in various ways by individuals engaged in the struggle for

symbolism and control of subjectivity and historical interpretation.

The important role of culture in language education and general literacy has been well documented (Byram & Grundy, 2003; Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001; Kramsch, 1993, 1998; Risager, 2007). In the second half of the twentieth Century, there were other social, political, and cultural factors (e.g., migration and cross-border exchanges). It also provides foundation for raising awareness of the importance of culture in language education (Porto, 2013). However, although culture teaching poses challenges for language teachers, integrating culture with language teaching can be beneficial. Researchers proposed that it is essential for language users to grasp culture knowledge, such as social practice, and integrating FL/L2 education and intercultural education has a positive influence on both students' cross-cultural attitudes and language learning (Bennett, 1997; Deardorff, 2011; Ishii, 2009; Lázár, 2007; Phillips, 1999). Dealing with cultural differences involves more than just the accumulation of facts, it needs the ability to use the language appropriately or to effectively relate the difference to 'otherness' (Byram & Zarate, 1997). Carefully planned instruction that offers opportunities for intercultural exploration and reflection is required to achieve this (Moeller & Nugent, 2014).

As the focus shifts from teaching to learning, people are increasingly aware of the role of culture in language classrooms (Sowden, 2007). For instance, Wei (2005) suggests that learners should be aware of their own culture, rather than just spreading and teaching American or British culture in English classes. Local cultural interventions may contribute to English teaching because the use of local culture in a classroom environment reduces the likelihood of assimilation and alienation, and local culture plays an important role in promoting and improving students' language learning (Mahmoud, 2015). Byram (2006) views culture from an individual and global perspective. From this perspective, we demonstrate personal identity, social identity, and cultural identity (for example, belonging to

an ethnic group or minority group). Kramsch (1993) also believes that the role of culture in language teaching is even more important, saying that it is not just the fifth skill but something that has been in the background since the first day.

In foreign language teaching practice, two major foreign language teaching methods represent a completely different view of the connection between language and culture (Ho, 2009). The first approach emphasizes a knowledge-based and contrasting approach to teaching cultural competence and considers culture to be a static concept that is independent of language. From this view, culture is a set of facts that must be passed on to students. Therefore, as Ho (2009) correctly pointed out, this view neglects the developmental nature of culture. For the second view, culture is at the heart of intercultural communication, and culture is dynamic, and language and culture are interdependent (Ho, 2009). Therefore, this view contradicts the static view. It discusses culture from a broader perspective, taking into account the need to address intercultural differences such as culturally imposed behaviors (Piątkowska, 2015). What students need is to be instructed to understand what the target language person is talking about and what is being done to make it meaningful. We should also learn how to create these meanings through linguistic and non-verbal channels, including the tone of emotion (Truong & Tran, 2014).

As Scarino (2010) pointed out, re-understanding language under intercultural orientation is complicated for at least two reasons. Firstly, in language education, the connection between language, culture, and learning is always dynamic. Secondly, developing a new understanding does not mean abandoning the understanding of the past, but rather incorporating it into a more complicated and comprehensive framework for language understanding. Since the late 1970s, language, as a communicative system, began to integrate the dimension of variability in the aim and context of language use. In the language curriculum, this level is often expressed as a fixed description of functions and concepts, with

a list of the roles and context in which participants can play in communication. Recently, people have come to understand language as a social practice. This framework seeks to capture the understanding that true communication occurs between people who are socially present, in their own life worlds and experiences. Language is interpreted to be more than just a structural grammatical system; it is interpreted as the interaction between people as interacting participants. This interpretation of language is often reflected in the curriculum as a comprehensive task through which learners complete communicative behavior (Scarino, 2010).

2.2 Main approaches to teaching culture

Four main approaches to teaching culture are discussed in literature and these include knowledge-based approach, contrastive approach, communicative language teaching, and intercultural teaching. The knowledge-based approach has been criticized for several reasons, including its view on the presentation of facts by students, who are seen as passive recipients of knowledge that are non-experienced and therefore invisible to them. However, another more serious question about this approach is that it treats cultural and linguistic abilities separately (Piątkowska, 2015).

Contrast and knowledge-based methods have their limitations because they only lead to the development of factual knowledge while ignoring the analytical, evaluation and explanatory skills of cultural meanings and values. Therefore, students are not instructed on how to find the connection between the knowledge they learn and the knowledge and experience they have acquired in the society in which they live (Thanasoulas, 2001). In the same vein, these methods do not provide learners with so-called implicit cultures that are obtained not only by memorizing cultural facts or simply by contrasting the aspects of the learner and the target language culture (Piątkowska, 2015).

Communicative language teaching only pays attention to the decent norms in the target

language culture and does not enable students to have the ability to communicate with non-native speakers from other cultures (Piątkowska, 2015). There is no doubt that intercultural communication needs to be able to view the target language culture from different cultural perspectives and respect different values and beliefs. This ability is the core of intercultural competence, and it extends the concept of cultural competence beyond the target language and culture (Piątkowska, 2015).

Intercultural teaching is consistent with the constructivist approach because it is a learner-centered approach that promotes learner autonomy, the construction of meaning, and the ability to transfer knowledge and skills to other environments that learners have not encountered before. The result of learning is no longer single, but a heterogeneous cultural perspective. Any cross-cultural approach hopes that learners can better understand the target culture and their own culture, rather than trying to imitate English-speaking cultural behavior patterns (Marczak, 2010). In any knowledge-based teaching approach, the main objective is to understand the facts about a particular culture. However, with intercultural teaching, the focus is not only on knowledge, but on attitudes and skills. One might note that Byram's (1997) method differs from the communicative language teaching in that it focuses on explaining the ability to move beyond own perspective and cultural background, thus from the perspective of the interlocutor. Therefore, the effectiveness of communication depends not only on effective information exchange but more importantly on the effectiveness of establishing relationships with interlocutors (Piątkowska, 2015).

2.3 Intercultural competence

2.3.1 Definition

Intercultural competence is one of the expected outcomes of intercultural aspects in language learning and teaching, and is an important skill in the contemporary world, especially for experts engaged with communication between people (Moeller & Nugent,

2014). Researchers around the world have given many definitions of intercultural competence (e.g., Deardorff, 2006; Byram, 1997; Sercu, 2004). Defining intercultural competence is complicated. At the core of intercultural competence is to prepare individuals to interact appropriately and effectively with people from other cultures (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). Bennett (2008) defines intercultural capabilities as "a set of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills and traits that support effective and appropriate interactions across cultural contexts" (p. 97). Similarly, Paige et al. (1999) describe the development of intercultural competence as the process of obtaining the specific and general cultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to effectively communicate and interact with people from other cultures. It is a dynamic, evolving, and continuous process that engages learners in cognitive, behavioral, and emotional ways (Dunne, 2011). Communicative competence refers to the person's competence to interpret information and negotiate meaning with other people in a specific speech group (Bachman, 1990; Savignon, 2001). On the other hand, intercultural competence is focused on the speaker's ability to communicate effectively with people from other cultures that the speaker considers different from his own (Gómez & Fernando, 2012).

With the lack of a consensus definition of intercultural competence, Deardorff (2006) established an agreed-upon definition by consulting with a team of well-known experts in the area and administrators at higher education institutions. The most cited definition is: "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp. 247–248). Kramsch (2009) also emphasizes ICC as a "dynamic, flexible and locally contingent competence", what she terms 'symbolic competence' (p. 200). Byram (1997) also explains the concept of intercultural competence, indicating that someone who is intercultural competent can communicate with people from other cultures with a foreign language. Such individuals can negotiate and mediate interactions and satisfy both themselves and the interlocutor. Their cultural

competence is connected with their language ability, and they are aware of the implicit and explicit meanings of the language. They could acquire new cultural knowledge and reflect. The goal of the competence is neither just let students know some basic cultural knowledge, nor behave according to cultural stereotypes. Intercultural competence, on one hand, enables students to perform properly in cultural settings; and on the other hand, it encourages students to reflect their home culture and other cultures in a more profound way. In the way of becoming intercultural competent, students need to be aware of whether they are making sufficient progress, and teachers must make sure that students are actually learning and adjust their teaching according to students' needs and situation. As Sercu (2004) stated, all communication in a foreign language is intercultural, and their teaching should facilitate the acquisition of intercultural competence. The development of intercultural competence requires learners to try to increase their familiarity with other cultures, and then connect them with their own culture (Sercu, 2002).

The term 'intercultural' emerged in the field of intercultural education and intercultural communication in the 1980s. Both are components of an effort to strengthen connection and cooperation among members of different nationalities in the common European Union or global economy (Jackson, 2012; Kramsch, 2001). In Scandinavian countries (e.g., Hansen, 2002; Risager, 2006), Germany (Königs, 2003) and France (Moore, 2001), intercultural education is a part of the humanities education, which is particularly valued. In foreign language research, the term of intercultural competence appeared in Europe together with the term of communicative competence (e.g., Bredella & Delanoy, 1999; Byram & Fleming, 1998), with social and political tendencies (Corbett, 2003; Risager, 2007). Byram and Zarate (1997) identified five savoirs or abilities that make up intercultural competence. In the United States, intercultural competence is at the heart of genre-based literacy courses (Byrnes, 2002) and online distance education courses (Ware & Kramsch, 2005). As an organizational

principle of courses, it has recently been promoted in the foreign language department
(Kramsch, 2013).

Many of the definitions and models of intercultural competence, reviewed by Spitzberg
and Changnon (2009), are more helpful in training people in business and industry settings. A
definition provided by Huber and Reynolds (2014) for teachers and trainers states that:

> *Intercultural competence is an integration of attitudes, knowledge, understanding, and*
> *skills that are applied through action, enabling a person to work alone or with others; to*
> *understand and respect those who are considered to have different cultural backgrounds*
> *from themselves; make appropriate, effective and respectful responses when interacting*
> *with these people; establish positive and constructive relationships with these people;*
> *understand cultural differences and their own multicultural connections (pp. 16–17).*

This definition and interpretations are helpful for the syllabus development and activities
design for this research. Through reviewing the literature and taking the objectives of this
study into consideration, the researcher defines intercultural competence as the ability to
interact and communicate appropriately and effectively with people from different cultures
and backgrounds in intercultural situations. In addition, the competence is composed of a set
of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. Intercultural competence is dynamic and
requires learners to make an effort continuously and over a long-term.

2.3.2 Models of intercultural competence

Different intercultural competence models involve several types of components and
internal transformation, which are essential in the process of developing intercultural
competence. The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) by Bennett (1993)
portrays the intrinsic evolution from 'ethnocentrism' to 'ethnorelativism' in the context of
intercultural communication. Bennett (2004) believes that one's worldview must change from
avoiding cultural differences to seeking cultural differences to successfully grasp the cross-

cultural environment. Gudykunst's (1993) Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) model explains that those who wish to adapt to a new cultural environment must learn to "successfully manage their anxiety in a new cultural environment". Gudykunst (1993) clearly states that when the anxiety about interaction in a cross-cultural environment is too high, it is unlikely that the traveler will accurately explain the host's response. However, when the level of anxiety is too low, in a dialogue, visitors from other countries will believe that they fully understand everything about the foreign culture, so they will not change their beliefs and miss the part that could be learned in cross-cultural communication. This model is often used in training courses for those who plan to live abroad. In the multidimensional model of intercultural competence proposed by Byram (1997), the first factor that one must address is attitudes. Byram (1997) uses words such as openness and curiosity to explain his belief that one must maintain an open attitude to learn new values and worldviews for the aim of participating in equal relationships. Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) provide a practical suggestion to allow learners to consider their own views by collectively documenting their preconceived opinions about foreign cultures before starting the discovery process. This encourages students to record their views before the unit is completed so that there is a comparative reference after the process is finished (Moeller & Nugent, 2014).

Byram (1997) describes an individual equipped with intercultural competence as someone who is capable of establishing a relationship while speaking another participant's foreign language; negotiating effectively to meet the communication needs of two parties; mediating dialogue between people with different cultural background; and continuing to gain skills in foreign languages that have not yet been learned. This last feature emphasizes that when an effective intercultural communicator learns to communicate with people from a particular culture, the foundation of language and cultural learning has been established, and individuals are more likely to continue collecting language information from other cultures to

expand the scope of their intercultural interactions. According to Byram (1997), gaining intercultural competence is not just about a simple communication, but a relationship and engagement, even if the participants' worldviews are not the same (Moeller & Nugent, 2014).

2.3.3 Byram's intercultural competence model

Among the models of intercultural competence, Byram's (1997) model is widely accepted and used (Helm, 2009). Byram's model has been extensively used by researchers studying the development of intercultural competence through various methods and approaches, and intercultural competent teacher development (e.g., Belz, 2003; Helm, 2009; Liaw, 2006; O'Dowd, 2003; Sercu, 2006). Byram (1997) proposed the concept of savoirs, which is an integral part of intercultural competence. He is also involved in the influential Council of Europe's Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters. A distinct advantage of his model over other models is that it sets clear goals (Dervin, 2010).

There are four interactive dimensions in Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model including attitudes, knowledge, skills (skills of discovery and interaction, skills of interpreting and relating), and critical cultural awareness. The first dimension, attitudes (savoir-eˆtre), refers to "curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (Byram, 1997, p. 50). The second dimension, knowledge (savoirs), refers to familiarity with "social groups and their products and practices in one's own country and in the country of one's interlocutor, and knowledge of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (Byram, 1997, p. 58). Two sets of skills compose the third dimension. One set of skills is skills of interpreting and relating (savoir-comprendre), refers to the "ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to the documents from one's own" (Byram, 1997, p. 61). The other set of skills, skills of discovery and interaction (savoir-apprendre/faire), is the "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge,

attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (p. 61).

The last dimension, critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager) is, by developing the

"ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices, and

products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997, p. 63). Byram also

develops teaching objectives under the four dimensions as guidelines for language teachers.

Detailed descriptions of the objectives of the four dimensions can be found in the Appendices

(see Appendix A).
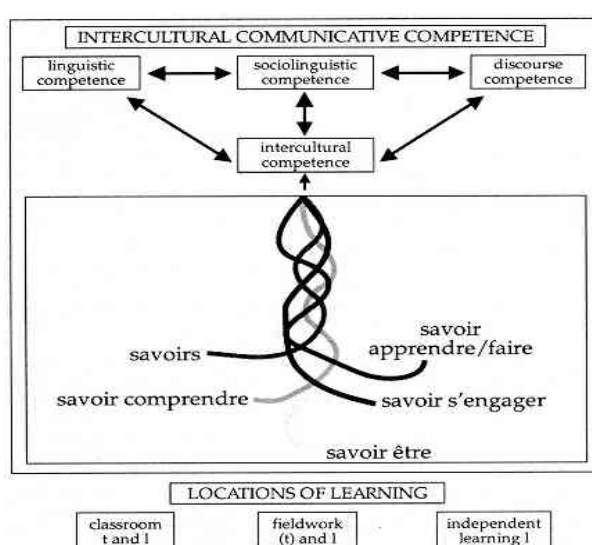
Figure 1. Byram's ICC model (1997, p. 73)

Byram's intercultural model is a representative and comprehensive model of intercultural

competence (Moeller & Osborn, 2014). The four dimensions are connected and interactive,

and Byram reminds educators that attitudes have a critical impact on interactions. There are

two kinds of knowledge in the model, the culture of one's own country and interlocutor's

country culture, the former can be developed through experience, while the latter should be

developed more purposely. The grasp of skills is based on learned knowledge, and the two

sets of skills are essential in communication or document interpretation (Moeller & Osborn,

2014).

In order to better illustrate the intercultural competence model and its application, Byram

makes efforts his later works (e.g., Alred & Byram, 2002; Byram, 2008). Although the four dimensions of intercultural competence remain stable in his model, Byram enhances the interpretation of intercultural competence and the model in several aspects, including extending the connotation of intercultural competence by proposing the concept of intercultural mediator as one of the objectives of being intercultural competent (e.g., Alred & Byram, 2002; Byram, 2006), and enhancing the application of the intercultural competence model by applying the model as a way of promoting citizenship education (e.g., Byram, 2008; 2012). Besides, the model was taken as the theoretical base in developing projects such as INCA project (Intercultural Competence Assessment) and CEFR project (Common European Framework of Reference) in the area of intercultural competence development and research (Byram, 2014).

It is also worth mentioning that in Byram's theory and in this research, the concept of intercultural speakers is taken instead of native speakers. Rather than taking the concept of native speakers as the target, researchers propose the notion of 'intercultural speaker' (being comfortable and competent in intercultural contexts) as the model (Byram & Zarate, 1994; Kramsch, 1998; Crozet, Liddicoat, & Lo Bianco, 1999; Risager, 1998). Intercultural speakers are able to communicate with others, to interpret different ideas and values, to negotiate and meditate, and are aware of different evaluations (Su, 2011). In the process of becoming competent bilinguals, in addition to language learning, learners also need to understand the meaning behind certain behavior in intercultural situations and respond in an appropriate way. This change reflects a rethinking of the essence of language ability in two aspects: language competence tends to be seen as a more complex system instead of a fixed way of understanding and communicating; and, moving beyond grammatical intelligence is required for developing the competence.

2.3.4 Assessing intercultural competence

Scholars and practitioners have proposed quantitative and qualitative assessment approaches such as case studies, interviews, narrative diary analysis, self-reporting tools, observations of others' culture, self and others' judgments, surveys, assessment forms, reflective journals, major event reports, individual and group interviews (Dervin, 2010). Some educators adopted different approaches to assess intercultural competence referred to the Common European Framework of Reference and Bennett's Intercultural Correlation Model (Bennett, Bennett & Allen, 2003). Many scholars and practitioners have also tried to assess intercultural competence in teaching. There are standard cultural tests, including multiple-choice questions, which are easy to manage and correct (Hashem, 1995). However, these tests cannot provide evidence about a person's intercultural ability because they only test factual knowledge, and sometimes general and stereotypes. Assessment tools such as diagnostic scales (e.g., Fantini, 2006; Allen & Herron, 2003), which consist of questions of the Likert type and have also received criticism. Ruben (1989) expressed doubts about these tests arguing that the effectiveness of such data depends fundamentally on whether respondents have the will and ability to conduct effective self-assessments.

In assessing intercultural competence in language learning, Scarino (2010) points out that it is essential to develop a process to capture its variables, cultural background, and explanatory nature. These processes are similar to data collection and analysis in research; they range from transient (analytical to instantaneous interactions, dialogues that explore meaning, observational interactions) to a series of ongoing written assignments (e.g., projects, tests, self-reports, grade summaries, portfolios and study logs are all available. The evaluation of language learning with an intercultural orientation requires a new understanding of the ways in which evidence can be obtained from language learning, and a broader interpretation of the nature of evidence collection and the way of judgment and proof of evidence. When

assessments are understood as an ongoing process of inquiry (i.e., collecting and analyzing data, providing information for teachers and learners to understand their own learning), each experience becomes another opportunity for learners to learn (Scarino, 2010).

It also takes care in selecting and applying instruments for evaluating learners' intercultural competence. For assessing intercultural competence with translated versions of instruments, it is recommended to use several iterations of the instrument until the last translation is in line with the source language (Erkut, 2010).

2.4 The cultivation of intercultural competence in language education

2.4.1 The need to cultivate intercultural competence

Scholars emphasize the importance of incorporating culture into language courses to foster students' intercultural competence. Intercultural competence, with dimensions of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, is generally explained as the ability to successfully communicate with people of other cultures (Kriaučiūnienė & Šiugždinienė, 2010). Language learners need intercultural competence to cope with different cross-cultural experiences. Researchers have discussed the necessity of emphasizing the cultivation of intercultural competence in language education (e.g., Kramsch, 1993, 2018; Byram, 1997; Douglas & Rosvold, 2018; Liddicoat, 2002; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Firstly, in the accelerating process of globalization and immigration, emphasizing intercultural competence in language teaching is gaining increasing recognition (Kramsch, 2018; Moeller & Nugent, 2014). While as an important objective in language teaching, intercultural competence is also an important skill for learners to live as global citizens (Elora & Oskoz, 2008). Furthermore, with the purpose of equipping students with the ability to interact and collaborate in a global society, it is important to offer chances for students to explore effective ways to communicate in intercultural situations (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). If language teaching and intercultural competence cultivation can be connected in a language classroom, students can

be more well-prepared for participation in the global world.

From the perspective of English use, although the exact number of English users is difficult to accurately count, Crystal (2008) estimates that the number of speakers in India and China alone exceeds all so-called native speakers. English is used in both the outer circle (such as India and Singapore) and in extension circles (such as Thailand, Vietnam, and China) (Kachru, 2005). In short, in countries where English is the official second language, English can be seen as a local medium of communication that represents local needs, and in almost all Asian countries, English is a medium for regional and global interaction. Similar to the concerns expressed as "language imperialism" (Phillipson, 1992, p.38), it is argued that although local English variants (such as Indian English or Hong Kong English) are widely used in Asia, and developed in an expanded English circle such as new English variants (such as Chinese English), inner circle English variants (such as British English) are still considered the most prestigious variants (Baker, 2012). In addition to the diversity and widespread use of English, as the globalization process accelerates and interactions among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, how to promote the cross-cultural nature of young people is of concern to many educators today (Jackson, 2011). At the higher education level, the mission statement now promotes international efforts and increasingly guides teachers to move towards more responsible global citizenship and intercultural competence, and it is expected that students will "develop the qualities needed to be effective in work and personal life in an increasingly globalized world" (Lau, 2004, p.2).

Furthermore, the internationalization of higher education requires a consideration of intercultural factors, and internationalization should include the development of intercultural courses. Crichton et al. (2004) argue that intercultural education is a more inclusive approach than international education because interculturalism includes both international and domestic students (Dunne, 2011). Lenchuk and Ahmed (2013) also suggested that activities

in the teaching plan should help students understand the language and sociocultural choices of speakers. Their purpose is to show ESL learners that language choices of native speakers are always constrained by the speaker's social variables (gender, social status, cultural background).

Intercultural competence cultivation is also necessary for competing in the global workplace. Business experts and scholars agree that the workplace in the 21st Century, regardless of location, is not the same as the working environment 25 years ago because of economic globalization (Muhammad, Faheem, Dost, & Abdullah, 2011), changes in demographic patterns (Karoly, Panis, & Constantijn, 2004), and increasing pace of technological change. Globalization has also changed the nature of work (Liu, 2007; Sheldon, Kim, Li, & Warner, 2011). It brings different characteristics to the international workplace. The global workplace is a dynamic environment created by unequal participation of various actors. The global workplace has raised our awareness of the greater cultural, economic, and historical tensions that are components of the work environment (Martin & Nakayama, 2015). Cultivating intercultural competence could also benefit our students in preparing for participating in the global workplace.

2.4.2 Language education and intercultural competence cultivation

A fluent second-language learner speaks a good second language but may not be familiar with the values, beliefs, and cultural aspects that make up the core of the language. Kim and Hubbard (2007) assert that intercultural competence is a key component of the success of today's global village communication and language learning. Language education needs to play a guiding role in cultivating students' intercultural competence by integrating language skills with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that assist them to become 'intercultural citizens' (Byram, 2008) who are capable to engage in intercultural communication and be able to think critically and negotiate with the complicated world. Intercultural communication

in language teaching takes into account the complicated interactions of learners in different linguistic and cultural contexts. Understanding others and other societies involve understanding oneself and own society. Therefore, language educators need to consciously decide to teach language for intercultural communication, which requires a theoretical framework and a learning theory that takes the dynamic nature of language and culture and communication and interactions into consideration. Language educators should not only pay attention to the linguistic aspects of language but should also develop instructional programs to help learners acquire and utilize language and intercultural competence in relationship with others in their communities, national communities or at the international level. If language educators cooperate to promote learners' attitudes and skills – the 'know how' or 'can do' approach – the approach to intercultural competence, instead of promoting 'know about' national culture, then they will promote student development (Byram & Wagner, 2018).

The idea that language is merely an intercultural mediation tool ignores the reality that language itself is the place of intercultural mediation because language is shaped by the culture of language and is part of the culture (Liddicoat, 2008). Intercultural communication should be regarded as a social and cultural process in which cultural factors are crucial. Therefore, as learning and using a language requires understanding grammar and phonology, it also needs to understand the influence of sociocultural contexts. However, for languages such as English in a global language environment, the links between language and sociocultural practices and citations can be diverse, complicated, and emerging. This shows that there is no clear 'target culture' and English can be assigned. In addition to understanding the more formal features of language, students need to understand different cultures, not just a specific target culture (Baker, 2011). Language learners need knowledge of the relationship between language, culture, and communication, and develop the ability to use it in different situations.

Therefore, as pointed out by Kramsch (2001), the main objective of second language learning should not be merely effective communication, but rather the search for an understanding of cultural boundaries and attempts to negotiate with them. Many foreign language educators have recognized that language teaching should promote the development of students' intercultural competence so that they can view different cultures from an informed perspective and prepare for intercultural contacts (e.g., Corbett, 2003; Sercu et al., 2005; Wu, 2006; Xu & Connelly, 2009; Xu & Stevens, 2005). Intercultural competence teaching requires attention and understanding of the dynamic values and identities in the target culture and family culture and their impact on personal and social behavior and interaction processes (Zhou, Xu, & Bayley, 2011). More specifically, the intercultural level of language education and even the intercultural level of the whole education tend to prefer certain teaching methods, such as learners as ethnographic researchers, experiential learning, and consciousness-raising (Alred et al., 2003, 2006; Byram & Grundy, 2002, 2003; Roberts et al., 2001), situated learning (Kramsch et al., 1996), the use of contextual texts (Byrnes, 2008) and literature (Kramsch, 2003), 5C methods (communication, culture, connections, comparisons and communities; Byrnes, 2008), and critical discourse analysis (Porto, 2013). Lázár (2003) also argues that intercultural competence can actually be improved in various ways, such as talking to members of a specific cultural background and using textbooks, media, and films (Gómez & Fernando, 2012).

Language education provides the possibility of developing intercultural competence. Through the acquisition of a foreign language in an open atmosphere, learners can travel among their home culture and other cultures and acquire necessary intercultural knowledge and skills (Byram et al., 2002). Students can explore cultural phenomena when studying a foreign language since language and culture is connected. In addition, in modern classrooms, technology plays an important role in assisting learners to access various, authentic cultural

resources and to interact with interlocutors from other cultures (Elora & Oskoz, 2008). In such a teaching and learning environment, information is shared, new concepts and views are exchanged, and learners are responsible for their learning. Language learning and intercultural exploration benefit each other in the process.

2.4.3 Intercultural language teaching approach

In order to facilitate the development of students' intercultural competence, a change from traditional to the more reflective and innovative teaching in foreign language classrooms is required. This poses challenges for foreign language teachers to achieve the objectives of language teaching in the modern society (Ho, 2009). Byram and Fleming (1998) proposed an 'ethnographic attitude' in the classroom dynamic to discover social conventions and perspectives in foreign languages and to promote the development of intercultural competence. This can be achieved through a range of simulations, roleplays, the use of images, and re-telling of a story. It is a method that provides learners with opportunities to freely express their experience in order to reflect on their own and other cultures (Cunico, 2005).

In line with the reflective perspective, the intercultural language teaching approach highlights the connections of language, culture, and learning. It involves students in a process of understanding their own language and culture, and recognize the situation of others. The intercultural language teaching approach encourages students to reflect on own language and culture and relate to another language and culture. The teaching and learning process forms a platform for possible negotiation and allows different views to be presented, mediated, and accepted (Liddicoat, 2008). The approach views culture as a set of various and dynamic practices. With the dynamic view, cultural knowledge is a more general concept beyond factual knowledge, and it emphasizes how language is used and how things are expressed and interacted in cultural contexts (Liddicoat, 2002).

The intercultural language teaching approach is an ELT teaching approach that provides opportunities for developing language students' intercultural competence. It intends to help develop students' ability to communicate smoothly in different cultural situations through learning a second language and finally guiding them to become interculturally competent. Typical activities include recognition of stereotypes, discussion of values, and analysis of cultural misunderstandings. In these activities, teachers should encourage learners to reflect on their beliefs from the perspective of 'otherness' and then explore and accept differences.

Five principles that guide intercultural language teaching are active construction, making connections, social interaction, reflection, and responsibility (Liddicoat et al., 2003). More details can be found in the intervention plan section (section 3.6). Based on the principles, Liddicoat and Crozet (Crozet, 1996; Liddicoat, 2002; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001) have proposed suggestions for language teachers in designing and teaching. Intercultural language teaching principles guide this action research through a process of planning, resourcing, teaching, assessing, reflecting, and renewing. Through intercultural language learning, learners discover, evaluate, and respond to language and culture in a process of recognizing, comparing, discussing, and mediating meanings in a non-judgmental way which moves beyond a simple presentation of cultural facts.

2.4.4 Intercultural language teaching process

Researchers have proposed the teaching process of intercultural language teaching (ILT) approach. Crozet and Liddicoat (2000) propose a process of acquiring, comparing, and exploring that students could be involved in when learning language and culture. Furthermore, Liddicoat (2002) developed a non-linear pathway of developing intercultural competence. With input, students have to notice for further comparison and reflection. Once the notice of input is available, it is necessary for the learner to compare and reflect on the similarities and differences, and consider how to respond to the difference, and this involves

possible modification of behaviors to react with the input. This consideration or decision is then linked to the communication system and initiate output by applying language with modified concepts or thinking. However, it is important to mention that this modification may not be the final step because the output may relate to new noticing, and the new noticing of cultural practice could be positive or negative. The learner may further evaluate the practice through others' reaction. Noticing provides a chance for reflection, which again becomes new output, and so results in a continuous cycle of learning. Through this process, students interpret and construct their own way of intercultural learning through exploring and reflecting (Ho, 2009).
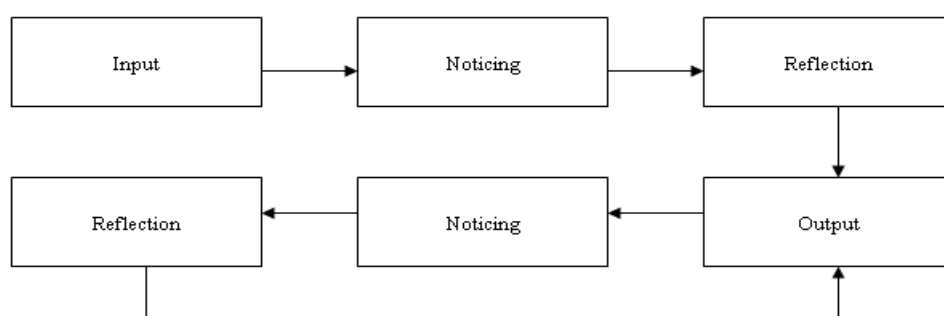
Figure 2: A pathway for developing intercultural competence (Liddicoat, 2002)

In the process of ILT, it is possible to interpret other cultures by reflecting and relating to one's own (Liddicoat, 2002). The objective of ILT is not to merge students in the new culture but instruct them to find and construct a position that steps forward their own culture, but not the same as the new culture. This position is often referred to as the 'third place' (Crozet et al. 1999; Kramsch, 1993). In ILT, teachers are facilitators and supporters of students in the process of discovering and reflecting. Cultivating intercultural attitudes, skills, and awareness is as important as teaching cultural knowledge in ILT, which is different from the traditional culture teaching approach. The challenge is how to design and construct a proper curriculum to achieve the objectives with practitioners' teaching philosophy (Qin, 2015).

Besides, the classroom, as a more risk-free environment for the proposed research, can

offer students a safe and comfortable place for exploring culture. The researchers consider the classroom to be a proper place to interact with culture and reduce prejudice before getting involved in real situations (Barrett, 2018; Damen, 1987; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat et al., 2003). In an intercultural classroom, the teaching and learning process is learner-centered, communicative, active, and cooperative (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Moore, 2006). Teachers are no longer expected to directly deliver cultural facts to learners, instead, they act as facilitators and assistants who guide the process of exploring, discovering and analyzing information from a range of cultural products from texts to media. In such a dynamic setting, knowledge is shared and exchanged rather than taught, and students are the real owner of their learning process (Moeller & Nugent, 2014).

2.4.5 Intercultural language teaching approach and the development of intercultural competence

In Byram's (1997) intercultural model, language teachers are recommended to instruct students through a way of developing intercultural competence in attitudes, knowledge, and skills while learning a foreign language. They begin by reconsidering their existing thoughts and beliefs before entering the stage of discovery of other cultures, they become more willing to explore and interact with otherness. In the process of continuing to interact and engage with other cultures, specific knowledge and skills should be acquired. It is also necessary for foreign language teachers to arrange enough time for learners to explore their home culture, such as history, geography, and society, and reflect on their own language and culture. This enables the students to view themselves from an 'external' angle, reflect and adjust concepts, beliefs, and actions (Byram & Zarate, 1997; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Moeller & Nugent, 2014). For learners, there is no predetermined final goal; on the contrary, each experience becomes its own target in becoming interculturally competent (Byram, 1997).

In addition, intercultural learning requires experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Moon,

2004; Tomlinson, 2003). It is not enough to just read textbooks or listen to lectures about other cultures. It is essential to face new and unknown situations, experience insecurity, exclusion and security, trust and compassion, and deal with cultural issues at the emotional level (Troncoso, 2012). In the process of cultivating intercultural competence, experience is not enough; it must be combined with reflection, analysis, and action to initiate a transformation through which any 'other' experience can be seen as a cross-cultural encounter (Piazzoli, 2010). Byram (1989) and Kramsch (1993) describe the process by which a person develops intercultural competence by decentering from his first culture. The Intercultural Language Learning Report (Liddicoat et al., 2003) tracks and synthesizes language, culture, intercultural learning, and how to evaluate these developments. Prior to this, Liddicoat (2002) also proposed a non-linear cyclical process of intercultural competence, drawing attention to the internal processes of students' attention to differences, linguistic features, and teacher behavior. All of this is a critical component of their spoken/written output. As students evaluate or reflect on their output, the process continues, comparing current knowledge with previous knowledge, and thus adjusting and modifying the output (Moloney & Harbon, 2010).

The intercultural language approach can be applied to facilitate students' intercultural competence development through the systematic integration of intercultural language teaching and different dimensions of intercultural competence. For ILT, firstly, the objective and principles are in line with intercultural competence development. The aim of ILT is to promote the development of intercultural competence through the acquisition of another language (Liddicoat, 2002). For individual learners, the objective of ILT enables the learner to communicate in two or more languages and interact interculturally with different perspectives to interpret and create meaning. Such a learner is not only a language user but an intercultural language user (Liddicoat et al., 2003). In addition, it also emphasizes the role of

students' previous knowledge and their home culture in developing intercultural competence. For ILT, principles such as making connections and reflection highlight the need to explore cultures based on students' previous knowledge and their home culture and encourages reflection in the learning process.

Furthermore, ILT approach could also promote the development of intercultural competence from the perspective of its teaching and learning process. ILT is known as a process of integrating language and culture teaching, which is based on a dynamic view of culture. It is an ongoing process and requires learners to reflect on own language and culture before relating to the interlocutor's culture. The contextual feature of language and culture can be mirrored through language use. Researchers argue that it is important to expose students to proper cultural input for the aim of cultivating correct beliefs and values towards cultures, and avoid simply replacing the target culture with the first culture (Crozet & Liddicoat, 2000; Kramsch, 1993). For intercultural language teaching and learning, the first step is to provide input for students and let them notice any similarities and differences for further reflection. Learners are encouraged to consider their own culture with the input. Once students notice the similarities and differences in the cultural phenomenon, the teacher can arrange tasks that encourage students to explore the nature of the difference and prepare them in building relationships with people from various cultures and backgrounds (Byram, 1997). In the next stage, learners are instructed to think about the nature of the intercultural situation and reflect on how to react to the difference. Then students are involved in activities to try out their new ways to communicate and mediate in intercultural situations. Therefore, in the process of intercultural language teaching and learning, through trial and error, exploring and reflecting, students' intercultural competence could be promoted.

2.5 Previous studies on promoting students' intercultural competence

Researchers conducted various studies to construct and explore specific programs that

could promote students' intercultural competence, including computer-mediated intercultural programs such as email exchange or online learning project (e.g., Belz, 2003; Helm. 2009; Liaw, 2006; O'Dowd, 2003; Stockwell, 2016), project-based programs involving student research or interview (e.g., Arshavskaya, 2018; Barr & Chinwonno, 2016; Bocanegra, 2015; Chen & Yang, 2016; Euler, 2017; Li & Liu, 2017; Wang & Kulich, 2015), overseas programs such as short-term international service or visit and experience transformation (e.g., Liu, 2016; Vigier & Bryant, 2009; Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018), blended learning programs (e.g., Arancón, 2015; Smith & Paracka, 2018), and portfolio project (e.g., Su, 2011). The results show that students can benefit from the programs in ways such as change in attitudes and knowledge acquisition. For classroom teaching, some researchers explore the effect of specific classroom activities, including traditional activities such as role play, critical incidents, and innovative activities involving videos such as films or TV series (e.g. Chao, 2013; Hoff, 2013; Matthews, 2018; Truong & Tran, 2014), novel, drama or text related activities (e.g., Cunico, 2005; Gómez & Fernando, 2012; Nie, 2017; Zoreda & Vivaldo, 2008), art activity such as designing posters (Llull, Palacios, & Ulkuniemi, 2018), and subtitling or translation activities (e.g., Borghetti & Lertola, 2014; Elorza, 2008). Some positive results are presented, including stimulating language development (e.g., Zoreda & Vivaldo, 2008), taking students out of their comfort zones and promoting understanding (e.g. Hoff, 2013), enhancing students' positive attitudes towards diverse intercultural phenomena and encouraging discussion on deep culture concepts such as discrimination and generation gaps (e.g., Gómez & Fernando, 2012), enhancing factual cultural knowledge and engaging in authentic learning (e.g., Truong & Tran, 2014), and forging ahead in improving intercultural motivation, knowledge or awareness (e.g., Chao, 2013; Nie, 2017; Zoreda & Vivaldo, 2008). However, researchers also noted that the complicated feature of intercultural language teaching and learning poses challenges for teachers and students, and efforts on the

perspective of cognitive, emotional, and physical are required (Truong & Tran, 2014).

Apart from the complexity of intercultural competence research, although intercultural elements do appear in language classes, they arise in an incidental form rather than a systematic manner and are constrained to the culture of the target language to some extent (Godwin, 2013). So, it is necessary to provide specially organized and well-designed culture-related courses for language students to become interculturally competent. There is a dearth of systematic research with a well-developed curriculum that seeks to promote the development of students' intercultural competence and an exploration of the acquisition process. Some researchers made contributions to this area by developing intercultural curriculum or integrating a range of activities into modules or courses, but it is far from enough in quality and quantity (Chen & Yang, 2016; Gilbert, 2017; Houghton, 2013; Huang, 2017; O'Brien & Eriksson, 2010; Sandell & Tupy, 2015; Toffle, 2014; Tran & Duong, 2018).

For intercultural language teaching approach, some researchers explored its role in facilitating learners' intercultural competence (e.g., Hiller, 2010; Ho, 2009; Qin, 2015; Takimoto & Hashimoto, 2010). Corbett (2003; 2010) proposes that the reflective stance of intercultural approach can encourage students to become aware of the roles that different languages and cultures play. In addition, Corbett also comes up with outlines of various classroom activities from ethnographic activity to activities involving literacy and media that take an intercultural perspective. By integrating traditional methods and new methods, Hiller (2010) develops an intercultural program to promote international university students' intercultural learning. Ho (2009) proposes that intercultural teaching has a positive influence on raising learners' cultural awareness and engaging them in cultural learning. Qin (2015) conducted an action research by applying the intercultural approach and the qualitative data show that students' attitudes and skills have been improved through the intervention. Within the framework of ILT, the interview results from the research of Takimoto and Hashimoto

(2010) shows that interpreting and translation activities could promote intercultural exploration. However, there is need for more detailed information to explore the usefulness of the approach in promoting intercultural competence.

Regarding intercultural competence development, Jackson (2011) points out that merely presenting in host culture does not ensure that participants can improve intercultural competence (Bennett, 2009; Zarate, 2003), or experience identity extension (Block, 2007; Jackson, 2010). Guilherme (2002, 2007) and other interculturalists believe that it is probable to develop understanding such as cultural knowledge and skills such as cultural learning strategies. This is a feature of intercultural competence and cross-cultural citizenship. In order to achieve these goals, it is essential to adopt a combination of cognition, experience, and participation (Jackson, 2011). As noted above, researchers and educators focus on approaches to develop intercultural competencies, such as experiential learning, activities of promoting intercultural competence in language courses, and the application of new technologies. However, intercultural competence research presents new challenges for foreign language teachers and textbook authors. The former must have the preparation and ability to teach intercultural competence, while the latter have to include appropriate intercultural factors in textbooks (Piątkowska, 2015). As Porto (2013) explained, although it is difficult to come up with specific teaching methods to change people's attitudes, we can try to teach other goals with proper teaching methods and hope that this will happen simultaneously.

2.5.1 In language classrooms

Intercultural language education research requires a range of techniques to address the cognitive issues of the entire person in its overall social and cultural context (Moloney, 2008). The language classroom has an authentic communication process and is a suitable environment for studying learning and development (Moloney & Harbon, 2010). In UK, more and more language classroom practices are formed through ethnographic and

experiential critical learning models, and student work stands out in the paper, indicating that the cycle of experience and thinking has succeeded in raising cross-cultural issues (Corbett, 2003, 2010; Roberts et al., 2001). In this period of work, the classroom has been described in a rich way, reflecting the understanding and exploration of cross-cultural issues and its status in language teaching discourse (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). These aspects of pedagogy are manifested in a global and international curriculum that enables teachers and learners to work in a constructive, decentralized and critical manner with people of different class, ethnic or language backgrounds or as a result of the cross-border movement of labor and the interaction of different people at the national level, population and capital, called 'liquid modernity' by Bauman (2000), and Pennycook (2007) referred to as 'global flows'.

More specifically, following Byram's (1997) model, Porto (2014) suggests that when learners in a country (or a cultural group) establish an international identity with learners from another country (or another cultural group) in an international project, intercultural experience in the language classroom will occur. In a way, when they challenge the 'common sense' of each country group or when developing a new international thinking and action mode, they will reach a high degree of criticality, which involves not only critical skills and reflection but also reinventing tradition through critical and determined action in the community.

Teachers play an important role in enhancing learners' cultural and intercultural awareness and promoting classroom interaction and discussion. Kramsch (1993) suggests that teachers can establish "a sphere of interculturality" where learners and teachers can continue to reflect on cultural learning (p. 205). Cortazzi and Jin (1999) also argue that cultural learning is a dialogue between teachers, learners, and textbooks. Teachers play the role of cultural mediators, encouraging learners to explore the values and cultural practices, and apply these reflections to connect with other cultures (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011). Porto

(2013) proposed that students are alive and human beings. When they are at school, they are part of the society, therefore, the classroom, or its walls, should be broken. The learner can conduct activities outside the school, and the teacher can bring them back to think about what they have done.

2.5.2 Textbooks and materials

Most colleges and universities have two types of textbooks, one is content text and the other is skills text. Those content textbooks serve subjects such as linguistics, culture learning, and literature, and the latter is used to train students' four skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Although skills textbooks are written by native English speakers are used, the amount of cultural information is insufficient. Most of these texts contain knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, but there is little sociolinguistic information to illustrate the cultural context of language projects. As some scholars have pointed out, textbooks in most cases provide a description of dialogue practice that is too simplistic (Liddicoat, 2000), containing inadequate detailed social identities and other interpersonal factors (Cunico, 2005; Orton, 2002), and lacking contents that deal with intangible factors such as values and beliefs (Hatoss, 2004; Paige et al., 2003; Tang, 2006). Therefore, they do not serve the aim of culture teaching in the reflective mode, but only expose learners to visible cultural factors (Hatoss, 2004). On the other hand, as Truong and Tran (2014) point out, content-themed books may contain a large amount of background information about the target country, but do not offer an opportunity to integrate these materials with language use. For a practical situation, culture learning is often based on lectures, and the interpretation and language of cultural information are isolated.

Therefore, the variety of English use and culture are essential for consideration when selecting proper textbooks for intercultural teaching. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) propose that three cultural characteristics can be used in English textbooks: source cultural materials that

are based on the native cultural products of students, target cultural materials of English-speaking countries (mainly Western countries), and international materials that contain different cultures. Kachru (1985) classifies the use of English into 'inner', 'outer' and 'expanding' ranges to define different English variants. Inner circle is defined in the core countries, such as the United States, as different languages spoken by native English speakers. The outer circle is made up of countries such as India, where English is used as the official language in the context of colonial history. Finally, the expanded circle refers to countries such as China, where English is used as a foreign language (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011). Through analyzing the cultural content of seven sets of English textbooks published internationally, Shin, Eslami, and Chen (2011) found that although the cultural factors in each set of textbooks are different, the cultural content of the inner circle still takes the dominant position. In addition, cultural introductions remain largely on the traditional knowledge-oriented level and do not encourage students to reflect deeply.

Likewise, Stryker and Leaver (1997) also point out other problems of some textbooks. Graded language textbooks usually contain 'artificial language', which does not provide learners with a model of how people communicate in a foreign language. Kramsch (2001b) proposed that the use of real materials in English classes is a top priority for improving learners' intercultural communication abilities. Kramsch (2001b) also suggests that English learners must be exposed to different kinds of reading materials, from traditional texts such as newspapers to literary texts, as they provide students with the opportunity to negotiate and engage in cultural representations (Gómez & Fernando, 2012). From the pedagogical perspective, using authentic multicultural materials can achieve several goals (Gómez & Fernando, 2012). It seeks to expand learners' understanding of the world and assists students to understand and explore cross-culturalism with other communities. In addition, it prepares learners to cope with various intercultural situations in the future.

2.5.3 Paths of cultivating college students' intercultural competence in current practice

2.5.3.1 Main approaches

Gómez and Fernando (2012) summarized four teaching methods from the aspects of constructivism: inquiry teaching, conversational teaching, transactional teaching and content-based teaching that applied to the study of literary texts in English classrooms. Inquiry-based teaching values learners' opinions in the classroom. On the basis of reading literary works or other materials, learners participate in the process of asking and answering questions, discussing ideas and sharing personal opinions. The literary dialogue teaching method proposed by Bakhtin (1984) is another constructivist teaching method, which plays a role in the study of literature in the language classroom. For transactional methods, the reader associates past experience, prior knowledge and assumptions with ideas in the text and builds meanings that lead to the transaction. Therefore, the meaning is not readily available, nor is it predetermined. Regarding content-based instruction, Schcolnik and Kol (2006) propose that in language classes, content-based instruction helps learners to construct two types of knowledge at the same time: content knowledge and language knowledge because materials are organized by content, which requires students to consciously reflect on the language in learning.

Besides the constructive approaches, the task-based approach is also helpful for the cultivation of intercultural competence. From the interviews data, East (2012) studied teachers' current understanding of cultural knowledge and how these understandings affect their teaching, and the researcher believes that in different contexts, advocates of task-based language teaching can seriously consider the potential of tasks as a tool for students to develop intercultural competence.

For designing and arranging tasks, Purpura (2004) categorizes expanded production tasks into three groups of activities: performance-oriented activities (e.g., simulations, replays,

hands-on activities); product-focused activities (e.g., speeches, papers, portfolios); process-focused activities (e.g., observation, discussion). Neff and Rucynski (2013) also provide a more specific checklist of essential attributes for intercultural tasks in order to decide on the appropriate tasks for meeting intercultural communication teaching objectives. The features of the task include: an emphasis on interactive oral communication; practical linguistic knowledge, including commonly used phrases and expressions; allowing learners to express themselves; easy to assess; completed through one or two lessons (excluding preparatory work); expand learners' intercultural knowledge. Applying suitable methods and arranging helpful tasks is essential for promoting the development of students' intercultural competence.

2.5.3.2 Digital devices

As mentioned above, authentic language instruction with the intercultural perspective helps learners to develop the language and intercultural skills required for communication. As Chen and Yang (2014) posited, the most important thing in this complicated interaction is how teachers achieve these aims. Byram's (1997) model only offers interpretations of the connection between intercultural communication and foreign language teaching; teachers must develop the best teaching strategies based on their own situation (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002). Traditionally, cultural learning in the classroom is non-textual and has almost no similarities with actual communication situations. By applying telecommunications, real texts and authentic intercultural communication experiences can be brought into the classroom; through the use of network tools, thereby overcoming the limitations of the classroom (Byram et al., 2002). Web 2.0 technologies (blogs and social networking sites) promote online practices that allow classrooms to make connections with the world (Peters, 2009). In addition, online education communities, such as the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN), offer collaborative programs that enable teachers and learners to establish

true intercultural communication channels. Studies have shown that by incorporating technology into the curriculum, learners can experience different cultures and develop their own language skills through meaningful learning situations related to real-life communication (e.g., Greenfield, 2003; Lee, 2007; Richards, 2010; Wu & Marek, 2010). This encourages students to build meaningful relationships with each other and use the language they are learning to do this (Thorne, 2005).

In the past 25 years, the changes in technology have been rapid, and the Internet has provided opportunities for interaction between learners. This is especially the situation of China (Qin, 2015). A series of articles (e.g., Byram, Holmes, & Savvides, 2013) show how researchers using the Internet and other methods are moving in the right direction, hoping they can influence other teachers. Byram (2014) mentions two methods; the first method is to use the network to provide assessment tools, but also to provide teaching tools such as preparation and experience of studying abroad. The second aspect is that the network provides an opportunity to create a new international language learner community that is committed to a common project (Porto, 2014).

Besides the application of online platforms, visual resources such as films, as a typical and flexible resources, can also be integrated into the classroom to encourage students to watch movies in English. Some advantages of using films in class include: adding pleasure; telling the story in a way that captures and maintains the audience's interest; involving different sensory and cognitive channels; and students are exposed to what people actually speak, and the way they convey meaning; the way films engage the audience, attracts them and helps them feel the same with the protagonist; films are usually accompanied by English subtitles, which helps students to understand and improve reading skills (Roell, 2010). Depending on the purpose of the lesson, the class can watch a complete movie or part of it because one or two key scenarios are sufficient to illustrate a language or cultural perspective.

Roell (2010) proposed pre-viewing, in-view, and post-viewing activities could be arranged for different objectives. For example, preview activities allow students to be prepared to discuss movies or individual scenes in class. Before learners actually watch a movie, it is often helpful to teach them hard-to-learn vocabulary. Teachers can distribute a list of words extracted from the conversation, or describe a scene that allows the student to guess what the vocabulary refers to. Intercultural learning assignments can combine language learning with a variety of essential skills including using the Internet, writing abstracts, speech delivery skills, and teamwork.

Most of the activities that using movies in existing English teaching are aimed at improving learners' comprehension and language skills (Yang & Fleming, 2013). They are usually teacher-driven activities with predefined outcomes. By selecting appropriate movies or clips, asking prompting questions, and guiding learners to think about problems in various situations, teachers can promote the development of learners' intercultural competence, or at least some of these elements such as skills (Yang & Fleming, 2013). Therefore, movies are very useful for foreign language learners. Under the guidance of the teacher, they can interpret the information conveyed by the native English speakers through language and action. A guided exploration of the film scene and its specific experience encourages deeper critical thinking and contextual contact with the 'other' culture (Truong & Tran, 2014).

2.5.3.3 Intercultural learning activities

This part reviews some typical activities that are used to facilitate the development of students' intercultural competence, including ethnography, role-play and simulation, and tasks for coping with the stereotype.

As proposed by Corbett (2003), intercultural language learning draws on the discipline of ethnography. The language in ethnography is considered to be one of the main ways in which a person manages relationships with other people. It is different from the communicative

approach that regards language as the main means of exchanging information, instead, the activities are about the true transmission of information. Byram (2014) also suggests that it is helpful to develop a method to help students who are going to have a period of residence to make better use of their experience through ethnographic research (Roberts et al, 2001).

Language learners are encouraged to become ethnographers with the aim of developing analytical and conceptual tools that enable them to understand how different aspects of culture interact (Kelly, 2005; Roberts et al., 2001). The ethnographic approach initially expected learners to contact their informant and propose a wide range of ethnographic issues known as "foreshadowed problems" (Jordan, 1997). The learner immediately contacts the other through observations of a series of participants as a response to forward-looking questions. However, there is concern that the ethnographic approach has been accused of showing that it is not always successful in restoring the possibility of survival and adaptation of sojourners (Dasli, 2011). Critics also pointed out that daily contact are inherently unpredictable, and therefore may lead to resentment from subtle differences that widen in the magnifying perception (Ayano, 2006; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; Pearson, 2006).

Other types of activities, role-play and simulation have always been advocated by practitioners of language teaching and can also be effective classroom activities for intercultural language teaching. According to Lee's (2012) recommendations, by organizing appropriate tasks, it could provide opportunities to explore unfamiliar views, and encourage students to remove centers from self-referencing criteria, and negotiate and view the world from a third position temporarily, and developing intercultural insight.

For coping with stereotyping in intercultural competence development, Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) proposed a method to avoid stereotypes, encouraging students to pay attention to classification instead of automatically guiding responses, to use loose explanations, and to keep an open mind when exploring themselves and others. Personalizing

cultural learning and exploration, encouraging students to explore the stereotypes they have personally experienced and the inaccuracies of these stereotypes, can promote a reflective, empathetic approach to intercultural learning (Lawrence, 2013).

2.6 Intercultural competence cultivation in the Chinese context

In the Chinese context, the connection between intercultural competence and foreign language education has been discussed in previous studies from the perspective of training models of intercultural competence in language teaching, courses design, and how to teach effectively (e.g., Chen, 2012; Jia, 1997; Liu, 2009; Liu & Xiao, 2011). Concerning the development of college students' intercultural competence, researchers have conducted studies to explore the important issues. Gao (2006) emphasizes the necessity of promoting students' intercultural competence in language teaching. In Qin's (2015) study, through a six-week Intercultural English Course (IEC) for multi-majored students, qualitative data show the development of students' intercultural competence, and learners' knowledge acquisition, positive attitudes towards other cultures, and intercultural communication skills have been enhanced. By adopting Byram's (1997) model, Wang and Yu (2008) conducted a research on non-English major students' intercultural competence, and the results show that the participant students' intercultural competence was unsatisfactory. The empirical results of the research conducted by Fan, Wu, and Peng (2013) also reflect that Chinese college students consider that their foreign cultural knowledge is insufficient, and they think that their foreign language skills and cultural awareness need to be improved for better communication. After exploring intercultural communication courses for English major students, Liu (2009) proposed that stereotyping in cultivating students' intercultural competence should be minimized.

Although two official guidelines, The National Curriculum Guide for English Majors (2000) and The National Curriculum Requirements for the Teaching of College English

(2004) have included intercultural communication in objectives and principles, the cultivation of intercultural competence is otherwise hardly addressed (Song, 2008), and culture teaching is often carried out as teaching the knowledge of the target culture explicitly (East, 2012). How the development of intercultural competence could be systematically and effectively integrated into language teaching remains a great challenge for Chinese language teachers and researchers.

Business English, as a field of English for specific purposes, pays more attention to the cultivation of interpersonal communication and professional skills (Jendrich, 2013). In this field, courses usually deal with pragmatic skills, etiquette, and cultural differences. ESP courses that contain carefully designed and planned activities can facilitate students' development of intercultural skills and prepare them for future study abroad experiences. This view is echoed by Aguilar (2018) who asserts that by integrating linguistic and content knowledge in English classrooms, ESP teachers can not only teach English content but also promote the development of learners' intercultural knowledge and skills. Focusing on ESP classes, intercultural competence can be cultivated when introducing different teaching and learning activities. For example, as proposed by Aguilar (2018), in the pronunciation module of a speaking course, or after a listening activity that involves different varieties of English, teachers can organize a debate to discuss the features of English as a Lingua Franca.

ESP offers an operating framework for business English teaching. In fact, as Zhang (2007) pointed out, business English teaching in the Chinese context has not yet developed properly and is language-oriented. English has always been used to express some content, although, in the early stages, this may not always have a clear theoretical guide. Another typical feature of business English teaching in China is that it is not a service industry. This is well articulated by Hutchinson and Waters (2002) cited in Zhang (2007) who claim that ESP is, instead, an independent form of language education. Business English represents a field of

social and economic life, with its own themes, interpersonal relationships, media selection, and communication channels. Therefore, it deserves attention as an interdisciplinary research field. With this understanding, as Zhang (2007) pointed out, Business English teaching in the Chinese context has its necessity and vitality.

In the context of Business English teaching in China, the main goal of Business English programs is to cultivate compound talents with intercultural skills and basic knowledge of subjects such as economics (Chen & Wang, 2009). However, this field is still in the initial stage, and issues including how to combine intercultural teaching theory with teaching practice, how to create an international business environment in classrooms, and how to improve learners' ability are still being grappled with (Deng, Zhu, & Dimond, 2016). Although some universities offer intercultural communication courses, the socio-cultural features of language and the cultural values behind business activities are often ignored by teachers (Chen, 2007). As Qian and Garner (2019) pointed out, it is essential for teachers to reshape culture teaching concepts and adjust classroom teaching practices. A systematic cultural training program that is based on a reliable theoretical framework may represent such a transformative challenge and benefit students' culture learning and intercultural competence development (Qian & Garner, 2019).

For business English major students in vocational colleges, some researchers pointed out the specific features of the vocational college that are necessary for conducting research (e.g., Li, 2012; Wang, 2015; Zhao, 2012). Students in vocational colleges need more instruction on competences related to culture in order to cope with the fierce job market competition. With the rapid development of globalization, students have got more chances to work with foreigners, and this requires students to process good intercultural competence, which in turn will require universities to prepare them better to this. For vocational college students who major in English, it is necessary to improve and enhance their intercultural competence for

future career consideration. Business English teaching should not only focus on language training, but the teaching of skills, and the ultimate aim of business English teaching is enabling learners to master English and could use it to do business interaction (Zeng & Duan, 2017). Enhancing business English major students' intercultural competence is urgent, and it can not only help students to better respond to economic globalization but it also contributes to the students' holistic development.

Byram (2014) pointed out that in the past five to ten years in China, more and more language teachers have realized the importance of intercultural competence. Zhang (2010) proposed that Chinese foreign language educators should focus on cultivating students' intercultural communication skills, through acquiring cultural knowledge; and the researcher especially suggests the use of etiquette to create new thinking for new actions, using the rituals embedded in the language and those that transcend language. Today, as intercultural communication interactions become more frequent, different cultural factors will collide in communication. If students are unable to master intercultural skills, they may have misunderstandings and conflicts in intercultural interactions. Therefore, foreign language educators should understand how to develop students' intercultural competence.

2.7 Conceptual framework of the research

In this study, the conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 3. The relationship between intercultural competence development and intercultural language teaching approach can be seen from the figure. The triangle in the left represents the developing process of intercultural competence while the right section represents the three-stage teaching process of ILT. Enlightened by Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model and ILT approach proposed by Liddicoat (2002), for the research at hand, four dimensions of intercultural competence were highlighted, promoted, and modified through the non-linear three-stage teaching including noticing, comparing, and reflecting, in a step-by-step and continuous

manner.
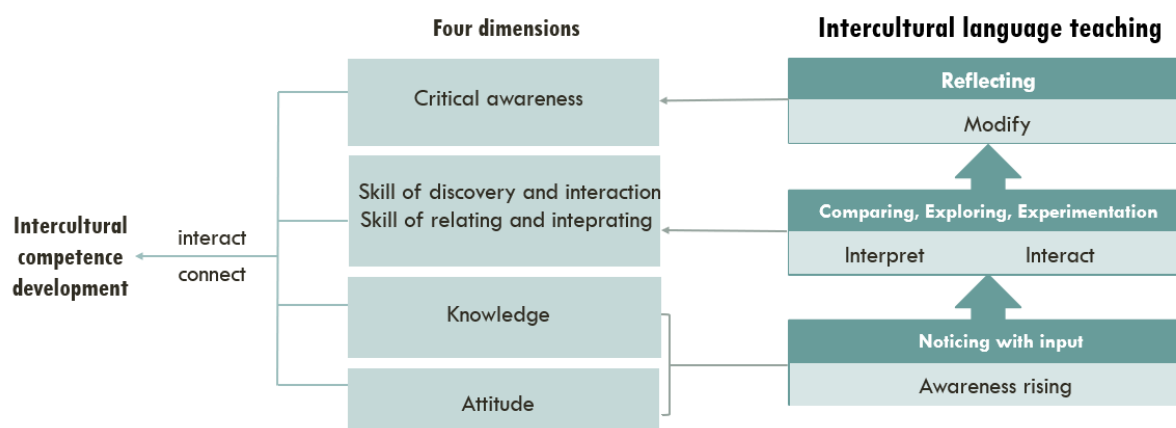
Figure 3. The conceptual framework of this research

Regarding the framework for this study, firstly, Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model is adapted because it highlights the complexity of intercultural competence. In Byram's model, the relationship between the four dimensions is interdependent and inter-connected. Knowledge and attitudes are preconditions, which can be further modified in the process of intercultural communication. Attitudes enable a conscious control of interpretations, and it makes the skills of discovery and interaction less difficult to operate. Knowledge and skills are interrelated. Knowledge is connected with skills of interpreting and relating in applying knowledge to understand a document or behavior, and the skills of discovery and interaction are means to augment and refine knowledge and to communicate in intercultural situations.

The skill of discovery is the skill of building up knowledge and understandings in intercultural situations. The skill of interaction is above all the ability to manage attitudes, knowledge, and skills in intercultural contexts. The individual needs to apply attitudes, knowledge, and operational skills to cope with intercultural issues. In addition, the individual requires a critical perspective towards the understanding of the world, and critically reflect on beliefs and behaviors through comparative studies of other societies (East, 2012).

Importantly, it is proposed in this thesis that the three-stage ILT approach is integrated with Byram's model to promote the development of the four dimensions of intercultural competence in a systemic manner. For the first stage, attitudes and knowledge were highlighted; for the second stage, two sets of skills were emphasized more, and students were guided to interpret and explain cultural similarities and differences; the third stage put more focus on the development of critical awareness, and learners were encouraged to modify their behaviors and language, and reflect on their attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In the whole process, the development of intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills and awareness was promoted step by step and facilitated the overall process of the development of intercultural competence.

To be more specific, noticing is the first core task of ILT. Once cultural difference has been noticed, it is available for further learning and reflection. For ILT, it is necessary for learners who have noticed and compared cultural differences and similarities from the input to reflect on the nature of the difference and think about how to respond (Liddicoat, 2002). Through exposure to a new culture in the context of its language and the awareness raising process of noticing, learners could acquire cultural knowledge and adjust attitudes. This dynamic process of teaching could bring exposure that students need for the decentering process. Then through ongoing comparison, exploration, and experimentation based on the earlier noticing, learners understand and explain the differences and similarities. This process relates to the dimension of skills. After deciding how to respond to the difference, learners then modify their language and behaviors and interact in intercultural situations. Skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interacting were highlighted in the process. The modification may not be the final step, learners may reflect and bring to new notice, and think critically on their attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Through learning a foreign language, learners are exposed to a new way of viewing the world as the process

encourages flexibility and independence from the home culture and language (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993). In the learning process, with input, learners have opportunities to notice differences and compare with themselves under the teacher's instruction. After noticing and comparing, experimentation enables students to use new knowledge and skills and other ways in communication and interaction. Then step by step, students integrate what they have learned and found in actual language use in intercultural situations. Through this dynamic process, students were involved in learning and trying in intercultural communication, in exploring ways of mediating and managing in interactions, and in developing intercultural competence (Liddicoat et al., 2003).

It is worth noting that the figure is used to illustrate the focus of the three-stage teaching, instead of illustrating the connections of the four dimensions. In the course, the first stage focuses more on the cultivation of attitudes and knowledge; in the second stage, skills were more highlighted, and critical cultural awareness was more emphasized in the last stage. Although the course focused on different dimensions in the three stages, students may develop other dimensions of intercultural competence in the learning process. By integrating Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model and intercultural language teaching approach proposed by Liddicoat (2002), the aim of the action research is to promote the development of students' intercultural competence. The four dimensions were highlighted during the course design and action teaching, and ILT approach was adapted to promote the development of intercultural competence. The framework guided the exploration of students' intercultural competence development.
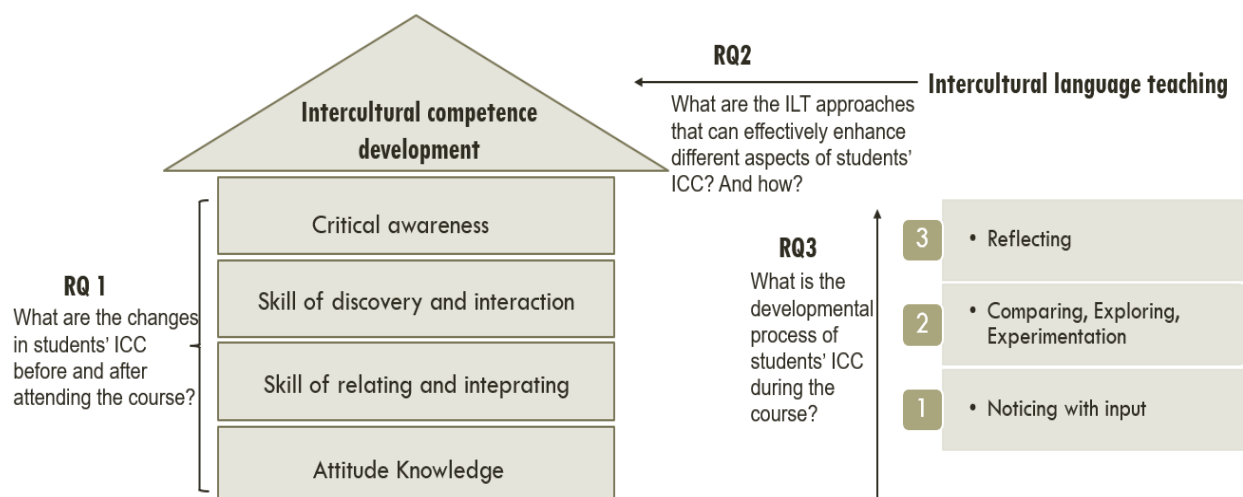
Figure 4. The conceptual framework related to research questions

The conceptual framework also guided the rise of research questions and the relationship is demonstrated in Figure 4. From the conceptual framework, before and after the course, students' intercultural competence was explored (RQ 1). In addition, whether students' intercultural competence was improved through attending the course, and the effectiveness of intercultural language teaching approach was studied (RQ2). Moreover, the development process is also significant for the proposed study (RQ3). Exploring how students develop intercultural competence during the course can provide more evidence for future teaching. The next chapter presents the methodology of the research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Setting and participants

3.1.1 Setting

In this study, the researcher acted as both the teacher and the researcher. This action research was carried out in the Business English department of a vocational college in Weihai City, Shandong province, China. The college offers 34 majors and has about 9500 students (information recorded in 2017). Language-related majors are the most competitive majors in the college, and the college offers 11 applied language majors. The Business English major was established in 2002 and is one of the cornerstones of the School of Foreign Languages and the representative major of the college. The teaching objectives of the Business English major focus on cultivating students with high quality knowledge and skills. The students should be able to adapt to the needs of the international business front line and engage successfully in completing tasks such as international trade.

The setting was selected as the teaching objective of the program is in line with the aim of this study. Besides, another reason for choosing this setting is that the researcher used to teach in the English department for about two years and already has a certain degree of background knowledge of the setting. Although the researcher is not familiar with the participants in this study, her teaching experience in the college can speed up the process of obtaining an 'insider' view of the context (Baker, 2009). In addition, it is easier to access to the setting through continuous contact between the researcher and the university.

The intervention took place over 12 weeks between October and December 2018 and involved about 3 hours of teaching per week. The course is a speaking course for second-year undergraduates, which involved various types of activities, including roleplay and group presentations on various intercultural topics. In terms of the assessment of this course, students were required to actively participate in learning activities in teaching sessions of the

course. For the mid-term and final exams, students need to complete individual and group tasks, and the evaluation is based on the performance of the different tasks. Specifically, for the mid-term exam, students were asked to select and present a person that could represent the core values of a country or culture, and participated in group work in presenting, persuading, and debating; for the final exam, students were assessed through a presentation where they should analyze and present an intercultural event (e.g., the D&G intercultural conflict). Students were informed of the related evaluation criteria before every task and their performance was evaluated based on a range of aspects such as the content of the presentation and question-and-answer sessions. More information concerning the intervention was provided in section 3.6 and the syllabus can also be found in Appendix E.

3.1.2 The teacher

In this study, the researcher acted as both the teacher and the researcher, and the qualification that enables the researcher to act as the action researcher and the teacher are illustrated in three aspects as follows:

Firstly, being aware of intercultural language teaching principles and the willingness to contribute to the development of students' intercultural competence, helped the researcher to satisfy the primary condition for action teaching. Although previous research (Risager, 1998; Sercu et al., 2005) show that teachers are stepping forward in becoming intercultural competent teachers, they may not meet all the requirements regarding knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Han & Song, 2011). The teachers are advised to be aware of how to integrate intercultural competence teaching in language teaching and should be willing to make efforts to achieve that objective (Sercu, 2006). Consistent with this, action research is suitable for this research because the researcher tries to apply intercultural language teaching approach in her teaching practice as a means to promote students' intercultural competence. Besides, as the researcher seeks to promote students' intercultural competence with intercultural language

teaching, she is clear about the teaching principles and requirements as well as the objectives of the intercultural language course.

Secondly, the researcher's teaching philosophy and teaching experience enable her to conduct action teaching. The reason for performing action research is to implement a curriculum or strategy and study students' learning (Johnson, 1995). It can be further interpreted in three dimensions: to advance in personal and professional development, to improve practice for learning promotion, and to improve teaching profession. The researcher fully agrees with the aim of action teaching and the three dimensions are in line with the purpose of this study. As the researcher in this study and an English teacher, the researcher has about three years of full-time teaching experience, and her teaching practice covers a range of language areas, including speaking, listening, business English, cross-cultural communication. The cross-regional educational background of the researcher also enables her to conduct action teaching in the intercultural field. The selection of an action research method was influenced by her position as the teacher and researcher, the approach enables her to work in an environment with students to explore issues that influence them directly. For the researcher, the study is not only about exploring the facilitating role of the approach, but more importantly, how to change the teaching practice to improve students' learning and promote their whole development.

In addition, the reflective character of the researcher also assists her action teaching and research. Given the important position of teachers as instructors and mediators of intercultural language teaching and learning, effective instruction primarily relies on the teacher's own continuous conceptualization of his or her own reflection in relation to his or her languages and cultures. The teacher's learning of own language and culture influences and connects with knowing about other languages and cultures (Liddicoat et al., 2003). It is necessary and beneficial for teachers to reflect on their own intercultural experiences. The

educational and teaching experience can also facilitate the researcher's reflection, teaching, and research.

3.1.3 Participants

The study involved working with two second-year undergraduate classes from the department of business English that were randomly selected and invited to take part in the study. A total of 65 students participated in the study, 33 for the treatment group and 32 for the control group. The age range of participants was 18-21 years. The gender proportion was approximately 25% male and 75% female, as a typical feature for language major students in Chinese colleges.

The two classes (both the control group and the treatment group) were invited to fill in a questionnaire (AIC-CCS) before and after the intervention. During the research, one class was taught by the researcher using the intercultural teaching approach and all the participating students in the treatment class were encouraged to write a reflective journal during the course. They wrote paragraphs (about 100-200 words or longer) after every teaching session. Interviews were conducted on three occasions, before, during and after the intervention. Each stage involved interviewing a group of 15 students who were selected on voluntary basis. For every round of interview, in selecting interviewees, the researcher first called for volunteers from the class, then from the volunteers, about 15 students were then chosen to include a series of experience, background, and reported the progress of intercultural competence development (based on the questionnaire).

For the treatment group, different types of qualitative and quantitative data (e.g., surveys before and after three months of learning; transcription of semi-structured interviews before, during and after learning; reflective journals) have been entered into the NVivo database and triangulated to record and reveal their learning and intercultural competence development. More detailed information of the intercultural speaking course can be found in section 3.6.

3.2 Procedures

Although there are more complex descriptions of the cycles of action research (e.g., Burns, 1999; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; McNiff, 1988), the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) was widely known and applied. The major steps of the model include developing an action plan that aims to improve practice, taking action to implement the plan, observing the impact in the context, and reflecting on these effects for further planning. In addition, according to Burns (2005), principles such as subjectivity, feasibility, and credibility are important for action research. Action research is mainly qualitative and the aim of action research is to develop actions for improvements and to gain a deeper interpretation of one's own social situation (Burns, 2009).

Overall, as action research, the research was planned and conducted through a typical process of action research suggested by Kurt Lewin's four-stage spiral work (Carr & Kemmis, 1986): planning, acting, observing and reflecting. With the data gathered it could reveal how the course helped students to develop their intercultural competence. Specifically, for the intervention teaching, enlightened by Liddicoat (2003), activities went through a process of planning, resourcing, teaching, assessing, reflecting and renewing. The research was conducted through three stages to explore the intercultural language teaching approach facilitates the development of students' intercultural competence.

Stage 1: During the first week, all participants were introduced to the goals and procedures of the research and completed the assessment of intercultural competence for Chinese college students (AIC-CCS). This helped to explore the situation of students' intercultural competence from an overall perspective and the four dimensions before the course. In addition, the pre-course interview was also conducted from the class taught by the researcher in order to know students' basic information, learning experience and preferences, and expectation of the course to adjust the curriculum.

Stage 2: The second stage involved action teaching combined with reflection. Students in the treatment class were taught using the intercultural language teaching approach, whereas those in the control group were not. Under the guidance of Byram's (1997) model and the national language teaching guidelines, a syllabus was developed according to teaching objectives, and teaching activities were based mainly on the intercultural language teaching approach, with the help of framework adapted from Corbett (2003) and Liddicoat (2003). Over 12 weeks, the researcher taught and gathered information from the class, including students' reflective journals and interviews, to explore the influence of the intercultural language teaching approach and associated teaching activities. During the learning process, students were invited to keep a reflective journal and to write short paragraphs (between 100-200 words) after every teaching session. In addition, in the teaching process, students were invited to participate in interviews for more information.

Stage 3: At the end of the semester, all students in the two classes completed the questionnaire (AIC-CCS) again. For some of students in the treatment group, interviews were also conducted again to explore the influence of intercultural language teaching approach and the course after all the teaching sessions. Students' views of the experience of developing intercultural competence were also elicited.

3.3 Data source

According to Creswell (2008), action research designs are "systematic procedures used by teachers to gather quantitative and qualitative data to address improvements in their educational setting, their teaching, and the learning of their students" (p. 62). It is useful when researchers seek to solve an educational problem and improve practice (Creswell, 2008). Questionnaires, journals, and semi-structured interviews are the main data collection methods for this research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted before, during, and after the intervention with 15 participants from the class taught by the researcher, and all the

participating students in the treatment class were invited to keep a learning journal to record their views and experience.

Regarding the interpretative and exploratory nature of the current study, the researcher must collect time-sensitive and context-sensitive data from the teaching process. It is essential to collect data that can reflect students' understanding of the development of intercultural competence, and to properly explain and analyze their feedback. Only in this way can the researcher record the dynamic meanings conferred by learners' learning experience and explore the development of their intercultural competence (Qin, 2015). Through a triangulation process, the data from the three collection tools were compared and analyzed to identify important perspectives, attitudes, and comments on the course and students' intercultural competence development process.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaires enable researchers to gather large amounts of data efficiently, and in a standardized form (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). A proper questionnaire can help with assessing students' current intercultural competence and build the foundation for action teaching. It also provides guidance for stage two and stage three, and the self-assessment feature helps to identify the participants' intercultural competence prior to the implementation of the intervention plan.

AIC-CCS (assessment of intercultural competence for Chinese college students) was adapted from Wu's (2013) study which involved assessing Chinese college students' intercultural competence (see Appendix B). This tool was selected for its validity and its firm theoretical base, and it was developed for use in a context similar to the proposed research. Based on Byram's (1997) ICC model, the tool is adapted from Fantini's (2000; 2006) two assessment forms, YOGA (Your Objectives Guidelines, & Assessment) form and AIC (Assessment of Intercultural competence) form. It also took the situation of Chinese college

students into consideration, and the tool has been used to evaluate Chinese college students of various majors in different colleges (Fan, Wu, & Peng, 2013; Peng, Wu, & Fan, 2015).

The questionnaire is in line with the framework of this research. In Byram's (1997) ICC model, four dimensions construct intercultural competence: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. In line with Byram's theory, Fantini's original questionnaires assess students' intercultural competence from four perspectives: attitude, knowledge, skill, and awareness. The two original questionnaires, YOGA form has 86 items (four levels for each dimension) and AIC has 53 items. In developing a tool for assessing Chinese college students' intercultural competence, Wu (2013) first collected and categorized the items in two original forms, then discussed and constructed the new questionnaire with three experts in the field. The newly constructed questionnaire was tested through a pilot study and student interviews. Through reduction of repeated and unimportant items, the tool primarily included 4 factors and 40 items, then through factor analysis and pilot study, it was modified to 4 dimensions and 28 items. The modified version shows high validity and reliability (the Cronbach's α was 0.913), and it can be adapted to assess Chinese college students' ICC (Wu, 2013). Based on the questionnaire, the researchers also built the FCE (fuzzy comprehensive evaluation) index system of Chinese college students' ICC and published the result in an international journal. The result showed that the tool can effectively assess college students' ICC from an overall perspective (Peng, Wu, & Fan, 2015).

The modified version is a nation-wide instrument and has been used to test Chinese students' intercultural competence in different regions. Fan, Wu, and Peng (2013) used the questionnaire to study 1050 multi-major students from 7 universities, and the results showed that students' intercultural knowledge and skills need to be further improved. By applying the instrument, Peng and Wu (2017) randomly selected 10 universities in major cities in mainland China and invited 1350 students to explore intercultural competence situation in the

background of "the Belt and Road" initiative. The study showed that students' intercultural communication skills are relatively weak. Qin (2013) used the instrument to compare the intercultural competence between college students who have received intercultural training courses and those without, and the results indicated that students who have been trained through intercultural courses had a higher intercultural awareness, although their intercultural competence showed no significant difference from an overall perspective. For this study, this questionnaire was used to evaluate students' intercultural competence in the four dimensions.

In order to better adapt the instrument, some modifications have been carried out for the research. With advice from experts and scholars, items that contain more than one aspect have been modified. In addition, comparing with Byram's ICC model and the detailed objectives (see Appendix A), 9 items were added to better evaluate students' intercultural competence, two items are from Wu's 40-item version, and seven are translated and added by the researcher. All the items have been reviewed to check the wording and framing. The modified version of this research contains 46 items in four dimensions. The questionnaire was provided electronically through Wenjuanxing website. The first section of the questionnaire elicits students' demographic information, including gender, age, academic background, and intercultural experience. Perceived English proficiency was also measured by self-rating of competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The second part is a self-reported questionnaire and allows learners to reflect on their intercultural competence in four dimensions, 46-items on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire enables students to evaluate their intercultural competence in a self-directed way and gathers the results of four dimensions of intercultural competence. The tool has the advantage of being simple to operate and takes about 10 minutes to complete, and it is a practical way for students to find out the strengths regarding intercultural competence and areas that they have

to improve. It is also worth to mention that the tool provides a non-Western view of assessing intercultural competence, considering that most of the assessment measures have been developed in Western contexts (Peng, Wu, & Fan, 2015).

Researchers also pointed out that it is limited to assess intercultural competence only relying on a single method (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2006). Many studies involve more than one way of assessing learners' intercultural competence to explore the developing process of learners and find patterns (e.g., Fantini, 2000; Straffon, 2003). For the study at hand, the researcher applied a self-directed questionnaire, journal, and interview to explore the development of students' intercultural competence.

3.3.2 Journals

Students from the class taught by the researcher were invited to keep a learning journal to reflect their intercultural competence development process. After each teaching session, students wrote short paragraphs (about 100-200 words or longer) to review their learning experience and reflect on their intercultural competence development related to the detailed objectives of the teaching session. Its purpose is to record students' experiences, perspectives and attitudes about intercultural communication, as well as examples of students' participation in intercultural competence development, using multiple data sources. This could provide a detailed description of how participants perceive and experience cultural, linguistic and intercultural communication and the links between the courses.

Adapted from previous studies (e.g., Holmes & O'Neill, 2010), the researcher gave basic guidance (see Appendix C) on how the journals could be written in order to enable students to express their views more directly. Concrete questions that related to the detailed objectives of teaching sessions were provided to students in order to guide their writing, and some strategies were applied to motivate students. In addition, as action research, it is not only essential to keep records of what is happening, but also to collect our own thoughts and

reflections about the action teaching (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Therefore, a personal journal was kept during the teaching for recording the progress and further reflection. Documents have the advantage of being ready for analysis and it is helpful for studying any trouble, restriction, or obstacle regarding intercultural language teaching and learning.

3.3.3 Interview

Interviews were used to collect participants' views towards the course and their experience of intercultural competence development. As a qualitative method of inquiry and a two-way communication method, the interview has advantages of enabling the researcher to ask questions and gain insights on specific issues (Creswell, 2008). During interviews, the participating students were encouraged to reflect on their learning experience and express their opinions about the course and their intercultural competence development. Based on the reflective journals, overall, 49 interviews were conducted, and most of the interviews were conducted with one-on-one form while few took the form of group interview as required by some students. Before the intervention, students were invited to review their past language and culture learning experience and their perceptions of previous courses. During and after the three-month learning, students were also interviewed focusing on aspects of intercultural learning, their views of the course and issues that emerged from their learning and their views of their own learning.

As interview participants were first recruited through volunteers, there is possible bias. In general, the possible deviations caused by relying on volunteers may vary with conditions including the type of information the subjects need, the form of their participation, and the time involved in their participation (Wallin, 1949). According to Costigan and Cox (2001), it is important to be aware of self-selection bias, that is, the participants involved in interviews may be different from those who disagree to participate. This has nothing to do with the

sampling standard. In interviews, sometimes extensive and intimate self-disclosure is required, which is likely to result in a sample containing more open, patient, and interested participants than the general sample range. In interview-based research, self-selection bias is unavoidable, because voluntary participation is at the core of good ethical practices, so all researchers can do is to be aware of the possible bias and its potential influence on the research (Robinson, 2014).

For the sampling of students who took part in the interviews, although participants were initially recruited through volunteering as a way of encouraging students to reflect on their learning experience, students' feedback in reflective journals was also considered to involve more students for rich information. Based on students' feedback collected from reflective journals and their performance in the teaching process, the researcher also invited more students to take part in interviews to express their views. Through this process of participation selection, more variation such as different situation of intercultural competence development and different intercultural learning experience was involved.

In addition, as interviews were conducted after every teaching stage, students with different learning experience and development process were involved in interviews, combined with reflective journals collected after every teaching session, it enhanced the reliability of the data and reduced the possibility of biased results. Besides, describing in a particular context, specific examples are provided with thick descriptions to better reveal students' learning experience in the course.

Based on the reflective journals and class time teaching, students' self-reflected progress in the development of intercultural competence was considered as the main criteria in selecting participants for interviews. Besides, students' various backgrounds and intercultural learning progress were also taken into consideration when selecting participants to explore in-depth the whole picture of the influence of intercultural language teaching approach on

students' intercultural competence development. Besides the interviews before the intervention, interviews were also conducted three times during and after the intervention; according to the lesson plan and the overall design of the course, the interviews were conducted after every four teaching sessions (three times) to collect data from students' regarding their intercultural competence development in a continuous manner. Fifteen students participated in the first and second stages and 20 students participated in the third-stage. Questions were prepared to guide interviews (see Appendix D). The interviews were conducted in Chinese and lasted on average 45 to 60 minutes (face to face or through the Internet), and the interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were processed through qualitative content analysis. Through interviews, personal feelings, opinions, and evaluation of the course were explored; and compared with observation, interview enables the researcher to better handle the kinds of information gathered by asking specific questions (Creswell, 2008).

The basic reason for triangulating data collection methods is that one data collection method provides strength to compensate the weakness of the other method, and the researcher can apply both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore a research problem (Creswell, 2008). It is proper to use triangular techniques when interpreting complex or controversial education issues that require more comprehensive information (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The pre-course AIC-CCS reports and pre-course questionnaires played a supporting role in the research; interview and journals explained in more detail in a more qualitative way based on the statistical results from the post-course AIC-CCS reports. The questionnaire responses offer an opportunity to corroborate the qualitative data as many of the topics covered are similar, especially the development of four dimensions of intercultural competence. Journals were collected from the participants during the learning process. Given the variety in the amount of data collected through the journals, the purpose in analyzing the

journals was to triangulate the interviews in revealing students' intercultural competence development and the facilitating roles of the intercultural speaking course. By applying quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, the researcher gathered helpful data about how intercultural language teaching approach could promote the development of students' intercultural competence.

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Procedure

Data collected from questionnaires, journals, and interviews were processed and analyzed under the guidance of literature and the theoretical framework. Comparison and contrast were also conducted among different data sources for further exploration of research questions. The raw scores taken from surveys were analyzed using descriptive analysis using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21.0). The qualitative data collected from interviews and journals were analyzed in detail through theme analysis and developed into categories. The qualitative phase of the research reveals useful information about students' culture learning experience and reflection on learning the course. The responses to the interviews were transcribed, coded, categorized, and developed into themes, and the students' journal responses were also categorized and reported.

3.4.2 Questionnaires

The pre- and post- AIC-CCS reports were obtained and analyzed. The data generated through the questionnaire was mainly numerical, descriptive and inferential, and analysis of the data was operated using SPSS. Firstly, the demographic information gathered from the questionnaire was described. Then, descriptive statistics were used. While discussing the results, for each item, students chose from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scales to evaluate their intercultural competence in four dimensions, namely, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness, to yield a general picture of the results. Students'

intercultural competence of the control group and the treatment group were compared in order to look into the effect of the intervention. Through basic descriptive statistics and t-test, pre- and post-course overall ICC scores of the two classes were analyzed and compared. The result of students' intercultural competence in the treatment group before and after the intervention was also further compared. Besides, mean scores of items in terms of four dimensions were also analyzed through t-test to find any significant differences.

3.4.3 Journals and interview transcripts

Qualitative data from journals and interviews were collected and analyzed. Content analysis was employed for the analysis of qualitative data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Wilkinson, 2004). When analyzing the data, Miles and Huberman's (1994) data synthesis rules, especially those noting 'patterns, themes' (p.245), and making 'contrasts/comparisons' (p.245) provided guidance. Overall, the analytical procedure followed the flow model proposed by Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. In analyzing the interviews, all interview recordings were transcribed by transcription software for further data analysis. After transcripts of recordings of each interview were completed, the transcripts were read and coded to explore the new themes identified through interpretation and analysis. Coding of all the reflective journals was also conducted after all the data needed were gathered completely, then read and reread to be coded. Before formal data analysis, through transcribing, reading, and rereading, the researcher was familiar with the data. The researcher read through a whole transcript and other document and built a sense of the whole, to capture the essential nature of what was being spoken or observed (Bazeley, 2013). At the end of the data collection, the researcher read the data several times and kept informal comments, focusing on consistent areas of different data types and students' unique views, and emerging topics. The descriptive or narrative features of the notes assisted the researcher to find clear connections between

different data types. Based on these impressions, the researcher gained preliminary reflections relevant to the research questions.

This study used content analysis. It is used to identify and classify related elements, and then group these elements into themes or patterns. Content analysis is a convincing and objective research method in the fields of education and history, and it can provide clear rules for researchers to further process the collected data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The specific content of this study includes two aspects: 1) the transcripts of interviews, and 2) the reflective journals written by the participating students. Open coding was first used to descriptively code the data, then through refining and interpreting, codes were developed to more analytical categories or clusters and identified and grouped based on the theme. Through data reduction and selection, the data were analyzed in detail to reflect learners' intercultural competence development process and the role of intercultural language teaching approach. The organization and development of codes was performed through NVivo Pro.

In response to the research questions, this study established two coding schemes. Firstly, a set of codes was used to capture any kind of change or improvement such as openness towards intercultural communication. Secondly, the examples of intercultural competence development were sub-categorized into the four themes, including attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. The other themes were also explored including students' improvement in language ability and students' feedback on the course. All topics were explored through code sets of various sizes, which sometimes overlapped. Codes and themes were also grouped into three stages according to the intervention plan in order to explore students' detailed learning process. Thirdly, themes were identified and categorized to reveal patterns. For the reflective journals, data analysis was conducted through a similar process. The researcher read through the journals and took notes. Then, the researcher read, coded, and identified themes, which further confirmed and helped to interpret the detailed information

from students' reflective journal. Students' comments are grouped by topic and further organized into themes and sub-themes (e.g., benefits of cooperative activities). In the analyzing process, because of the interrelationship of many areas, there is inevitably a certain degree of overlap between codes. In addition, if it is considered that multiple codes are applied, it is allowed to encode the same data multiple times. For instance, students' comments on an intercultural activity (e.g., mini negotiation activity) may involve their intercultural competence development through the intercultural experience and the usefulness of the activity. Therefore, classification and coding are necessary, but at the same time, the relationship between independent data should also be considered, and a more comprehensive view should be adopted (Baker, 2009). In the coding process of this study, according to the type of data contained in each code and the definition of each code, codes were revised to ensure consistency between different interviews and journals.

In terms of coding, the decision was based on the consideration of a combination of both content and the language. In other words, coding was not only determined by the words themselves; the researcher also considered the contextual meaning of words to give them values. For instance, the 'attitude' aspect in theory is more than the usual attitudinal attributes in intercultural competence, which usually includes "respect (valuing other cultures); openness (withholding judgment); curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity)" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 256), the analyses of this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of learners' general attitudes towards themselves, others and intercultural communication, including attitudes particularly related to the development of intercultural competence.

Some considerations were also applied when analyzing the qualitative data from sources. For interview transcripts and journals, coding was more focused on what is said or written by the participant in response to the questions or instructions. Instructions and guidelines were also followed when interpreting data (e.g., Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Bazeley, 2013). As for

the function and role of the data sources, journals and interview transcripts focus more on the development process of students' intercultural competence and the role of intercultural language teaching. The journals usually confirm the impressions obtained from the interviews and also reveal the usefulness of the course. In addition, these journals add more depth, often providing detailed reflections on intercultural learning experience and development linked to the learning of the course. Strategies suggested by researchers including carefully recording and reporting the details of the teaching process, making perspectives and questions explicit, recording detailed memos of the analyzing process increased the consistency of analysis and enhance credibility (Duff & Bachman, 2004; Bazeley, 2013). The relationship between research questions, data sources, and data analysis are presented in the map below.
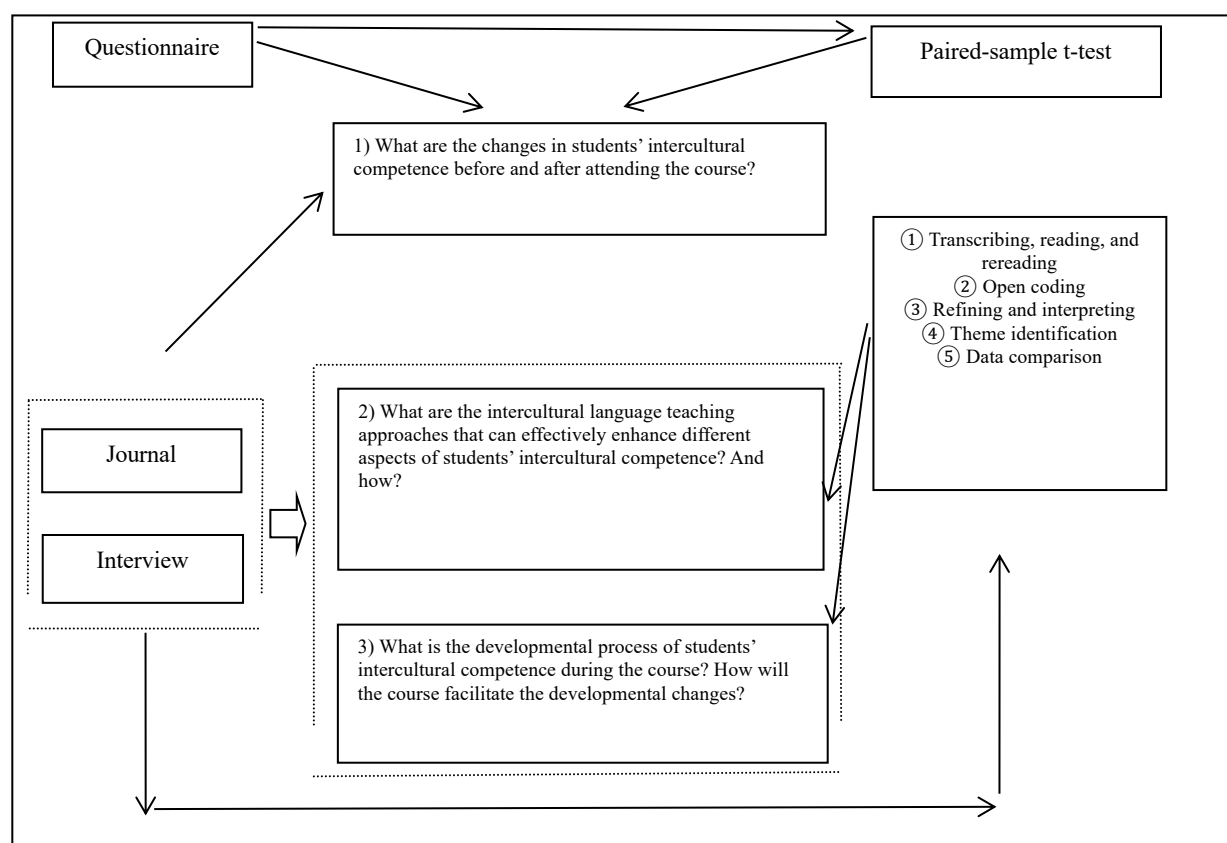
Figure 5. Map of research questions, data source, and analysis methods

    As Van Nes et al. (2010) pointed out, the translation of quotes brings specific challenges such as the translation of specific concepts used by participants. Regarding the translation

issues, in addition to cooperating with a professional translator to translate quotes and applying the method of back translation, rich description and explanation when using participants' quotes were also provided to enhance credibility.

To sum up, quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed in detail using SPSS to answer the first research question. Qualitative data collected from journals and interviews were analyzed through coding and identifying themes in detail to answer the other two research questions, as well as better reflect students' intercultural competence development from the qualitative perspective. Through this process, the role of the intercultural language teaching approach in terms of facilitating the development of students' intercultural competence and the specific development process experienced by the students was explored and revealed.

3.5 Ethical issues

Following the three principles of responsibility, confidentiality, and negotiation put forward by Burns (1999) in action research, in this study, a range of strategies have been implemented to enhance the quality of the data. For instance, it has been important to be aware of power relations and their potential influence, allow criticism of research and methods, even during the interview process (Bravo, 2003). In addition, it has been immensely important to ensure that participants have the right and opportunity to object (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005), and to remind participants about the nature of the research at different stages.

Firstly, the research was conducted with the explicit written consent of the participants, and the overall purpose of the research was explained. Besides, the participation of the students was voluntary, and it was clearly stated that they could withdraw from the research at any time without providing any explanation. Since the researcher is also the teacher of the course, there is some potential risk of conflict of interests; however, the researcher made it clear to the students that participating in the research or opting out of the research has nothing

to do with the course or the scores.

The researcher was aware that the analysis of data depends on several aspects: what was said, how, and when it was said (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009). Therefore, strategies were used to cope with potential imbalances, and these included presenting the research and its purpose in a clear and open manner, collecting consent forms and answer questions concerning the use of the data, explaining and reminding the participants about their roles, responsibilities and rights at different stages of the study, protecting privacy and anonymity, and making the assessment of the course clear. The study was conducted at the university site and followed the general guidelines of the university. Besides, as the course follows the general assessment structure and the requirements of the department, students' grades were assigned under supervision to ensure objectivity.

In addition, students were encouraged to freely talk about their feelings and opinions of the course, to achieve this, besides the above-mentioned strategies, the anonymity of the participants was also protected, and during interviews, a safe and comfortable environment was created to encourage students to express their views freely, and students had an option to take part either individually or in small groups as they felt comfortable and safe. Besides, the researcher created a friendly teacher-student relationship through the teaching and learning process and remained objective to reduce students' potential worries.

3.6 Intervention

The intercultural language teaching was conducted in a business English speaking course, which also followed the general teaching objectives of business English speaking courses. This type of speaking course is conducted every semester for business English major students. As shown in the curriculum and sample teaching plans, the intercultural speaking course also involved business topics and necessary sections of business English knowledge such as business negotiation.

3.6.1 Overall design

The intervention design follows a process of noticing, comparing, and reflecting, which is guided by Liddicoat's (2002; 2013) theory. By exploring through literature, national guidelines, and the textbook, the researcher planned for the three-stage teaching and learning (see Appendix E). This was followed by the identification of specific teaching sessions, including topics, intercultural concepts, and teaching activities designed to foster intercultural competencies. Based on the information from pre-course interviews, the researcher reviewed and adjusted the proposed activities and lesson plans. Enlightened by Hiller (2010), students participated in developing learning activities and contents through the pre-course questionnaire and discussions after teaching sessions.

Inspired by Baker (2012, 2016), the course set the following learning goals for the cultivation of intercultural competence: to acquire the knowledge needed to understand cultural products and perspectives; to cultivate the ability to identify, compare and reflect on various viewpoints; to develop inner attitudes for taking in new ideas and mediating between familiar and unfamiliar cultures; and to take a critical view on own attitudes, knowledge, and awareness (Yu & Maele, 2018). Teaching topics were generally based on the course textbook, and the topics selected also reflected those provided by the national English course teaching guideline, which offers a list of topics and skills that are considered important for students' future career development. The teaching sessions endeavored to present learners with cultures through the use of authentic examples and cases. Its purpose is to arouse learners' interest in critical analysis of cases, reflect on their beliefs about culture, and ultimately provide students with intercultural attitudes, knowledge and skills that can be transferred when encountering otherness, and enable learners to become mediators in intercultural settings.

In addition, as exploring the dynamic feature of culture is necessary for intercultural language teaching, the teacher also guided students to discover issues behind cultural practice

and products that are important for shaping views and beliefs (Liddicoat, 2002). Through intercultural learning, students are supported to be more capable in recognizing culture differences, handle intercultural situations and manage intercultural conflicts. In this case, related activities were arranged for promoting the development of different dimensions of intercultural competence.

3.6.2 The syllabus

Enlightened by previous studies (e.g., Chen & Yang, 2016; Houghton, 2013; Huang, 2017; Punteney, 2016; Richards et al., 2010), a syllabus was developed under the guidance of Byram's (1997) intercultural competence theory and Liddicoat's (2003) intercultural language teaching and learning theory (see Appendix E). The choices made about the syllabus follow the guidelines of intercultural language teaching and the consulted literature; and were further altered through a needs analysis based on the results of pre-course interview and students' suggestions during learning.

In the first phase, the course objectives and the plans were presented. Learners were guided to explore their own culture and other cultures, and they were encouraged to notice any differences and similarities. Proper attitudes were promoted and knowledge of culture and intercultural communication were delivered. In the second phase, students continued to explore culture and intercultural communication and compared different cultural systems. This enabled them to focus on cultural and intercultural issues at a deeper level. Based on the first stage, knowledge acquisition and skills development were promoted. In the third phase, after the two months of learning, students were encouraged to reflect on own attitudes, knowledge, and skills, in order to better reflect own intercultural competence development and develop critical cultural awareness towards culture and intercultural communication. A brief course plan was provided in the table below, and the complete sample lesson plans can also be found in Appendix F.

Table 1. The three-stage course plan

Stage	Intercultural competence highlighted	Major intercultural topics	Typical activities
Stage 1 (week 1-4)	Attitude; knowledge	Food culture; Small talk	Recipe preparation; Street interview
Stage 2 (week 5-8)	Knowledge; skills	Value system; Effective communication	Critical incidents; Storytelling
Stage 3 (week 9-12)	Skills; awareness	Non-verbal behavior; Intercultural communication	Observation; Intercultural events interpretation

Complete lesson plans were also developed (see Appendix F for sample lesson plans). For each session, different dimensions of intercultural competence and detailed intercultural learning objectives were proposed and highlighted in order to guide learners' intercultural competence development step by step and in a continuous manner. Specifically, in the first four weeks, the main focus was on attitudes and knowledge, and students were encouraged to notice culture and intercultural communication with various inputs. For the period from week 5 to week 8, intercultural skills were promoted and students were instructed to compare and consider the nature of cultural differences. For the last four weeks (week 9-12), critical awareness towards cultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills was highlighted in the teaching sessions through more intensive reflection. Learners were encouraged to reflect on the three months learning period and consider their own attitudes, knowledge, and skills towards culture and intercultural communication.

3.6.3 Activities and resources

Activities were mostly adapted from the work of Corbett (2003; 2010) and other previous studies. Rich resources were also provided during teaching sessions, including news, TV advertising, business campaign literature, textbooks, pictures, films and short videos. Authenticity was a key consideration in the selection and adaptation of materials for

intercultural language teaching in addition to the quality of the resource itself. Resources were also examined and adapted to ensure that they are properly challenging for learners to facilitate their intercultural and linguistic development. In such a study, it is important to respond to and integrate the views of students into the research to effect change (Rothwell, 2011). Participants were encouraged to provide own suggestions on activities in the learning process in order to better facilitate learners' development of intercultural competence. The following intercultural language teaching schema proposed by Liddicoat et al. (2003) were also used for the designing and carrying out of tasks.

Ideas/concepts related to: language ← → culture ←→ learning ←→ intercultural language learning (Principle 1: active construction)	*What ideas/concepts are involved in the task?*
Connecting ideas/concepts (Principle 2: making connections)	*How are these ideas/concepts connected?*
Process/interactions (Principle 3: social interaction)	*What processes of thinking and doing are involved?*
Values (Principle 4: reflection and Principle 5: responsibility)	*What values do learners draw upon?*
Aspects of the task : • action in context, • purpose • process of interaction • product resulting from the interaction • reflection on all aspects	*What is the action in context?* *What is the purpose?* *What is the process of interaction?* *What product results from the interaction?* *What are learners invited to reflect upon?*

Figure 6. Schema for task design (Liddicoat et al., 2003, p. 60)

Framework of knowing

Interpretation

↓

Interaction

↓

Action/Production

↓

Reflection

Intercultural language learning   *Intercultural language use*
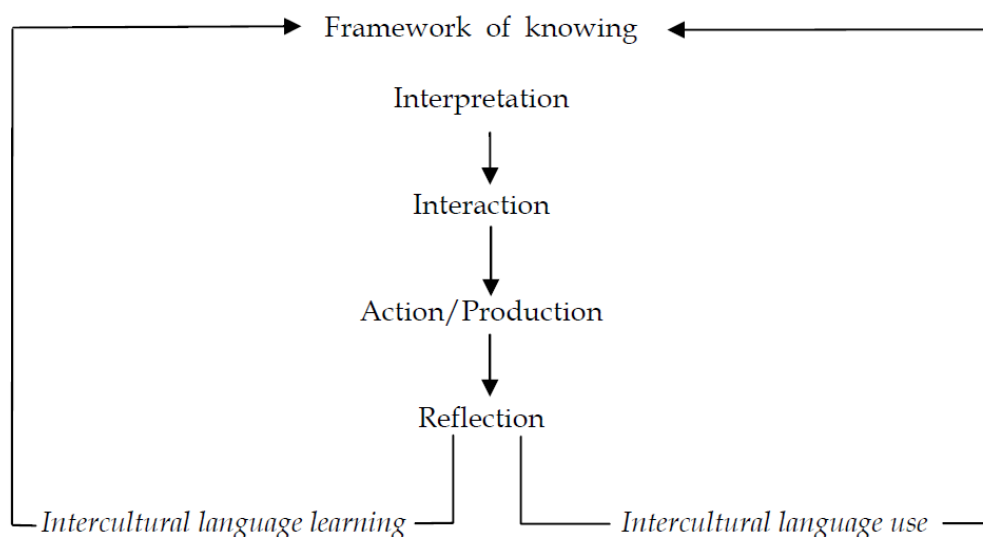
Figure 7. Process of carrying out a task (Liddicoat et al., 2003, p. 59)

With some examples of classroom activities below (Table 2), the teaching and learning process went through several stages and guided students in exploring and reflecting on culture.

An activity called "Culture in the office" sought to promote the acquisition of knowledge of intercultural interaction, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical awareness (K3, K11, S7, S10 for detailed objectives). For this activity, the teacher allows learners to explore and interact with body language, and the focus is requesting, reprimanding, describing and evaluating behavior. In this activity, the learner's role was played in an office environment, they considered messages managers and employees send to each other through body language. In about 40 minutes, students were guided to prepare for a two-round role play and observed as well as reflected on the performance.

Table 2. Teaching and learning process within an example task

Procedure	Activity	Objective
1. Warm-up (5 mins)	Watch videos and introduce the topic; Encourage students to think with resources (resources of interactions in the office)	Raise interest and attention; Remind students of the topic in their own culture; Let students notice the cultural phenomenon in the input;

		Let students understand the unconscious influence of non-verbal phenomena (K3).
	ILT principle: active construction	
2. Discussion (5 mins)	Pose questions about interactions in the office; "What body language they use?" "Why they do that?" "Can you think of other ways?"	Let students compare different roles of body language; Form proper attitudes toward body language and avoid stereotyping; Encourage students to interpret the meanings and functions; Let students learn about levels of formality and conventions of non-verbal behavior, and the processes of social interaction (K11)
	ILT principle: making connections; reflection	
3. Main activity (15 mins)	Roleplay: Requesting (manager and employee) With the given situation, students try to use body language to reach the communication aim.	Let students interact in situations, try out body language to communicate; Let students observe and explore the function of different body language; Let students interact in real-time with an appropriate combination of attitudes, knowledge and skills, and taking cultural differences into consideration (S7).
	ILT principle: social interaction	
4. Discussion and comparison (10 mins)	After role-play and observe, students reflect what body language is proper for the situation; Discuss how to use proper body language and what aspects have to be considered	Let students reflect the function of body language; Let students reflect the culture behind body language; Let students learn about proper body language and conventions of non-verbal behavior and the processes of social interaction (K11)
	ILT principle: making connection; reflection	
5. Follow-up activity (15 mins)	Second-round role play (another situation with potential misunderstandings) After discussion, students modify their body language and interact in another situation	Let students interact with learned knowledge and skills; Let students modify behavior and learn to communicate with proper body language; Let student learn to recognize and evaluate the importance of misunderstandings and dysfunctions in specific situations, and decide and implement appropriate behaviors (S10).
	ILT principle: social interaction	
6. Closure (5 mins)	Review and summarize what have been learned; Answer questions if necessary	Let students reflect what they have learned and clarify any confusions; Enhance knowledge and awareness.
	ILT principle: reflection; responsibility	

With videos that reflect interactions in the office, students first noticed what happened in the office and they were encouraged to think about the meanings behind the interactions, try to interpret both language and non-verbal behaviors, especially the body language. As a

moderator, the teacher raised several open-ended questions to trigger the discussion. Its purpose was to reduce the power dynamics between teachers and learners, and this provided a more flexible and free learning atmosphere and promoted intercultural language learning. Then, the teacher provided a situation including a manager and an employee; with the situation and basic information, in pairs, students tried to use body language to interact with each other to reach a communication aim. Students could use old knowledge and skills first. Through performing and observing, students compared themselves with classmates and considered the appropriate and effective body language in the situation. Then, with the organization of the teacher, the class discussed and summarized what they found, followed by another situation and another round of role-play. In order to communicate, students were encouraged to modify their behavior and explore appropriate ways, and after the two-round role-play, the class reflected on what they would have found and learned. The teacher also provided more examples (both successful and unsuccessful) for further reflection.

Throughout the three-stage learning process, students could gain the first-hand experience from the various intercultural activities and become more capable in comparing, explaining, and evaluating (Roberts et al., 2001). In the intercultural curriculum, the researcher focused on the application of intercultural language teaching theory to practical communication issues in different cultural contexts. Through comparison, analysis, and reflection, this course could help students improve awareness of self and other cultures and learn how to communicate more effectively and appropriately in intercultural interactions. Intercultural language teaching and learning is not simply a method of including language learning and culture learning. It is an overall orientation that influences decisions from developing a course to ongoing renewal, and from curriculum design to carrying out classroom tasks (Liddicoat et al., 2003). Tasks were mainly adapted from Corbett (2003; 2010), and the objectives of the four dimensions in Byram's (1997) model were highlighted

in the course tasks. Although some of the activities in this study came from traditional language teaching studies, they assisted students in exploring cultures, comparing and negotiating third place in intercultural learning. The selection and designing of the tasks follow the focus and schema of intercultural language teaching framework. The tasks also follow the rules of active construction in contexts; making connections; social interaction; reflection; and responsibility. In the process of learning through a task, learners were encouraged to activate their knowledge of language and culture and connect them in promoting intercultural understanding. They interpreted the purpose of the interaction in intercultural situations and this process of understanding led to interaction, through thinking and doing. Therefore, learners actively learn to communicate with the language. This led to reflections on intercultural language use and intercultural communication. Such reflection contributes to promoting and reshaping students' overall frameworks of intercultural competence.

In summary, a variety of methods, ranging from short activities to student research were used in the course. A wide range of sources also helped to create an effective learning environment that exposes learners to a wide range of materials and assist them in developing intercultural competence. The intercultural language teaching syllabus for this research focused on topics that could provide learners with the opportunity to explore intercultural concepts that are important for intercultural communication and interaction. The next chapter focuses on the findings from the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the main findings of the research that were generated to provide answers to the research questions. The chapter is structured as follows: students' learning situations and other background information before the intervention are reported in section 4.1 to provide a clear foundation of this action research. Section 4.2 answers the first research question, highlighting students' intercultural competence before and after the intervention to explore the effect of the intervention. The findings related to the second research question are presented in section 4.3. The data illustrate the effect of specific teaching sessions on promoting the development of students' intercultural competence. Section 4.4 presents the developmental process of students' intercultural competence through learning the course and this addresses the third research question. The researcher also proposes a tentative model of the development of intercultural competence that captures the features of participating students' development of intercultural competence during the intervention. After describing the model, additional information focusing on students' feedback on the course is provided in section 4.5.

4.1 Students' background information before the intervention

This study started with the exploration of students' experience in language and culture learning prior to the intervention. Connecting the curriculum to learners' experiences is one of the basic principles of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980). To better illustrate the background of the intervention, the first aspect to be reported is participating students' language learning experience and habits. The second aspect is students' experience of culture learning and intercultural interactions. As posited by Punteney (2016), teachers can take advantage of students' rich multicultural backgrounds. In addition, students' expectations, confusion and needs were also explored. Therefore, students' background information is reported in three parts: learners' previous English learning experience, learners' previous

cultural learning and intercultural interaction experience, and students' confusion, problems, and expectations of culture and language learning.

4.1.1 Unsatisfactory language ability and exam-oriented language learning

From the questionnaire data, 32 students from the treatment group evaluated their language ability using a 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) Likert scale. The Table 3 below illustrates students' self-evaluation of language abilities.

Table 3. Students' self-evaluation of language ability

Domain	M (Max 5)	SD
Overall	2.76	.56
Listening	2.55	.75
Speaking	2.48	.94
Reading	2.85	.71
Writing	2.58	.75

From the data in Table 3, the mean scores are all below 3, which shows the participants' self-evaluation of their English language ability tends to be low rather than high. The pretest results show that the participating students' overall self-evaluation of their language ability is low ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.56$). In particular, both listening ability ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.75$) and speaking ability ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.94$) are reported as the lowest. From the Table, it can be observed that students are not confident about their language ability. Together, these results clearly suggest that participating students considered that they lacked language competence, hence, the need for more support programs was evident.

Qualitative data were also collected through pre-course interviews, which also helped the researcher to explore students' learning situation. During interviews, students shared their previous language learning experience. The first aspect to be examined was the students'

language learning habits. For learning channels, the most frequently mentioned medium was entertainment, including TV series, movies, and songs. Other media such as watching news and TED shows are also preferred in addition to some approaches introduced by teachers. One of the participating students said, "Generally, I watch American TV dramas such as *American Horror Story*, I'm interested in this type anyway". Similarly, another participant said, "I generally like watching movies. I especially like to watch suspense movies".

It is also noticeable that using various apps is popular among the participating students. With the ongoing improvement of technology, students now have more access to authentic resources. For example, one participant said:

> *In addition to watching American TV dramas, I also like Tik Tok (Douyin). There are many videos about English learning. There is a teacher named Alex, and he posts some videos about methods to learn English, and some guidelines about oral English* (interview before the intervention, student 5).

Due to the requirement of the job market, exam-oriented learning method still plays an important role in students' learning, a considerable majority of the interviewed students expressed the importance of passing exams such as CET-4. The views of most of the students were well captured by someone who said, "The CET-4 exam is approaching, so I have been memorizing the words and doing exercises for the exam".

When asked about short-term expected improvements, most of the participants also connected their objectives with examinations such as CET-4 or translation certificate. Concerning long-term learning objectives, although they admitted the importance of exams, students are also willing to pursue higher education, enhance basic knowledge and skills, learn vocabulary and grammar. The results show that the emotional factors such as learners' self-perception, willingness, out-put impressiveness concerns have an influence on the learners' learning objectives. As one student said:

The most important thing is the CET-4 exam. Then I especially want to improve my

speaking skill. I know my oral English is not very good, but I must insist on practicing

(interview before the intervention, student 2).

4.1.2 Inadequate intercultural learning and limited opportunities for intercultural interactions

The first part of this section consists of the cultural dimensions that students are familiar with. During discussions about the cultures that they are familiar with, students mentioned a range of aspects of cultures including etiquette (table manners, present giving), daily life (eating habits) and entertainment (sports, movie, music). Although students expressed familiarity with some specific cultural aspects, overall, they still felt that they are not completely familiar with cultures. They used words such as 'some' 'a little' to express the culture they know, for example, "Food, and gift-giving. I know a little." Although covering a range of topics, students' cultural knowledge seems to be unsystematic and constrained within American culture predominantly. As one participant puts it:

For college students, it may be some TV series. Well, the most familiar one should be the

culture of United States because I especially like the American TV series. I learn culture

or some other things from the American TV series (interview before the intervention,

student 5).

There are also some indications that many students viewed culture stereotypically and as a collective language-nation entity. Some participants mentioned the culture of other non-English speaking countries that they learned about from some course tasks or TV programs, but their knowledge was very limited. From the results, it was found that some students consider culture as something highly professional and difficult. A common view amongst interviewees is that students were not confident in their cultural knowledge. The following

interview excerpts clearly illustrate the participating students' self-reported lack of knowledge. One student said, "the kind of cultural customs, I may not know very well". In the same vein, another student said, "I know a bit, more life-like, for example, greeting; in fact, I really don't know much".

Regarding the main channels that students learn culture from, it emerged that browsing social media, watching TV series and accomplishing the tasks prepared by teachers, are the most important sources for students' cultural knowledge. When learners were asked to recall what they had learned about culture in their previous language courses, they demonstrated an apparent focus on cultural facts. Only a few made references to the integration of culture with language in ways that appeared to enhance their learning of both. When asked about any cultural aspects (e.g., history and value system) discussed in language classes, students had limited impressions. The reasons for this may include the existing cultivation pattern of the college, limited teaching methods and the curriculum of this particular discipline. Some teachers may have included this information in their sessions but not regularly. Commenting on culture learning in language courses, some interviewees posited that:

I didn't have it in my mind, that is, teachers rarely talked about it, basically based on textbooks (interview before the intervention, Student 2).

Classes are according to the textbook, seldom related to daily life, I didn't learn it systematically (interview before the intervention, Student 5).

However, some teachers made an effort in teaching culture as indicated by one of the participants who mentioned a reading class that changed her previous biased belief:

I assumed that if you are in the United Kingdom, everyone wears a top hat with an umbrella. Actually, it is very strange to see a scene like this in UK, and this changed my stereotype (interview before the intervention, student 9).

Another part of students' previous learning focuses on the acquisition of communication skills. Besides cultural knowledge, skills are also necessary to cope with various intercultural situations. For communication skills, participants highlighted that they were not equipped with the required understandings or skills in their previous language classes. As a result, they may not be able to communicate effectively due to the limited knowledge and skills. Some participants reported that:

No specific ones, just mentioned during some conversation exercises (interview before the intervention, Student 8).

It's only about business, but the common issues are known (interview before the intervention, Student 2).

The comments provided here clearly reveal the kinds of difficulties experienced by the students regarding learning culture. Details about teaching methods were also revealed under the theme of students' previous language learning experience. Some believed in the facilitating role of video-supported teaching and experience-based instruction in explaining the different scenarios of interactions. One participant stated that a teacher used movies to teach how to communicate with others in specific situations, while another teacher shared own working experience:

She often let us watch some movies several times, such as the Rio Adventure, and then the teacher explained a lot. For example, people under this situation will say this or that, and it may vary in different situations. Another teacher told us about her experience. For example, she used to work at the front desk, and she met several foreign customers coming over. Then the teacher mentioned what they were chatting about, that is, what should be said and what should not (interview before the intervention, student 5).

However, besides teaching culture, how to communicate with people from other cultures is not considered to be an important focus for teaching. Students reported that while most English courses comprise of activities, tasks and guidance for language skills, culture is either given less space and attention to by the textbook designers or skipped by the teachers to save more time for business-related activities. This fuels learners' reluctance to perform speaking tasks, which increases their anxiety. For students' learning experience in language courses, the Table 4 below summarizes some of the main characteristics of participants' comments in previous language courses.

Table 4. Students' comments regarding previous language courses

	Positive comments	Neutral comments	Negative comments
1	For students, it was beneficial to learn from teachers own experience	Some knowledge was useful, but learning opportunities were limited.	More time for business skills learning, less for communication skills training.
2	Some resources were helpful with a detailed introduction.	Although some teachers tried to use other resources, it was limited.	Students who are not interested in business found it difficult to learn effectively.
3	The development of social media provided more opportunities.	It is nice to have access to rich resources, but students had to prepare for exams.	Too much focus on textbook study may neglect other kinds of skills and knowledge.

Students' previous experience of interaction with foreigners was explored because intercultural contact with people from other cultures is another important channel for intercultural competence development in addition to classroom learning (Czerwionka, Artamonova, & Barbosa, 2015; Elola & Oskoz, 2008). The interview data revealed that, most of the students did not have much experience of interacting with native English speakers or people from other cultures. Most of the participants never interacted with foreigners, some just said hello on some occasions. In addition, some remarks were made concerning

confidence in communicating with foreigners, and lack of confidence was itself a major challenge. Talking about this issue, an interviewee said, "I haven't communicated with foreigners. Even if I really meet them, I think I might not be able to organize wording".

Some students had an opportunity to communicate with foreign teachers, however, the duration of interaction was short and the communication style tended to be passive. One student mentioned the experience of trying to find partners using online applications to practice speaking skills but was constrained by fear and limited choices. The student also expressed her worries about communicating although she was actually willing to communicate:

> *I tried to find it by myself, and there are some apps that can be used, but I rarely used them, because I didn't dare to take the initiative, especially in real life. I am willing to do but don't have the courage* (interview before the intervention, student 10).

Another issue that was explored in relation to students' previous intercultural communication experience was the misunderstandings or any difficulties that happened during the interactions. Through interview, all the participants who had communicated with English speakers reported difficulties. Two main areas of difficulty were interpretation and expression. Problems in understanding included the influence of speakers' accents and the use of slang or unfamiliar words and problems in expressing included being unable to use accurate words, inadequate vocabulary, and difficulties of expressing their own thoughts. Students tended to feel nervous and afraid of awkwardness during interactions. For instance, one student shared her struggle during the interview:

> *…because my English is not very good, so when he used some difficult words, or he has an accent, I can't understand. Just because of one unfamiliar word, I can't understand the meaning of the whole sentence* (interview before the intervention, student 9).

In terms of solutions to the difficulties and problems, most of them sought help from others or used body language. It can be concluded that participants did not have much experience and confidence in solving misunderstandings and difficulties in communicating with English speakers.

Apart from students' previous intercultural interaction experience, interview data also show that participating students knew little about intercultural competence and what is needed to communicate successfully in intercultural situations. Students have vague perceptions of intercultural competence and intercultural communication, and they have not learned about this in previous courses.

In summary, from the findings presented in this section, although some students have certain experience of intercultural interactions, most of the participating students lacked opportunities for intercultural contact. In addition, students also reported that few teachers integrated culture in language teaching, and the previous language courses focused more on the training of language abilities neglected the cultivation of necessary skills for effective intercultural interactions. In the following section, students' needs and expectations before the intervention are reported.

4.1.3 Coexistence of struggle and desire for learning

A variety of perspectives were expressed in interviews regarding current confusions and needs in language and culture learning. Most of the participants wanted to improve their speaking ability including improving fluency and pronunciation. Their main concern was to understand how to interact in a simple manner and how to speak English fluently. Other issues such as vocabulary, writing, listening and grammar was also mentioned.

Regarding confusion or problems in learning English, three major areas were identified, including how to speak English more fluently, how to improve listening and react quickly during interactions, and how to improve interest in learning English. As some interviewees

said: "I don't know how to learn English better, to speak English fluently, without struggling" "I feel so confused now; I don't know what I should do". Participating students' views about their language learning situation reveals that the most overwhelming experience of language learning is not necessarily trying to handle unsatisfying course arrangement or teaching pattern, but the psychological struggle to design and conduct own proper learning plans.

When asked about their expectations from language courses, students expressed the desire for learning more about culture and cultural differences. A common view amongst interviewees was that they want to improve speaking ability and be more capable of communicating with foreigners and expressing own ideas in English. Some students also mentioned that they want to learn to communicate in a more confident and natural way. One individual stated that, "I hope that teachers can focus on more cultures in the future, which can help in learning English". Another student stated that teachers should focus on, "Some expressions, that is, how to communicate with some foreigners, and how to communicate easily in daily life".

The study also elicited students' opinions on expected cultural topics that could be considered for further improvement of the curriculum and course arrangement. From the results, travel and food were among the topics related to daily life that received major attention. In addition, some participants indicated that they want to learn more about cultural differences such as differences in interaction and value systems. The comment below illustrates that students also want to learn for practical use:

It is better to learn things that are widely used in real life, not just history or geography, a bit boring. It is better to involve practical use, such as etiquette when you chat with foreigners (interview before the intervention, student 2).

There was a clear indication of students' awareness of the problems encountered in previous language learning experience, but they were also looking forward to the journey of

learning the new course.

From the point of view of the present research, it is important to note that the participating students need educational practices and experiences that enable them to develop intercultural competence. Although most of them are faced with inadequate intercultural learning, unsatisfying language abilities, and lack intercultural contacts, they are eager to learn culture and language, especially for practical use. By boosting students' mastery of the components of intercultural competence, intercultural competence itself is enhanced. The categorization of intercultural competence includes attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. The next section illustrates the development of students' intercultural competence by learning the course in detail.

4.2 The development of students' intercultural competence

This section presents the development of students' intercultural competence through learning the course, especially the method of defining learning outcomes proposed by Byram's (1997) ICC savoirs. There are two parts in this section, the first part reports the development of learners' intercultural competence from the quantitative data while the second part analyzes students' intercultural competence from a qualitative perspective using four dimensions namely, attitudes, knowledge, skills (skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction), and critical cultural awareness.

4.2.1 The development of students' intercultural competence from the quantitative perspective

4.2.1.1 Students' intercultural competence: comparison of treatment group and control group

The first section presents the result of the pre- and post-survey of the treatment group and the control group. The two groups' intercultural competence before the intervention are shown in Table 5:

Table 5. Results of the intercultural competence of the treatment group and the control group

before the intervention

Domain	Control Group		Treatment Group			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Overall ICC	3.12	.48	3.06	.47	-.54	.60
Attitudes	4.15	.68	4.03	.81	-.66	.52
Knowledge	2.53	.63	2.53	.48	.02	.98
Skills	3.37	.58	3.29	.63	-.58	.57
Awareness	3.34	.65	3.18	.70	-.94	.35

There is no statistical difference in intercultural competence between the control group and the treatment group before the intervention, regarding overall intercultural competence and the four dimensions, which suggests that the two groups tend to have similar intercultural competence before the intervention. The students in the treatment group and those in the control group demonstrated no significant difference in the four dimensions of intercultural competence before the intervention.

Table 6. Results of the reliability of the survey (AICCCS) before and after the intervention

Domain	Pretest Cronbach's alpha	Posttest Cronbach's alpha
Overall	.949	.972
Attitudes	.889	.943
Knowledge	.933	.953
Skills	.904	.952
Awareness	.916	.950

As shown in the Table 6 above, the reliability of the instrument was also tested. The AICCCS demonstrated a satisfying level of internal consistency, α=.949 (α=.889 within the

attitude subset, α =.933 within the knowledge subset, α =.904 within the skill subset, and

α=.916 within the critical cultural awareness subset). The reliability of post-test is 0.972.

Table 7. Results of the intercultural competence of the treatment group and the control group

after the intervention

Domain	Control Group		Treatment Group			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Overall ICC	3.15	.39	3.24	.78	.58	.57
Attitudes	4.05	.75	3.95	1.04	-.44	.67
Knowledge	2.65	.51	2.89	.70	1.52	.13
Skills	3.40	.64	3.37	.90	-.13	.90
Awareness	3.22	.73	3.33	.91	.55	.59

There are no statistically significant differences, at the .05 level of significance, between

the control group and the treatment group in self-evaluation of intercultural competence.

Results show that the treatment group had higher scores for the dimension of knowledge and

awareness than the control group, as well as the overall intercultural competence, however,

no statistical difference exists between the two groups in terms of intercultural competence

after the intervention.

From the two sets of independent sample *t*-test, it can be found that although the mean of

the overall intercultural competence of the treatment group is higher than the mean score of

control groups' intercultural competence, there is no significant difference between the

intercultural competence of the treatment group and the intercultural competence of the

control group. Concerning the results of post-survey, students in the treatment group

evaluated a higher score for the dimension of knowledge and critical cultural awareness than

the control group, while there is a lower score for the dimension of skills and attitudes of their

counterparts.

4.2.1.2 Comparison of treatment group students' intercultural competence before and after the intervention

From pre- and post-survey (AIC-CCS), the data of students' intercultural competence in the treatment group were collected and analyzed. After the intervention, to find whether students in the treatment group have improvements in the development of intercultural competence, the result of their post-survey was also compared with pre-survey data to find any changes. The results obtained from the paired-sample t-test are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Results of the paired-sample t-test of intercultural competence of the treatment group before and after the intervention

	Pretest		Posttest			
Domain	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Overall ICC	3.06	.47	3.24	.78	1.08	.29
Attitudes	4.03	.81	3.95	1.04	-.31	.76
Knowledge	2.53	.48	2.89	.70	2.42	.02[*]
Skills	3.29	.63	3.37	.90	.40	.70
Awareness	3.18	.70	3.33	.91	.77	.45

* $p < .05$.

It can be found that students' overall intercultural competence before the intervention is not very satisfying (M=3.06). From the results, the dimension of attitude is the highest in the four dimensions (M=4.03), while participating students considered their knowledge as the weakest (M=2.53). For the dimension of attitude, the mean score was slightly decreased, and reasons may be a relatively high evaluation before learning the course, and students may reconsider their intercultural attitudes, or come up with a higher requirement of their attitudes.

Although students' overall intercultural competence did not show a significant difference compared with the data before intervention, results of the paired-sample t-test show that the

mean score of the dimension of knowledge differs between pretest ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.48$) and posttest ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.70$) at .05 level of significance ($t = 2.42$, $p < .05$, 95% CI for mean difference 0.05 to 0.65). The results show a statistically significant difference in the dimension of knowledge before and after the intervention.

As the dimension of knowledge was significantly improved after the intervention, another paired-sample *t*-test was conducted to find more details of the aspect of knowledge that was significantly promoted. Results are shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Results of the paired-sample t-test of knowledge of the treatment group before and after the intervention

Number of items	Aspect of knowledge	Pretest		Posttest			
		M	SD	M	SD	t	p
11	Lifestyle	2.39	.66	2.82	.81	-2.18	.037
12	Values	2.36	.74	2.82	.92	-2.33	.026
13	Social etiquette	2.30	.77	2.82	.77	-2.78	.009
15	Taboo	2.03	.59	2.64	.86	-3.38	.002*
16	Conventions	2.21	.70	2.79	.82	-3.30	.002*
17	Intercultural concepts	2.09	.81	2.79	.86	-3.83	.001*
18	Cause of misunderstandings	2.18	.85	2.91	.98	-3.26	.003
19	Strategies	1.91	.77	3.03	.98	-5.29	.000*

* $p < .001$.

As shown in Table 9, the results indicate that the intervention resulted in a significant increase in the 8 aspects of the dimension of knowledge. Results show that the mean scores of item11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 were significantly improved after the intervention. Students considered that their knowledge of these cultural aspects was improved after participating in the intervention. In addition, item3 of the dimension of skills was also significantly improved from the results of paired sample *t*-test ($p=0.058$, two-tailed), and this

will be further analyzed in detail with the qualitative data of the dimension of knowledge and skills.

The findings from the quantitative data suggest that there is no statistically significant difference between the intercultural competence of the treatment group and the intercultural competence of the control group; however, regarding the treatment group, the results show a statistically significant difference in the dimension of knowledge before and after the intervention. Although the reliabilities of the questionnaire meet professional standards, to adequately capture the detailed aspects that are inherent in the participating students' development of intercultural competence during the intervention, evidence collected from interviews and reflective journals is presented in the next section to better illustrate students' development of intercultural competence in a more detailed manner.

4.2.2 The development of students' intercultural competence from a qualitative perspective

Information about the development of students' intercultural competence was identified from students' reflective journals and interviews conducted during and after the intervention. Guided by Byram's (1997) ICC savoirs, evidence of students' development of intercultural competence is presented from four dimensions namely, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. For every dimension, it analyzes students' improvement in detail and takes students' journals and interviews as examples.

4.2.2.1 Attitudes

This dimension involves the affective component of intercultural competence, including aspects such as openness and understanding of differences. Instances are recognized from students' responses in interviews and reflective journals. For the dimension of attitude, more evidence was found for the aspects of willingness to explore otherness and increasing interest in exploring cultural phenomena, both familiar and unfamiliar ones. In addition, students

showed willingness to appreciate the beauty of cultures, and they also emphasized the necessity of culture learning. Regarding personal changes, students learned a list of inspiring values, such as willingness to engage with otherness, learning to see things from different perspectives, learning to appreciate the beauty of various cultures, and learning to adopt an open mind.

Willingness to explore and engage with otherness due to self-development motivations

The major aspect of improvement in attitude is students present willingness to contact and explore otherness. The participating students stated that their attitudes have changed interculturally and had gained increased interest in other cultures. They reflected on their open understanding of interacting with other cultures at a certain stage of the learning process, mainly considering the needs for various reasons. Specific examples illustrating the learners' achievement in this aspect of attitude development are:

> *I think we should learn more because after all, culture and communication are different in each country, so I think it's better to know more about it* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 13).

> *With the development of the economy and the improvement of our living standard, we can travel abroad. Therefore, we should master the etiquette and skills of communication* (reflective journal, week 3, student 18).

Students recognize the importance of contact with other cultures, and typical reasons including the existence of cultural differences and more opportunities for intercultural interactions. Although students' motivations to engage with other cultures vary, interest is an influential factor. Students are driven by curiosity about otherness, to be open and willing to learn from others, and they seem to value cultural diversity and different perspectives. This was well articulated by one student who said:

I still want to learn about the cultures of other countries, it's kind of interesting, just like the tea culture of each country mentioned in the second week, it's very interesting. I also note that the culture of each country has its own charm (interview after the second-stage learning, student 12).

Learners are potentially open to interactions with culturally different others, and ready for change when they encounter differences. With this kind of attitude, students gain more courage in exploring and learning about cultures, and their intercultural learning in turn also promotes the willingness to engage more with otherness, as one student said:

Just because I know more, then I am more willing to be in contact with others. In the past, I felt that I didn't know much, so I didn't dare to go and touch this thing, but now I know more, I am willing to try to have more contacts with them (interview after the first-stage learning, student 15).

Interest in discovering other perspectives and engaging in active learning

The second aspect related to the improvement of students' attitude is interest in discovering other perspectives on the explanation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena and engaging in active learning. Students showed interest in exploring cultural products and perspectives, a typical example from the interview data is:

For cultural interactions, I want to understand them. I want to have better communication. I want to deepen my knowledge, understand their culture, their knowledge, and their anxiety (interview after the second-stage learning, student 7).

It emerged that interest influences students' active exploration, as one student highlighted in the reflective journal:

Regarding culture and language, there is more to learn. It is interesting to learn about different countries by learning to understand different cultures (mid-term reflective

journal, student 12).

It is interesting to find that many students also mentioned their previous learning patterns and expressed their changed perspective in terms of their willingness to explore other cultures. As the course continued, students tended to spend more time learn on their own.

Besides discovering other perspectives, students also show willingness to question the values and assumptions in cultural products and practices in their own environment. It was evident that learners actively reflected on their own beliefs, as a student said:

Cultural habits are different in each country, and after learning, I feel that my perception of some etiquette is more or less changed. I learned more (interview after the first-stage learning, student 17).

It is interesting that many students' previous impressions of English-speaking countries are more positive than their own, but the initial stereotypical beliefs were sometimes later dismissed or tempered. Those beliefs are modified as a result of intercultural exploration, and students becoming more critically aware of the perceptions of other cultures. This is exemplified by what one of the students said:

I used to think that English-speaking countries are very good, and they are even better than China, but now it is not necessarily true as we learn more. Every country has its own good features and has its own bad characteristics. Now I really feel that my country is very all-embracing. It welcomes any kind of culture coming in, and Chinese people also scattered in the world (interview after the third-stage learning, student 21).

Students reflected and reviewed their own attitudes and beliefs inspired by learning more about other cultures, and they are also taking a more objective view of cultures. According to Byram's (1997) illustration, the identified cultural perspectives include both familiar and unfamiliar phenomena, both in one's own culture and other cultures. However,

the students' responses mainly focus on unfamiliar phenomena in other cultures. This trend echoes the findings from the dimension of knowledge. The results suggest that compared with taking account of own cultural practices, students tend to pay more attention to other cultures perspectives and unfamiliar phenomena.

Students also reflected that they are more active in learning and engage in deep learning. The examples below show that they are more actively engaged with intercultural learning in a deeper manner, rather than superficial learning:

For culture, I am more proactive to understand cultural differences, and when I look at something later, I also apply them (interview after the third-stage learning, student 2).

I feel that I am more and more diligent to learn, to actively learn, to delve, to understand (interview after the third-stage learning, student 18).

The data undoubtedly support the claim about the promotion of positive attitudes towards languages and culture learning. This kind of reflection is not rare, students made progress in actively reflecting on their own culture and intercultural learning. For example, during an interview, a student shared his change:

I used not to care much about this aspect before, but after learning, I suddenly realized that everyone or each country has different habits or behaviors, which seems to be good in our culture, but they may consider it bad, and I did not realize before. After studying, I feel that if I really meet this situation in the future, I will definitely pay attention to these issues (interview after the second-stage learning, student 22).

Similar opinions were also identified during interviews, for example, a student recognized the importance of learning more stating that: "I want to enrich myself, because I think that I really know too little". Students consider that learning cultures provides a solid foundation for interaction, whether out of interest or future career preparation.

Emphasizing respect and moving forward towards neutrality

Byram's attitudes appear to be fully reflected in the context of Chinese college English learners. However, with further exploration of learners' feedback concerning the development of their intercultural competence such as attitudes, more features are identified. Firstly, students show more respect and tend to move beyond own cultural position in communication. One participant reported that:

> *If you want to work with a person, but you are not from the same country or there is cultural difference, as long as they don't touch the bottom line of your own, or violate the morals, try to respect it as much as possible. Try to be as consistent as possible with the other party* (interview after the second-stage learning, student 11).

The students emphasized the importance of respect in intercultural communication, stating that people should take a step beyond own culture. The significant increase happened in the neutral judgment of cultural others, rather than positive or negative evaluation, which seemed to show a less judgmental and more objective stance among the learners. As illustrated by the examples below, the students recognized the need to avoid ethnocentric perspectives, and they consider that it is essential to respect and follow the convention of other cultures:

> *It is important to respect the background of other people's culture. I think this is very important, and we should not communicate with others based on the thinking mode of own country only* (interview after the second-stage learning, student 14).

> *Understand and respect the culture of other countries, absorb good aspects of others' cultures, and promote our own national culture* (mid-term reflective journal, student 10).

The exploration of cultures also led students to leave their positions and consider cultural practices from different perspectives. There is evidence that, at least at some points,

some learners had begun to move towards a space where they accept differences as non-threatening, and they do not need to abandon their self-awareness, because they increasingly accept multiple views. For instance, a student said:

I might think from the other's perspective, not only standing in my own current perspective, but also from the perspective of foreigners to understand what they think at the time (interview after the third-stage learning, student 20).

Another student echoed the same view:

No matter what you communicate with each other, you must not only consider yourself; but also consider others, no matter what you say, what you do, you can't just consider your own interests. You also have to consider the feelings and thoughts of others (interview after the second-stage learning, student 11).

This finding is consistent with what Huang (2015) and Su (2011) found previously, that is, through research and interviews with people from other cultures or people who have been in contact with other cultures, they have become more respectful of others and less ethnocentrism towards cultural differences. It is worth noting that in their research and this study, these influences were not only bring about through contact with cultural others, but more importantly, through in-depth discussions, students understand other people's perspectives for reflection or challenge their own previous assumptions or explanations (Chen & Zheng, 2019).

Through intercultural learning, students formed positive attitudes toward other cultures, including respect, understanding, tolerance and sincerity. Students admitted that before they evaluating how others interact, they needed to be aware of their attitudes toward others.

Accepting cultural differences and appreciating the beauty of culture

Students are willing to accept cultural differences and tend to be more understandable

when facing cultural differences. When discussing different cultural products and practices, many students explicitly stated that they consider themselves to be more open and tolerant to other cultures. For instance, a student illustrated a shift in her perspective on greeting conventions during an interview:

Greeting, or ways of expressing emotions are different. Western countries are relatively straightforward, sometimes they will kiss or hug, and these gestures are treated as politeness in their culture, and now we are more and more open, and we agree and accept their culture. In the past, I could accept hugs but I still have reservations about kissing. Now through learning, I feel that we should understand and accept them, this kind of culture (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

Another student also said, "I feel that I am more acceptable than before and understand others more."

Students also emphasize the importance of mutual understanding in intercultural communication, as one student explained:

Since there is a difference, we can choose to understand the culture of others; as long as they don't touch the bottom line of our own culture such as morality, we should be able to understand the cultural differences as much as possible. We can have something that we can't accept, but we have to understand. Of course, we also hope that others understand our culture, that is, we must have a process of mutual understanding (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

Clearly, through learning the course and changing attitudes toward cultural differences, students gradually learned to appreciate the charm of language and various cultures. Some students' attitudes and reactions to differences have undergone significant changes due to the intercultural orientation in the language courses. For instance, one student said:

I feel that the culture of language can be so rich and colorful, and there are many ways of expression. I made progress in expressing ability and learned more means of expressions, and has a deeper understanding of these things that are not accessible, and infiltrate the content of the classroom into the after-school life in order to further enhance ability and innovation (reflective journal, week 6, student 26).

For one thing, students are more familiar with cultural differences and become more acceptable to some differences such as greeting conventions; for another, they are willing to try and experience other cultures by themselves because of deeper understanding and recognition of the beauty of cultures.

Willingness to experience other cultures although not fully prepared

Students are willing to experience other cultures, for example, a student said:

The course helped me in life, it helped me to better accept the culture that is different from mine, let me learn to communicate with each other, and I learn more about culture. It makes me want to travel, to experience their cultures, and acquire more knowledge (interview after the third-stage learning, student 7).

The student also expresses the importance of experience and learning for promoting intercultural communication, "I think we should experience it; we should learn, we should communicate with them to enrich knowledge and promote mutual cultural interactions". Faced with potential problems such as culture shock, after learning the course, some students are more confident and feel that they can now adapt. This is well articulated by a student who said, "If one day I really go abroad, I might be used to it, I will not feel like I'm suddenly in a strange environment".

Although the students appear to be unsure about being fully prepared to experience another culture during residence, they are willing to experience the cultures by themselves

through travel or pursuit of higher education, and they recognize the importance of respect and following the conventions. As a student stated, "whether it is cultural differences, cultural conflicts, cultural interactions, and integration, etc., it is worthy of our self-practice to understand and perceive".

The following interview excerpt illustrates students' willingness to explore and experience other cultures as well as interacting with interlocutors from other cultures:

> *...because everyone is an individual, he or she represents a culture. So sometimes I will be more willing to communicate with others if I think so rationally, because in this way, I can know more about others through the most basic communication. It's another opportunity for me to learn about the world, so I will be more proactive and more willing to communicate. In the past, I may not have realized this and thought there is no need, I think that I may achieve an understanding by reading books, but now I feel that everyone is like a living book, and there is a desire to explore* (interview after the second-stage learning, student 10).

Based on the findings on attitudes, students are becoming more open and curious of culture and intercultural interactions, and they are willing to explore different perspectives and become more neutral in viewing intercultural differences. They consider themselves to be actively engaged in intercultural learning and appreciate the charm of culture. It is helpful for students to develop proper attitudes toward culture, language, and intercultural learning, which is essential for future intercultural interactions. There is evidence that students made progress through learning the course. The next section presents the findings of the development of students' intercultural competence in the dimension of knowledge.

4.2.2.2 Knowledge

In this dimension, the emphasis on acquisition is based on specific information that students could recognize as having learned. Most comments were about specific aspects of

culture, such as non-verbal behavior in intercultural interactions. Other comments highlight acquisition of more general information regarding topics such as intercultural misunderstandings. The analysis shows that students learned more about social distinctions and process of social interactions. They also reported progress in learning more about factors that caused misunderstandings. Other themes were also identified, and these include acquisition of knowledge of connections between language and culture and knowledge of cultural differences and their influence on business.

Enriched knowledge of social distinctions and value systems

As stated in Byram's (1997) ICC theory, this aspect of knowledge refers to the knowledge of/about social distinctions and their principal markers in one's own country and in their interlocutors. This part of knowledge is highly related to the course content, and students were impressed by the sessions mainly involving time systems, proverbs and body language.

By comparing different aspects of home culture and other cultures while exploring cultural themes such as the concept of time and meanings of numbers, learners had the opportunity to realize that their own societies is both different and similar to other society. They were led to see the different values and concepts in various societies. An important cultural aspect such as time system can reflect a society's value system and people's beliefs. Any learning that focuses on this topic assists students' knowledge acquisition and understanding of own and other cultures. In the beginning, student found some differences between their own and other cultures. However, with the acquisition of more related knowledge, students could interpret the differences in relation to other aspects such as lifestyle and provide their own evaluation. The two examples below show students' thinking about time systems:

In fact, the concept of time, different countries have different concepts of time, in China,

each province and each city have different pace of life (interview after the third-stage learning, student 2).

People in some cultures may feel that they must be punctual, but it is flexible in China. We can still have some negotiations on that. For example, for some cultures, they are extremely strict about time. For us, although it is better to be punctual in China, but it is not a must. Other cultures' work schedules are not the same as ours. We have a very systematic study of high school, before 6 o'clock in the morning to 9 o'clock in the evening; every day is like this. For them, they don't have to go to class very early in the morning, and there is plenty of extracurricular activities in the afternoon. I am envious of their lifestyle (interview after the third-stage learning, student 17).

Apart from the value system that reflected on time concept, students also learn about social distinctions through exploring the meaning of numbers. Some students said that this part of knowledge is new for them, as articulated by one student:

We didn't know the meanings of these numbers before. The videos of the numbers the teacher played in the last class taught us something, we didn't know before, including the meanings of numbers such as 13 or 666 (interview after the first-stage learning, student 5).

Some students were surprised by the cultural differences of interpretation of numbers. They found that a good number in Chinese culture may not necessarily be interpreted as good in other cultures.

We later watched a video about numbers in Chinese and foreign cultures. I didn't expect that 4 would be a lucky number in some foreign cultures, but the popular number 666 is not a good one. After viewing the video, I learned more about the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures (reflective journal, week 4, student 12).

Such exposure to the differences between own and other cultures enables the students to broaden their view about new systems of values and norms. Some students paid more attention after class and deepened their learning through searching for more information on the internet. This is shown in the interview excerpts below:

I also took some pictures specifically because I wanted to go back and look at them again (interview after the first-stage learning, student 12).

Because numbers have different meanings in Chinese and foreign cultures, I am also interested in understanding this. There are still a few numbers I haven't figured out yet, and I want to ask the teacher (interview after the first-stage learning, student 14).

It is worth mentioning that some students can relate the different value systems with the economy and other areas that could influence specific cultures, but this part of knowledge may be biased in the early-stage of learning. As a student said:

English-speaking countries are economically developed, so most of the people in these countries may have a different concept of time. Anyway, they think that time is valuable, but they may compare it with money. This is kind of utilitarian (interview after the first-stage learning, student 10).

Students' knowledge acquisition also evolved as the course went on and more findings related to the developmental process are provided in section 4.4.

Enriched knowledge of social interactions in other cultures

The second aspect of knowledge that was addressed is knowledge that focuses on the processes of social interactions. Students found this form of knowledge to be immensely helpful as evidenced by their reflective accounts. For instance, one participant reflected on personal changes:

Their communication, I thought it was very simple, no tone, there is no point to pay

special attention when communicating with them, and now I know that some countries
also have some unique ways of communicating (interview after the second-stage
learning, student 14).

Another student also reported progress in acquiring knowledge of communication from
other cultures:

For example, if I watched a foreign movie in the past, I could not follow the dialogue
between the two people, including why they said things the way they did. If I watch it
now, I can clearly know what they are talking about. That is why they express themselves
in the way they do with different kinds of expressions, that is, because in their country
basically they will use this expression to say that thing (interview after the third-stage
learning, student 21).

An important area that students indicated as a major source of knowledge is non-verbal
behavior, and they developed knowledge of different types of non-verbal behaviors and
different applications in own and other cultures. For those who are more confident in
communication, they acquire more knowledge of interactions to communicate more
effectively in intercultural communication. For students who are not so good at
communicating in English, they gained knowledge of communication that can assist them
when communicating with people from other cultures. Commenting on this, a student
asserted that:

Just through these four weeks' learning, I have a deeper understanding of the things in
these countries; especially, the session of body language. I now understand some
different body language in Chinese culture and Western cultures. Maybe after I have
learned, I can communicate with them. When we are communicating with others, maybe
we feel good, but they feel bad about our behaviors. We have to use polite body

language and respect them. Don't simply do what you want to do (interview after the second-stage learning, student 15).

The student also pointed out the usefulness of this form of knowledge:

Through body language, I think the ceremonial gap is actually quite big, for example, gently knocking on the nose, it may mean confidence in UK, but in other countries, it does not have such a meaning, so when we communicate with people from different countries, through some of their gestures or body language, we can know whether they approve use or not. Or it may be that they are approving or disgusted with what I say, and I want to know more about it in this regard. It does not only depend on the language to know the person's preferences in communication, the behaviors are also important (interview after the second-stage learning, student 15).

Students acknowledged the usefulness of the knowledge of social interactions, they consider that it is necessary to learn to avoid embarrassment, or to make the communication smoother. This is well illustrated by a student who said:

If you use some of the body language more professionally, they feel comfortable, the communication process maybe smoother, and they will definitely be more willing to communicate with you (interview after the third-stage learning, student 9).

In addition to the knowledge of social distinctions and processes of social interactions, grasping knowledge of misunderstandings in communication and useful strategies to cope with potential misunderstandings and dysfunctions in interactions are also essential for effective intercultural communication. The next section presents students' reflections in this area.

Enriched knowledge of intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts

Firstly, students acknowledged the existence of potential conflicts and misunderstandings

in communication. One student commented that, "…because of some cultural differences, there may be some small misunderstandings". Furthermore, students reflected that they learned about factors that cause intercultural misunderstandings, as one student posited, "In fact, when concepts or certain things that are different from some foreign countries, there will be some conflicts".

Based on the knowledge, students learned about how to avoid misunderstandings and potential conflicts. This is evidenced by what one student stated:

I have some understanding of some cultural differences when we chatting with our foreign friends. Due to some cultural differences, I may make some small misunderstandings, and I maybe know how to avoid them (interview after the third-stage learning, student 20).

Some students also apply the knowledge they gain from after-class reading and learning. For instance, a student indicated that:

After learning cultures, when I read some news online, I can almost automatically use some of the knowledge. I know why this happens, and I understand why there is a problem (interview after the third-stage learning, student 18).

With the acquisition of knowledge about intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts, students develop insight into intercultural events, for example, talking about the news of a Chinese tourist in Sweden, a student shared her opinion:

I think he is using the Chinese ethnic culture to abduct foreign culture, and this triggered various comments. At the time, when I read the news, I didn't see that Mr. Zeng brought back the female tourist to the hotel. I thought he was negotiating with the hotel, but the other party began to insult China. I was very angry. Later, after seeing it, I felt that there were cultural differences. He took the Chinese female tourists back. It is Chinese

morality or Chinese etiquette, but Swedish culture is different, this is intercultural

conflict (interview after the third-stage learning, student 7).

The students were more aware of the existence of different values and beliefs and their influence on intercultural communication. Referring to the examples of knowledge that students made progress with, especially knowledge of social interactions and misunderstandings in intercultural interactions, it is clear that the knowledge dimension has been greatly improved. On this basis, students have a commonality in the feedback of the same teaching sessions, which is of great value for further exploration. More information related to the teaching sessions is provided in section 4.3.

Enriched knowledge of the influence of culture on language

Engagement with a more integrated learning experience enabled greater interweaving of language and culture. Through intercultural learning, students are more aware of the existence of cultural differences and the influence on language and communication, as a student said:

> *Indeed, there is no need to talk about this. The cultural differences between nations must be huge, and I now find that there are cultural differences in different regions in China. Culture really involves a wide range of things. If you pay attention to it, there are really many things that reflect cultural differences* (interview after the second-stage learning, student 2).

Based on this kind of understanding, through detailed learning about different expressions and various forms of conversions in different contexts, and trying to use different ways to express, students explored English and Chinese, as well as Chinese culture and other cultures. Their learning was also expanded to include other areas such as translation, debate and delivery. One student shared his experience of learning culture and expressions:

Taking the lesson about numbers for example, I checked its origin of numbers, and I found this related to people's likes and dislikes. In addition to this, there are some words that are particularly interesting. They express different meanings according to their favorite animals or something. I am very interested and will continue to learn (interview after the first-stage learning, student 10).

Comparing with own culture, another student shared his thinking in detail during the interview after second-stage learning:

From the classes and after-class learning, I feel that people from English-speaking countries are very straightforward in communication. They tell you directly what they mean. Chinese and Japanese, when they say something, it's not just that, they may still have the meaning hidden behind this sentence, that is, there is implicit meaning. I feel that communicating with people from countries like the United States is bolder, they are not afraid to say anything. I think that countries like ours may be affected by some traditional ideas, sometimes we do not dare to speak out, or will not say what we want to say, this is not the same with other cultures (interview after the second-stage learning, student 3).

With the enriched knowledge of the connection between language and culture, students consider that it is essential to pay attention to cultural differences and promote intercultural interactions. This was highlighted by a student who stated that:

When communicating with different people, given the differences between their cultures and our culture, we should narrow the gap during communication in order to embrace each other and promote cultural communication (interview after the second-stage learning, student 7).

As they majored in business English, students also reported gaining knowledge in the

area related with business. The next section presents students' improvement in this field.

Enriched knowledge of cultural differences and influence on business

The last area to be identified in the dimension of knowledge is enriched knowledge of cultural differences and their influence on business. As business English major students, apart from language learning, they also must grasp the knowledge of business such as negotiation skills. Through the process of learning English and cultures, students also learned more about the factors behind cultural differences and their influence on business. With this knowledge, it is helpful for students to behave more effectively in business situations such as arranging meetings. For example, a student shared his detailed reflection on the concept of time and its influence on arrangements of negotiation or meetings:

> *If you are going to negotiate with others, you can't just consider our time, but also consider the others. This is very important, because this is related to the break of the other party, if they can't have a good break, there may be no way to proceed. So, I think we have to have a proper understanding of the concept of time. We can't just consider our own time, and we should think more about each other's time system* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 21).

Students demonstrated enriched knowledge of cultural differences and extensively evaluated the impact of values and beliefs on their own cultural and social behavior and communication styles. Some students also learned from the advantages of other cultures, as one student posited:

> *In fact, it is also one of the topics that triggered many discussions. Foreigners are more confident, but in China, we may be more accustomed to modesty. When chatting with foreigners, especially if you are an employee in a foreign company, you may recommend yourself when needed, instead of saying that 'I can't, maybe someone is better', this kind*

of modest statement (interview after the second-stage learning, student 22).

Students acquired useful knowledge that could assist them in future working situations, and they learned to pay more attention to details. For instance, a student wrote in a reflective journal:

> *After learning the session, I understand that different types of introductions and different contents are needed on different occasions, and the key points should be explained clearly so that others can understand* (reflective journal, week 1, student 15).

By looking deeper into the culture, paying more attention to more aspects, and exploring new perspectives, students made progress in intercultural language learning. For some students, they learned more of the knowledge that they did not pay attention to in the past, or did not have many opportunities in previous speaking courses. For some students, they dug deeper into the nature of cultural products and practice, and became more knowledgeable in the area that they are already familiar with.

From data analysis of the knowledge dimension, it can be found that learners' responses less frequently reveal their ability to understand their home culture. Compared to their achievements in exploring other cultures, examples that reflect learners' understanding of their own culture are not enough. Although some examples are considered to reflect learners' progress in this area, the evidence is insufficient. These aspects of knowledge have been embedded into later course activities such as storytelling and related resources. In classroom discussions, the teacher also guided the class to discuss and think about the influence of those changes and differences in their own life and business. It is reasonable to assume that learners have obtained some relevant information, but due to limited teaching time, students may not acquire all the related knowledge. This will be a valuable consideration for the future development of course curricula.

The findings from qualitative data are also consistent with the result of the knowledge section of the survey. The mean scores for eight items in the section of knowledge were significantly increased after the intervention. For items 11, 12, 13 and 15, students gained more knowledge about the lifestyle, value system, etiquette, and taboos of other cultures. For items 16, 17, and 18, the results suggest that students consider that they became more knowledgeable of basic social conventions of different cultures and intercultural communication, as well as causes of misunderstandings in intercultural interactions. It is noticeable that the mean score of item 19 has the highest increase among all the items of the knowledge section, compared with the result of pre-survey (M=1.91), students evaluated high after learning the course (M=3.03), and students considered that they gained much knowledge of effective strategies for intercultural communication. This is also in line with the findings from qualitative data, especially, for the strategies of avoiding intercultural misunderstandings and the use of body language in communication. The next section (4.2.2.3) presents students' development in the skills dimension.

4.2.2.3 Skills

Within this dimension, there are two main aspects that were highlighted. While learners described many learning experiences related to skills of interpreting and relating, they also described learning about many useful discoveries and interacting skills. They also made progress in developing enhanced communicative skills.

Guided by Byram's ICC model, there are two sets of skills; the skill of interpreting and relating (S1) and the skill of discovery and interacting (S2). For S1, students reflected on their learning about the causes of misunderstanding and dysfunction in interactions and analyzed the hidden cultural factors such as different value systems. For S2, students reflected that they made progress in the skill of eliciting concepts and values from documents and events. They were also able to explain and apply them to other phenomena. Besides,

students considered that they acquired many verbal and non-verbal processes of interaction that could be used in specific situations. They also made progress in using an appropriate combination of attitudes, knowledge, and skills to communicate with people from other cultures, taking many aspects such as familiarity and cultural differences into consideration.

Developing the skill of identifying areas of misunderstanding in interactions

This skill falls under the skills of interpreting and relating (S1) and constitutes the ability to identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in interactions and explaining them according to cultural systems. For the first part of this skill, identifying areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in interactions, students consider it important to pay attention to specific areas in interactions with people from other cultures. For instance, talking about taboos, a student said:

> *I remember a video in a lesson before learning about cultural taboos. In the video, when the two girls were asked some questions such as private issues, they felt embarrassed, but when they were asked some other questions, they communicated smoothly. Then I realized through the video that communication is also an art* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 2).

Many students used expressions such as "avoiding creating bad impressions" or "bad things might happen", which also indicated their careful attitudes when dealing with intercultural situations. For another part of this skill, students made progress in explaining the cultural systems involved in misunderstandings. They recognized that different beliefs and values could lead to different behaviors, and they consider that it is important to avoid sensitive topics or behaviors when communicating with people from other cultures. As illustrated by the examples below, students highlighted that factors such as different values and customs may cause misunderstandings in intercultural interaction:

The so-called gossip in our culture may be something that is not considered as gossip in other countries. It may be because the gossip in each country is different, and some values of each country are also different (interview after the first-stage learning, student 5).

I feel that I must pay attention when interacting with foreigners, because after all, cultural customs are different, and some words may make the other party feel uncomfortable or cause misunderstandings (interview after the second-stage learning, student 20).

In addition to the identification of factors that may cause misunderstandings and strategies that avoid misunderstandings in communication, students also provided their opinions. Some students believe it is important to learn more for effective communication, as one student said:

Communicating, we must pay attention to our own words, that is, we have to know what we can say and what we cannot, we still have to pay attention to this aspect, to learn more in order to better communicate with others (interview after the second-stage learning, student 15).

Some students consider that it is essential to apply proper ways of communication in order to avoid potential negative effects, as one participant stated:

I might be more straightforward when dealing with foreigners compared with Chinese; we better ask them directly, it may be rude if we are hiding, and it will cause the opposite effect. So, there are two points, the first point is initiative, and the second point is about being culturally appropriate. Therefore, I feel that I will uphold these two points in cultural interactions. By doing this, whether it is now or in the future, bad things will not happen. Recently I have seen a lot of reports saying that bad things happen because

of misunderstandings between cultures, even bloodshed (interview after the second-stage
learning, student 10).

It is helpful for students to interpret the causes of conflicts and learn to cope with misunderstandings for future intercultural interactions. In addition, they also learned more about processes of interactions.

Developing the skill of identifying processes of interaction and negotiating appropriate uses

The second skill highlighted by participating students is the skill of identifying similar and different interaction processes, verbal and non-verbal means, and negotiate an appropriate use in specific situations. For this skill, the ability to negotiate an appropriate use can be interpreted as a higher requirement than identifying processes of interactions. The students' responses provide some noteworthy examples, especially for non-verbal devices. Students are more confident in handling intercultural situations with the developed strategies. Although learners responded in a variety of ways, they demonstrated the ability to use their knowledge and skills of intercultural communication, as one student said, "I used to mimic other people before, but now it is about my own strategies".

From the perspective of verbal processes of interactions, firstly, students learned to enhance the quality of communication through selecting proper topics and learned to expand a conversation. As one student stated:

I also know what topics to avoid in discussions. The main thing I learned is
communication, I did not really know how to communicate with foreigners in the past,
and how to avoid awkwardness (interview after the first-stage learning, student 18).

Students also indicated that they acquired skills of coping with specific situations such as how to end a conversation properly, as illustrated by the example below:

Ending a conversation, in fact, I thought that if I want to end a conversation, I just say that directly, but I found that there are many ways of doing this, and some of them may be impolite (interview after the second stage learning, student 12).

In addition, students acquired skills of active listening, which is also helpful in communication. Commenting on this, a student stated that:

In the video, those different kinds of listeners, what you should do to be more polite, asking some questions or making eye contact, I feel these skills are very good to study and attempt, they are quite helpful (interview after the second-stage learning, student 12).

From the perspective of non-verbal processes of interaction, students also reflected that they developed useful skills of applying body language in communication. Some students recognized the role of body language in making up inadequate language, as one student said:

With body language, for example, when we are chatting with others, and our English is not good enough, or when we explain to others and they can't understand, we can use body language to help them to understand. It is quite impressive for me (interview after the third-stage learning, student 20).

In the same vein, another student stated that:

Paying attention to the body language, sometimes others need a moment to reflect what we mean, but if we use body language well, or if our facial expressions are natural and polite, they may understand what we mean by our body language. It does help to communicate, and we did try it out in the activity of street interview (interview after the first-stage learning, student 2).

Some students also consider that it is helpful in making a conversation more efficient, as

pointed out by a participant:

> *When we talk to others face to face, we can always pay attention to the other's body language. It can help us better understand during the conversation, and make conversations more efficient, both in negotiation and in daily life* (end-of-term reflective journal, student 19).

It is interesting to find that students also learned from observing the teacher's body language in addition to the other activities and resources, as a student mentioned during an interview:

> *Sometimes when we are communicating with others, the body language is indeed helpful in promoting effective communication. For example, I noticed that in class, when the teacher is teaching, it is not just language. It actually involves the body language to help us better understand* (interview after the second-stage learning, student 2).

It was found that many students enjoyed the learning and exploring process, and they actively appreciated the charm of language and communication. The following examples capture this viewpoint:

> *The speaking course made me feel the charm of language, speaking is really an important form of knowledge, such as skills of ending a conversation, and the negotiation skills. I learned a lot* (reflective journal, week 8, student 12).

The students developed skills for establishing effective relationships within their groups and partnerships in future workplaces. Students learned the various languages for expressing own ideas better or convincing others, and they also learned how to apply body language to assist their communication. Students were able to provide specific examples of verbal and non-verbal interaction processes. This indicated that they acquired relatively solid skills in the learning process. In addition, some students also applied the new skills in classroom

activities or when communicating with their friends. Some students developed their own strategies for effective interactions.

Developing the skill of combining knowledge and skills and taking cultural differences into consideration

Based on the newly developed knowledge, especially the knowledge of cultural differences, students revealed that they developed skills of combining the new knowledge and skills to facilitate interpretation and expression in interactions. Students learned to pay special attention to cultural differences in interactions, as one student said:

> *I will pay attention to cultural differences and try to avoid those issues that foreigners don't understand or can't understand correctly, and if I can't explain it, I can use body language to help them understand* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 20).

Furthermore, students highlighted that they are capable of adjusting their thinking and had become more flexible in coping with cultural differences in communication.

> *I will not do the same as before. Sometimes when we are doing a task, generally, we will translate the idea of Chinese into English. However, chatting with foreigners is not like this, I will adjust the Chinese-like ideas in order to make it closer to each other's culture and to be closer to these differences* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 16).

Views such as thinking from the perspective of others and integrating the ideas of both parties in communication are also identified from students' reflection. Talking about this, a student said:

> *When communicating with people from other cultures, you must speak slowly; if you have different opinions or ideas, don't be self-centered, argue with them, you have to listen and then integrate different ideas, this will be better* (interview after the second-stage learning, student 15).

The results of the questionnaire also echo the findings of the qualitative data under this theme. For item 3, 'able to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds in English' in the dimension of skills, the difference between post-survey (M=3.06) and pre-survey (M=2.58) is significant (p=0.058, 2-tailed). This also reflects that students are more confident in communicating with people from other cultures. On one hand, they admitted the existence of cultural differences and the potential of dysfunctions in communication and on the other hand, they appreciated the possibility of handling them in a proper manner.

Developing various practical communicative skills and advanced in interactions

In addition to the skills of coping with misunderstandings and cultural differences, students also reported making progress in using several other communicative skills in interactions. One of the participants alluded to this:

For example, at the beginning, I only knew how to start a conversation, and then, I learned what needs to be avoided in communication and finally how to carry out a good communication. If I communicate with a foreign friend now, the communication may be smooth and will not be awkward (interview after the second-stage learning, student 18).

Statements such as the preceding one acknowledge the instrumental value of intercultural skills for communication. Another student also shared his improvement in communicative skills:

I learned about what I can talk about and what should not be said, and issues that I should pay attention to when communicating with others; how to express in an appropriate manner, and the right way to end a conversation. I learned a lot (interview after the second-stage learning, student 14).

In addition, the students learned to pay more attention to details such as voice tone. A student shared her learning experience:

...when I watched the video that presents various dialogues in class, I thought about my spoken English. Anyway, it was the kind of feeling that I was just reading. Even if I memorized, I felt that there was no such big change in the tone of reading. Now I feel that when I talk, there is tone (interview after the first-stage learning, student 13).

Another student shared his reflection in the context of communication:

Language also depends on different occasions; the tone of voice will be casual between friends. However, in more formal situations, you must pay attention to your own words. Some words or tone, we must pay attention to (interview after the second-stage learning, student 22).

The qualitative data show that the learners also developed various skills including active listening, eye contact, thoughtful questioning among others. They also felt that they are more capable of behaving more naturally and smoothly in conversations. Students enjoyed learning and using the skills. They actively reflected on their acquisition of skills, for example, a student said:

From the simplest five-sentence self-introduction to the part of company interviews, there are obvious differences. When I answered and others answered it, I also reflected on my own shortcomings. My thoughts were not detailed enough and I did not consider it deeply (reflective journal, week 1, student 2).

In addition, some students also plan to transfer their skills to other people. One participant asserted that:

Maybe after returning home this winter vacation, when I am watching a movie with my father, I may tell him how to say these things because he likes these things, and he is willing to accept them. I can transfer these things I learned at school into the simplest ideas which he can understand (interview after the third-stage learning, student 9).

Although students do not have much experience in intercultural communication, they learned to pay more attention to cultural differences, misunderstandings in communication, and they learned to apply different skills in interactions. In essence, students are more aware of the complexity of intercultural communication and they are more careful in handling details. The next section provides findings on the dimension of awareness.

4.2.2.4 Critical cultural awareness

It is worth noting that critical cultural awareness is indispensable for intercultural interactions, and it is also the result of using one's attitudes, knowledge, and skills in cooperation. This is a higher requirement among the dimensions of the Byram's (1997) ICC model. Therefore, critical cultural awareness requires more in-depth analysis and reflection on intercultural communication, and this cannot be easily achieved in one course or without systematic and clear instructions. Although the dimension of awareness is a relatively higher requirement for students in the process of the development of intercultural competence, students' reported progress during the learning of the course was identified. Students reflected that they made progress in interpreting values in events and evaluating with reference to specific perspectives and criteria. In addition to what was identified from students' reflections, they are more aware of the diverse relationship between language and culture, the complexity of intercultural communication, and the importance of learning.

Interpreting values and evaluating intercultural events with multiple perspectives

The major identified aspect of critical cultural awareness from students' reflections is interpreting values and conduct evaluative analysis of events which involves clear perspectives and standards. To critically evaluate intercultural events or documents, the ability to interpret values in cultures is essential. Therefore, the first part of this ability is identifying and interpreting explicit or implicit values in one's own and other cultures. Students reflected that there exists different value system in different cultures, and the

differences may influence communication. For example, a student shared her understanding:

> *Now I feel that I have a new understanding, that is, I understand the details and I know their daily life, and I have learned more concepts. I think cultural differences are more influential in communication among people* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 15).

Students identified different values such as religious beliefs and demonstrated awareness of their influence on communication, as one student said:

> *It may be the same as communication, you may treat some things like a big deal, but others may think differently. For example, there might be differences in people's religious beliefs and this will also affect their thoughts* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 4).

Through exploring various cultural products, students learned to pay more attention to values. A student talked about this citing an example of meanings of numbers:

> *For the same thing, we have a kind of opinion, but the other party has another kind of opinion. So, it's not just about expressing our views on this matter, but also about the other; like the same number, maybe we feel nothing special, but 13 is an unlucky number abroad* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 18).

Another student shared similar opinion, and shows awareness of different value systems:

> *In fact, we are different, different society, and different values. The part that foreigners think is funny, we may not understand much of it. If it was translated into Chinese, it may not be that funny. A foreigner may not understand most of the things that Chinese considered to be funny* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 5).

With the development of the skill of identifying values and concepts, students also

related the various values to intercultural events. With the analysis of recent international and domestic events, students are more capable of interpreting cultural perspectives. It is good to find that students can provide different perspectives when evaluating intercultural events. For example, one participant reported her gains as:

Now I may think from the other side, through many aspects, what caused it to happen. I will not only pay attention to the results, maybe think more about it, what happened, what caused the event. More layers, and more aspects, it is not so simple (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

Students are more capable of viewing from different perspectives and taking cultural differences into consideration. Their analysis is more systematic and logical. Towards the end of the course, learners began to pay attention to global issues. These resources, activities, and discussions with classmates were no longer just for language learning; they also became sources of various views on global topics which aroused deep reflections. For instance, commenting on the news of a Chinese tourist in Sweden, a student said:

The recent news, it feels that the cultures are different, they are different from what we know. The cultural atmosphere is different, so cultural differences arise (interview after the third-stage learning, student 22).

Another student provided her analysis of the event, and emphasized the importance of communication at the same time:

Regarding cultural conflicts, because we are rooted in different cultures, I think we should communicate with others to cope with cultural conflicts. Just like the event that happened in Sweden regarding the Chinese tourist. If we understand their culture, we can avoid the cultural conflict, so there won't be such a piece of ridiculous news (interview after the third-stage learning, student 7).

Students also enjoyed the learning process, as one student indicated, "analyzing the cause and effect behind the phenomenon is a cool thing". It can be found that students can refer to cultural differences and come up with different perspectives when analyzing domestic and international events. Taking an insight into intercultural issues, students are more aware of the relationship between language and culture and the importance of learning.

Awareness of the diverse relationship between language and culture

Besides becoming more aware of intercultural issues through analysis of intercultural events, students also became more aware of the relationship between language and culture and reflected on their previous beliefs. Students experienced varying degrees of transformation or repositioning. Many talked about changes in their perceptions toward language and culture and a few actually used their new learning experiences to open the door for further reflection. Firstly, students paid more attention to the connection between language and culture, and they are more aware of the importance of culture in communication. This is well articulated by a student who said:

> *My thoughts on culture and language have changed. I found that culture and language are inseparable. To learn a foreign language, you must first understand their culture* (reflective journal, week 1, student 12).

The same student provided more detailed reflection during the interview after the intervention as shown in the interview excerpt below:

> *I did not pay much attention to culture and cross-cultural issues of different countries before. Maybe I partially talked about other countries according to what I think from those I contact. Now I feel that before I talk about the culture of another country, I must first learn and know what their culture is like. I might consider it more carefully than before. I may not notice it before, I thought it is what I consider it was, but now I must*

learn their culture, and then some bad things won't happen (interview after the third-stage learning, student 12).

Students acknowledged that they had stereotypes and biases against other cultures, however, they felt that they became more open-minded. Some students deepened their understanding of the role of culture in communication. For example, a student changed her previous beliefs of viewing culture as simply equal to custom, as the student said:

I didn't think about it, I thought that culture is culture. I didn't connect it to communication either. I thought it is a unilateral thing. It actually involves many aspects. I used to think that culture refers to those cultural customs. However, communication also involves cultural differences (interview after the second-stage learning, student 2).

In addition, students are more aware of the nature of culture, as a student stated:

I thought that the culture of other countries might be far away from us. In fact, I found that almost anytime, anywhere in daily life, I can touch more or less foreign cultures. These things are always around me (interview after the second-stage learning, student 3).

Being more aware of the features of culture and the connections between culture and language shows students' development of cultural awareness, and this also influences their awareness of intercultural communication and intercultural learning.

Awareness of the complexity of intercultural communication and emphasis on the importance of learning

Apart from being more aware of the relationship of culture and language, for communication, students reflected that they have also become more aware of the complexity of intercultural interactions and the importance of learning. Many students wrote in reflective

journals and discussed in interviews some personal and sometimes emotional narratives about previous beliefs. The example below clearly illustrates change of a student in terms of awareness of the complex features of intercultural communication after learning:

I thought that if you are fluent in communicating with foreigners and they can understand, it will be no problem. It is good enough if you can speak English fluently. Now I think we not only have to be fluent, and some of the body languages must be paid attention to. For example, if we speak English well, but we are talking about the taboos of others, it is not good. Or if we speak English very well, but our facial expressions and the kind of physical movements make others feel very disgusted, and this is not good. I used to think that I just need to speak English fluently. It's good enough. I don't have to worry. Now I feel that it is not enough to speak good English, but also need to pay attention to a lot of things (interview after the third-stage learning, student 21).

Some students also felt that they are more interculturally sensitive. As a student said:

I will pay attention to different cultural backgrounds, and some of the common proverbs and expressions. Language is connected with culture, and there are a lot of different meanings and different understandings. That is, when we communicate with others, we have to be very sensitive and pay attention to those aspects (interview after the third-stage learning, student 10).

Based on their learning, students indicated that they are more careful in dealing with intercultural situations and they also emphasized the importance of learning about cultures. The students showed the ability to go beyond description. They often questioned their own beliefs and assumptions, used theories to explain experiences, and then connected them with examples of experiences and behaviors. In the final-stage reflection, they made a critical self-assessment of their behavior, and determined their own strengths and weaknesses and where

they need to work on. A student explored ways in which media had shaped her ideas and emphasized critical reflection, talking about this, she said:

> *I think I haven't paid attention to this kind of cross-cultural issues between different countries before. Maybe I talked about other countries according to the 'biased' exposure and thoughts. Now I feel that before I talk about the culture of another country, I must first learn and know what their culture is like. I will consider it more carefully than before* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 22).

In addition to gaining confidence and motivation for culture learning, it was intriguing that many participating students changed their views on English and learning. They began to understand English as a tool to help them achieve further goals, rather than as an end, that is, to learn English for test scores. One student expressed her change of interest in learning:

> *The arranged activities can well stimulate our interest in learning. I have become more interested in language learning and intercultural learning and I have learned a lot from the course* (end-of-term reflective journal, student 12).

Students are more aware of the relationship between language and culture. They reflected that they are surrounded by various cultures and they also interact with these cultural products and practices. Furthermore, they consider that they are more capable of evaluating intercultural issues and events in a more critical way. It can be found that students' understanding of intercultural communication was also enhanced by learning the course. Being more sensitive and capable in communication, students are more confident to behave naturally and effectively in interactions.

In summary, the quantitative data suggest that students' knowledge was significantly improved after the intervention. From the qualitative perspective, participating students made improvements in the development of intercultural competence, in different aspects of

attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. It has been found that students actively explore their own attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts, which contribute to the openness and curiosity toward culture and culture learning. They indicated that they acquired more knowledge and skills of verbal and non-verbal devices that are useful in intercultural communication. As a result, they considered themselves as being more aware of intercultural issues, and learned to appreciate the distinctive beauty of different cultures. The intercultural speaking course provided students with more opportunities for intercultural exploration and reflection. The next section provides more details of the effect of the course sessions on the development of students' intercultural competence.

4.3 The facilitating role of the course on students' development of intercultural competence

In order to answer the second research question concerning the facilitating role of intercultural language teaching approach on different aspects of students' intercultural competence, students' reflections regarding the activities of the course were collected and analyzed. This helped to explore the influence of the course on the development of students' intercultural competence. This section presents the specific aspects of the course and teaching practices that enhanced the learners' intercultural competence. The first part provides a brief introduction of major approaches and activities while the second part examines the relationship between teaching sessions and the development of learners' intercultural competence. The findings are supported by students' feedback in reflective journals and interviews. The main themes that have emerged are summarized based on teaching methods and activities that appear to be effective for the cultivation of students' intercultural competence.

4.3.1 Major approaches and activities for promoting the development of intercultural competence

The most important focus of the course is that the teacher was not trying to teach culture or cultural facts. Instead, the teacher was making efforts in teaching what to and how to communicate more effectively and properly in intercultural situations through learning English. Though taking part in various kinds of activities with a different focus, students explored deeply of culture and intercultural communication. This section reports the effect of major methods and activities that were considered helpful in participating students' journals and interviews.

Based on the principles of intercultural language teaching, Liddicoat and Crozet (Crozet, 1996; Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999; Liddicoat, 2002) have proposed an intercultural language teaching model which includes a process of awareness-raising, experimentation, production, and reflection. For the course, the process was emphasized, and different aspects of intercultural competence were highlighted in the three-stage learning. Specifically, for the first stage, students were guided more to notice any cultural similarities and differences and try to explain. In the second stage, more activities were arranged to provide learners with more opportunities to compare cultural products and perspectives and experiment what they learned. For the last stage, students were encouraged to reflect on own attitudes, knowledge, and skills, and integrate what they have learned in the course. In addition, it is necessary to point out that any method chosen for the intercultural classroom can be combined with characteristics of other methods when needed (Pereira, 2016).

4.3.1.1 Stage one: ethnographic activities for promoting beneficial input

The first stage is an awareness-raising stage where the learners are introduced to new language and culture input. Proposed by Liddicoat et al. (2003), new input should be introduced through participative tasks, encouraging students to compare new cultures with

their own culture and language use. Ideally, learners should be provided with opportunities to notice differences, with the help from the teacher. Furthermore, it is important for learners to think and talk about what they notice in their native or second language. In line with the guidelines of intercultural language teaching approach, one of the most important features of the first-stage teaching is guiding students to actively explore the living environment and own culture, and notice differences compared with other cultures. Activities in this stage had ethnographic features, and topics were highly related to students' own experiences and interest such as food culture.

Taking the activity of street interview for example, in groups, students were asked to prepare several questions and interview passers-by on the street. Most of the students were impressed by the activities, and some students reflected that they took a big step in communication, both for confidence and for skills acquisition. The first point is students learned communication skills in real-time interactions and they are more aware of skills such as how to continue a conversation. Some students reflected that they were excited to have an opportunity to interview other people and know their thoughts, and this made them learn beyond the classroom, instead of being constrained by the knowledge in the textbook. In addition, students also made progress in teamwork, although it takes time to arrange, it turned out to be fruitful and interesting. Students know more about the perceptions of people on issues about the home country and other international events, and this also expanded their horizons. The opportunities for using English to interview and communicate with others are rare and precious, most of the students made an effort and took an active part in the activity. Commenting on the activity, one interviewee said:

I found the new side of life that is more interesting. It is because, if we only pay attention to ourselves or our friends, we may think that those reactions or body language are simple and limited. By observing strangers or communicating with strangers, we can

find some ideas or actions that are different from ourselves and our friends. It's quite

interesting (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

Another student said:

Street interview, first of all, is more suitable for me. I like to go out of the classroom and

talk with some people I don't know. It's a casual conversation, and it is not constrained

by some knowledge in the textbook. I was extremely interested, and I thought that the

activity resulted in good harvest (interview after the first-stage learning, student 10).

Students also benefited from activities that closely connected intercultural language learning with their experience and interests. For example, in the activity of recipe preparation, which is a representative activity in the session about exploring food culture. Based on the knowledge and working in groups, students were guided to prepare a complete set of recipes for a business partner coming from a foreign country. They had to take the cultural difference and other factors into consideration. Many students considered the activity interesting and they learned a lot from this activity. Apart from the food culture, some students were aware of the different expressions between English and Chinese when preparing recipes. Through this activity, students also made efforts to think from a range of perspectives such as the partners' home culture and their eating habits. Reflecting on the session, one student said, "learning the differences in food culture, I can also experience the great fusion of the world in daily life".

Visual materials were also helpful for promoting notice and awareness-rising in the first stage, especially the use of short videos and movie clips. Using imaginative materials such as movies can assist students to gain insight into other cultures by deconstructing stereotypes and prejudices (Lee, 2019).

4.3.1.2 Stage two: integrating features of traditional and innovative activities for experimentation and production

In the second stage, teaching contents and activities were arranged to promote comparison and contrasting to help students to gain insight into cultural differences and intercultural communication by providing more opportunities for experimentation and production. A comparison between learner's own lifestyle and that of other communities is a necessary means to better understand the two. This kind of comparison helps students perceive and process differences. At this stage, learners begin to apply their new knowledge and try new ways of interacting. Learners put together the elements they had been trying out and integrated the information they acquired in actual language use (Liddicoat et al., 2003). Therefore, activities of the second stage integrated features of traditional and innovative teaching methods to better serve participants' intercultural learning.

For spoken English, this can be done through role-playing. If students are at a stage where they can perform role-playing, role-playing without a script is best (Liddicoat et al., 2003). In role-playing, they can show the cultural and linguistic information they have been practicing. The purpose is to allow them to experience the interactions of different cultures. To some extent, this involves learners experiencing the effects of using different cultural rules, and experiencing the comfort or discomfort that this may bring. Role-plays received students' positive reflection on their beneficial features. For instance, through selecting and role-playing the examples of good and bad conversation, analyzing the cases, and discussing the cultural factors, students learned knowledge and skills of intercultural communication. In detail, students know how to behave in a proper way in specific situations such as how to end a conversation and leave. With good and bad examples provided, it is clearer of different effects of different behaviors and use of language. With resources, students were impressed by the importance of using proper language and behaved properly in interactions. It is

interesting to find that students also applied what they learned in interacting with their friends. Students made progress in communicating in a more natural and flexible way and learned to expand a conversation by applying some strategies. As one participant commented:

I understand that no matter what we do, we have to leave time and space for others to react, for example, let the interlocutor know when I want to end the conversation, or the conversation will be interrupted because of some reasons (interview after the third-stage learning, student 20).

Role-playing and analyzing critical incidents also benefited students in second-stage learning. In groups, students selected and prepared a critical incident that caused by cultural differences such as different value systems. Then, groups presented their cases, and the teacher guided the class in analyzing the cases, followed by discussion of typical reasons that cause the incidents. Through the process, students explored cultural differences and how to cope with those incidents. They also explored and learned different value systems of culture and learned to analyze the causes of the incidents and being more capable of interpreting critical incidents caused by cultural differences. Talking about the usefulness of this type of activity, an interviewee said, "I think what I learned can be used in daily life, especially when communicating with foreigners".

Besides actively designed role-plays, collaborative activities were also applied to enable learners to use the knowledge and skills learned from the course. Collaborative learning is an educational method that involves groups of learners working together to solve problems, accomplish tasks or create products (Laal & Laal, 2012). By bringing different learners together for meaningful discussions, learners will be exposed to the unique cultural knowledge provided by their peers (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004), and may challenge their values and perceptions (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). The activity of mini negotiation, as a typical collaborative activity of the session of negotiating and mediating in intercultural

communication, is the most welcomed activity in the stage. Before the formal class, students were asked to form groups and prepare a product within a certain value, and the product can be found on the current market or from students' imagination, but it should be tangible. As price negotiation is the most basic form of negotiation, this activity took this type. Each group briefly introduced their product and the initial decided price, then in the time of two classes, students tried to sell their product to other groups, and they could buy other products in the market if they wanted. Every group had an equal amount of money. With the negotiation going on, the products and cash in the whole market changed. After every successful negotiation, students reported their current situation of cash flow to the organizer, and the amount of every group was shown on the board, with a limit of certain rounds as an indicator for students' decisions. The teacher acted as the organizer and the assistant. At the end of the activity, the amount of remaining cash added by the value of products held by each group was the result of the group in the activity. The teacher also added some bonus as stimulus that depends on the specific situation of the activity. Students fully participated in the activity with passion although they spent a lot of time familiarizing with the rules.

Most of the students considered the activity quite helpful. Firstly, students experienced and explored the process of specific business areas including price negotiation, product promotion, and marketing through this activity. The activity broke the traditional forms of activities and provides students with opportunities to fully interact with classmates. In addition, in the activity, students need to use English to introduce products and persuade others, and they must react quickly as time is limited, and this way, they practiced language ability. Thirdly, as required, students must add cultural features into their product selection or design, students learned more about culture, how to find out the cultural strengths of their products, and how to convey this. They had to make many decisions, such as what products are worth to purchase, which group can be potential partners, and what price they can aim at.

All these sections encouraged students to think, to decide, and to take actions. Students considered this experience direct and integrated various abilities. The examples below present positive feedback on this activity:

> *When negotiating, the teacher said that in the process of negotiation, the most important thing is that you can't just think about yourself. You can't just think about your own ideas, just consider your own interests. I think it is the same when communicating with others. No matter what I communicate, what I want to do, I must not only consider myself, but also consider others, and consider the feelings and ideas of others* (interview after the second-stage learning, student 11).

> *I feel that this kind of experience is the most direct and intuitive. You may say that if you are sitting in the classroom and listening to the teacher saying such a process of trading, or listen to some audio materials explaining such topics, the feeling is not the same* (interview after the second-stage learning, student 3).

The dynamic interactions encourage learners to think in a more complex and diverse ways, thereby promoting critical thinking by reconsidering the conceptual frameworks of others and themselves (Toyoda, 2016). In addition to the above two types of activities, in the second stage, the teacher organized several times of storytelling activities, with slightly different forms. Students reflected that these activities promoted the ability to use words and phrases depending on the context. Some students also reflected that they learned how to continue a conversation and organize language from telling a story. They consider it is important to think continuously in communication and remain active and always ready to make adjustments in interactions. As one student puts it:

> *I feel that this kind of activity is the same as communicating with someone from abroad. I never know what he will say. I must adjust myself and always be in a positive state and*

keep it. I must be mentally prepared, to make myself more professional (interview after

the third-stage learning, student 9).

Many students like the activities of storytelling as the tasks provide space for creativity and imagination. Such activity provides learners with a communication medium, and also creates a non-threatening, low-stress environment for learners, allowing them to express their ideas on intercultural topics freely. In a sense, sharing and exchanging views on intercultural issues through these activities simulated the requirements of students working and interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds in the global workplace.

4.3.1.3 Stage three: experiential activities combined with analysis for fostering reflection

Feedback is an important part of activities and involves reflecting on the learning experience in previous phases. At this stage, students discuss their feelings about speaking and interacting in a specific way. It is important to recognize the positive and negative emotions expressed by learners and acknowledge the validity of these emotions. Feedback should make students work to find a third place: a comfortable space between their first language and culture and their second language and culture (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999; Kramsch, 1993). The methods and activities of the third stage focused more on feedback and reflection. Students were encouraged to actively reflect on attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

Students need to practice their new knowledge and skills in the course, and experiential activities would be an important way to expand and improve learners' intercultural competence. Experiential activities can be used to allow learners to develop reflective skills, to step out of their comfort zone, and to practice and improve their intercultural skills (Punteney, 2016). A helpful activity in the third stage is observation, especially for learning about non-verbal behaviors. After learning knowledge about non-verbal behaviors and analyzing related cases, students were encouraged to observe the non-verbal behaviors of passers-by and try to interpret their body language. They can also try to communicate and

interact with the passers-by after observation. The aim of this activity was to make the influence of intercultural factors more conscious so that students can deal with these factors, rather than ignore them. Observing other people's body language is an impressive and new activity for students. Although it seems normal in daily life, for most of the participating students, it was their first time to observe and analyze. Through observation, analysis, and discussion, students learned more about the non-verbal behaviors and they considered the experience as interesting. One student reported that:

> *I didn't really walk on the street to observe other people, but because of this activity, I really paid attention to observing others. Sometimes you see, but you don't think about it. Now I do not only observe other peoples' non-verbal behaviors, but also have to reflect the reasons why they do this and summarize. I think that body language is quite interesting* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 23).

Another important type of activity in this stage is case analysis, especially for the aim of promoting critical thinking skills. For the final exam in the third stage, students dig deeply into intercultural events, which promoted the ability of evaluating and analyzing cultural perspectives. Through the process from preparing to presenting, students also knew clearly about own weaknesses such as using body language to assist expression. In addition, students considered it is important to present their work in class and share their thoughts with others, and they reflected that they made progress and behaved better in exams. Commenting on the learning experience, a participant said:

> *What I found most meaningful is the individual part of the two exams. Sharing some things that were found by yourself is very important. Sharing your own opinions, and the question-and-answer session is also very important* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 5).

Emphasizing reflection and self-awareness for students as individuals can assist them to examine their own identities, values, cultural perspectives, assumptions, and prejudices (Punteney, 2016). In the next section, the influence of specific teaching sessions including the above helpful activities on the development of students' intercultural competence is presented.

4.3.2 Students' development of intercultural competence through the course

This section discusses the relationship between the course and the development of intercultural competence. The aim of the analysis was to highlight ways in which students described the dimensions of intercultural competence that they developed during the course. The focus was not to measure the levels of ability gained during the experience. In addition, this section investigates the role of the course on the enhancement of the learners' intercultural competence, which refers to Byram's (1997) savoirs namely knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness. It aims to make use of inferences and analysis of the methods and intercultural development strategies in the teaching practice. It is hoped that this can provide some effective ways to effectively cultivate the development of intercultural competence. Major teaching sessions (TS), activities, and the key emphasized dimensions of intercultural competence are presented including detailed illustration of evidence from students' reflections.

4.3.2.1 Exploring culture through group collaboration enhances learners' positive attitudes

Most of the students' opinions in reflective journals and the interviews are loaded with positive attitudes towards TS4 'numbers and icons' for learners' attitude development, and the analysis demonstrate that learners recognized that the session helped them to develop attitudes such as openness and curiosity that constitute achievements in this research experience. The following part details its teaching content and teaching methods as well as

students' views on the teaching session.

Students' feedback on TS4 reflects their preferences for group collaboration, especially for discussion, analysis, and presentation. This method aims to create ways for learners to cooperate with each other and help each other with their tasks. The teacher's original teaching plan highlighted this method to achieve intercultural competence learning objectives, especially for cultivating students' positive attitudes toward cultures and communication. In TS4 'numbers and icons', students were provided with materials which introduced the meanings of numbers in different cultures and different interpretations of figures. After viewing the materials, the teacher guided the students to discuss the meanings with the group partners and to think about the reasons behind the different explanations. They then shared the results of the discussion with other students and further explored culture with the aid of the teacher. An important part of the session is the activity of street interview. Working in groups, students were encouraged to go out of the classroom and interview several passers-by to further explore different views towards specific topics, current events, or other issues of interest to them. Students organized their street interview in groups, and presented their work through videos. The activity was welcomed by students, as captured by one student who said:

> *The street interview, first of all, is more suitable for me. I like to go out of the classroom, and communicate with some people I don't know. It's a casual conversation. Besides, this kind of activity is not limited to knowledge in the textbook, or just a skill. I am very interested, and I think that the activity produced good results.* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 10)

The street interview was one of the most influential activities in the teaching session. It played a useful role in the development of students' intercultural competence. Many students felt that such an activity had influenced their attitudes indirectly. They expressed that it They stated that this encourages them to actively participate in interactions with others. Students

are more open and curious, and willing to explore other cultures and interact with others. These comments not only show the general willingness to engage in this kind of intercultural experience, but also reveal a positive attitude towards the otherness involved in the exchange. This is illustrated in the following interview excerpts:

> *This kind of activity outside the classroom is very interesting and it can really enrich ourselves compared to learning in the classroom* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 2).

> *It makes me feel very good. As long as you want to achieve something, you have to dare to try* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 10).

The activity also provided students with an authentic communication experience with strangers and to explore different views. In addition, some students also made progress in terms of improving their confidence during communication. This shows the usefulness of similar activities, for instance, a student stated that:

> *Faced with strangers, we had some hesitation and embarrassment at the beginning, but as the street interview was going on, the little excitement in my heart replaced the unnaturalness of everything. In this group activity, we have made some progress in speaking ability and improving our courage* (reflective journal, week 4, student 12).

Another part that benefits many students in cultivating positive attitudes is presenting and debating representative figures of own and other cultures. The activity highlighted the attitudes of curiosity, willingness to explore other perspectives and willingness to reflect on own beliefs and views. It also promoted reflection on different value systems and own culture. In addition to the content of the activities, many students felt that the collaboration of tasks also shaped their attitudes toward different values. Students not only benefitted from preparing and presenting own selected figures, they also learned a lot from debating about

representative figures through collaborative work. In preparing for the debate, students firstly analyzed the figure from their own perspective, and when debating, different views were presented and exchanged. Activities like these help learners better understand those values. Reflecting on this session, a student said, "When we prepared to introduce a person and deliver his or her values, everyone may have learned a lot in the process".

While students were participating in the learning process by selecting and presenting representative figures of certain cultures, they were involved in a serious contemplation on culture and critical analysis. They were required to use and improve not only their linguistic skills but their intercultural knowledge and collaborative skills as well as demonstrate their understanding of culture. By exchanging views, discussing, and reflecting, students learned to identify and analyze different perspectives and reflect on their own perspectives. As a student said:

The teacher enabled us go deeper and explore the spirit of the country that the person represented. This gave us a deeper understanding of some things that the country represents (reflective journal, week 4, student 3).

Talking about this session, another student said:

Debating about who is more representative of the nation, that is, everyone feels that the representative person selected by themselves is more representative of the nation's spirit. I think it also contains our own views of the nation (interview after the first-stage learning, student 17).

The students' voices about the session's impact on their attitudes reveal that the experience gave them many ideas that involve own and other cultures. They emphasized two important issues: appreciating diversity and cooperating. As a student reported, "let group members assist in coming up with ideas, we can also improve our English because we have to

find out why the figure can represent the nation". Students also indicated that the peer-to-peer nature of the session formed part of their learning experience. They not only admitted that their personal achievements can benefit others, but also acknowledged that sometimes the achievements of others were beneficial for them. As a student stated:

> *I feel that I now know the thoughts of others which were different from mine. Most classmates may talk about figures who are related to the history of the nation, but some also talked about the kind of people like Helen Keller, who is particularly inspirational. The spirit is worth learning* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 4).

4.3.2.2 Resources with guided comparison promote knowledge acquisition of social interactions

Analyses of qualitative data suggest that the intervention had influence on the learners' articulated representations of value systems and knowledge about processes of social interactions. Students' responses indicate that TS1 'art of introduction', TS3 'supporting a conversation', and TS4 'numbers and icons' contain effective teaching techniques that facilitate their knowledge acquisition, and knowledge is clearly the most frequently addressed dimension of TS3 'supporting a conversation' and TS4 'numbers and icons'.

In TS1, a section focusing on food culture is considered helpful by students and the activity of recipe preparation was also considered useful for students' knowledge acquisition. In the activity, students were encouraged to prepare a complete recipe for their business partners who come from other cultures. In groups, students discussed, prepared and presented their work. Learning through exploring various food culture has provided learners with a valuable opportunity to explore and learn about language and cultural differences. A student shared her learning experience during the interview:

> *I didn't know it before. The dishes in the western countries actually involve a lot of*

things, and you may not find this only by seeing the name of the recipe, but when we

searched the recipe name and looked at the ingredients in detail, I found that westerners

are really exquisite about diet (interview after the first-stage learning, student 2).

The same student also wrote about the exciting learning experience in the reflective journal, "Learning the differences in food culture, I can also feel the new experience brought about by this fusion of the world in daily life".

In this session, the teacher used guiding questions for discussion, providing relevant cultural explanations and encouraging students to make intercultural comparisons. Students also learned through the comparison made between Chinese and English recipes, as a student said, "I learned that the expressions are still different between Chinese and English". Through comparing with own culture and language, the activity of recipe preparation mainly promotes students' knowledge acquisition, including the knowledge of the differences between Chinese and English and knowledge of other cultures. Students also made progress in developing the skill of taking cultural differences into consideration when handling issues in business contexts, for example, a student said, "For instance, where he comes from, some basis of the culture, and we will develop a menu that is good for him based on such situations".

Students are also more aware of the influence of the integration of different cultures and reflect on own culture and the interpretation of it from the perspective of other cultures. As a student explained in the interview:

Choosing five dishes, you must connect to the cultural differences between the two

countries, what tastes they are suitable for, what they don't need, and then we have to

think about it in all aspects before we select the five dishes (interview after the first-stage

learning, student 18).

Knowledge of the process of social interaction is the most successful goal achieved in the

knowledge dimension, reflecting on the intercultural language teaching promotes the development of learners. Most of the students' feedback on this dimension is related to knowledge and strategies for effective communication, which mainly comes from TS3 'supporting a conversation', covering topics such as applying appropriate body language to express interest and gestures in different cultures. In the teaching session, these topics were explained through materials that contain cases of intercultural communication, combined with comparison and discussions. Materials that contain examples of communication provided learners with opportunities to learn about useful knowledge and compare different strategies for effective communication. This was well illustrated by a student who said, "Some techniques of chatting, although some are theoretical, if you pay attention, you will find that these theories are really very informative in practice". Students acquired knowledge of interactions which they did not learn in previous language courses, as a student stated:

> *It makes me feel very novel because I have never known it before, but now I know more and more. Some parts are the same as our home culture, but some other parts are completely different, which is very interesting. It makes me feel like completely understanding a new thing* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 16).

As an important part of TS4, students selected, analyzed and presented a famous figure from a country that could reflect the core values of the culture. Students were guided to be immersed in the experience, through which they can search, discuss and present in the target language and culture. Students learned the knowledge of own national memory, perspectives from other cultures, and the national memory of other cultures, for example, a student said, "In fact, I have learned more, including the spirit of the characters, deeds, this is new knowledge I learned".

Besides learning from preparing and presenting the representative figures selected by themselves, students also benefitted from exposure to other views. Students' feedback reflects

the influence of others' perceptions on own learning, as a student commented in the reflective journal, "In the debate, we learned about the great people of different countries, and also understood their contributions, their greatness, and their significance to different countries".

The comparisons and analysis are meaningful for students' knowledge acquisition as they provide adequate space for student-oriented learning, as commented by a student:

Everyone has an idol in their hearts. The activity gives us a lot of space for self-development. Finally, we can introduce our idols to others, and better learn the advantages of my idol and the values of idols that were introduced by our classmates (mid-term reflective journal, student 21).

Next section illustrates students' skill acquisition through learning the course.

4.3.2.3 Interactive activities allow learners to develop useful communicative skills

Learners reported in the interviews and journals that TS6 'body language' and TS8 'negotiate and mediate in cultural interactions' had allowed them to develop useful skills of interaction. In particular, in TS8, the activity of mini negotiation received a positive reflection of its role in promoting skill acquisition.

In TS6 'body language', the activity of observing and interpreting body language benefitted students. In this session, students explored non-verbal behavior in different cultures, especially gestures. Apart from learning through materials and the teacher's introduction, students learned from observing the body language of passers-by and learned to interpret and apply non-verbal devices.

In TS8, teachers provided two sets of materials, one describes the various negotiating styles and another illustrates the culture behind these differences. Students were encouraged to analyze the opinions after reading and watching, and to form their own views on negotiation and conflict resolution. This session aims to promote students' skill development and emphasizes skills including interpreting cultural perspectives, mediating in intercultural

interactions, and applying verbal and non-verbal devices in communication. Students' feedback indicates that the session is helpful in promoting the development of these skills.

Firstly, resources were closely related to the students' knowledge base, and learners showed interest about the content in these materials. Although the materials contained a certain amount of unfamiliar contents, most learners found it not so difficult to understand the key points with the aid of the teacher's explanation. Students reflected that exploring culture and negotiation is a demanding but fruitful task. In the learning process, the teacher provided necessary support to make learning more effective. Furthermore, students were provided with opportunities to develop and implement their own strategies through a follow-up interactive activity and this authentic learning experience also helped to make their learning more solid.

In the second part of the session, the whole class was organized to participate in a mini price negotiation. In groups, students prepared a specific product that is rooted in a selected culture, and they try to sell the product to other groups and they could purchase other products at the same time. The cultural knowledge obtained in previous explorations was further reflected, making students closer to mastering the essence of the differences in strategies and non-verbal behaviors. In the process, students experimented the negotiation strategies they learned, and used verbal and non-verbal devices to assist their negotiation. Students considered the learning experience authentic and new, as one student commented:

Breaking the routine of regular classes. Through these activities we may learn some new things. We learn some knowledge about other industries and some ways of selling and buying things. I have not experienced it before and I feel very good (interview after the second-stage learning, student 15).

This view was echoed by another student who stated that:

In the process of trading between the two parties, I feel that this kind of experience is the

most intuitive. The experience is different from sitting in the classroom and listening to the teacher explaining such process of purchase or listening to some audio materials explaining the process (interview after the second-stage learning, student 3).

Students see themselves as active participants in interactions and they realized how this could enrich real-life communication. They experimented with new devices in communication, especially non-verbal devices, for example, a student shared her strategy, "you have to try in communication. You can observe his eyes, it can help you to see whether he wants this product or not".

Students also learned to think from the perspective of the other party through negotiating and interacting with their classmates, as a student said:

The teacher said that in the process of negotiation, the most important thing is that you can't just think about yourself. You can't just think about your own ideas, just consider your own interests. Communicating with people, is the same. No matter what we talk, what we want to do, we can not only consider ourselves but also consider others, we can't just consider own benefits. We must consider the feelings and ideas of others (interview after the second-stage learning, student 11).

In addition, students reflected that the session contains a range of useful skills and various capabilities, as a student said, "we have to quickly think about the words we want to use, what sentences…and we can also use our imagination".

Another student also said:

Those strategies we choose or the quoted prices we decided, what kind of goods we need to purchase or what kind of goods we need to sell. I think this is a test of many things and we need to consider a lot (interview after the second-stage learning, student 11).

At the cognitive level, theory and class discussions are useful for provoking thought

about intercultural issues, but for more experiential learning, it is useful to actively participate in group tasks that bring together different perspectives. This hands-on approach makes learners to think about how they interact in the real-world workplace. By providing learners with ample opportunities to reflect on the experience of practicing in group work and getting feedback from their peers, they were involved in in-depth learning. However, it is obvious that the comprehensive development of these skills through intercultural learning in the classroom is still a challenge for Chinese English learners to some extent and this process requires appropriately designed teaching materials and context-sensitive teaching skills to fully help learners. The next section presents the role of certain sessions on promoting the development of awareness.

4.3.2.4 Analysis of intercultural events nurturing reflection and evaluation

In this project, students' learning is promoted by reflection, which allows students to identify and discover connections in specific aspects of their lives. From students' reflection, TS9 'deal with cultural conflicts' contains much evidence of developing awareness. In the light of TS9 as the most productive teaching session for cultivating awareness from students' reflection, the following part explores the content and teaching methods used by the teacher in this session.

Students' achievements in intercultural competence are realized through the analysis of. intercultural events that caused wide concern, the identification of cultural differences, the comparison and reflection between the two sides, the construction of critical perspectives and the evaluation of conflict understandings. The development of these competencies is promoted through intentional curriculum design and the teaching methods adapted in the course.

In TS9, the teacher integrated different types of learning materials on the theme of a typical intercultural incident, including news, videos, and reading materials. These materials

presented different perspectives of a similar topic together and helped learners understand the event throughout the session. The theme was introduced at the very beginning of the session through a guiding phase, with the purpose to attract students' attention and stimulate their thoughts to confront different views throughout the learning process. The teacher encouraged critical reflection, wherever possible, in response to students' statements or questions. The materials described the event and these originated from several pieces of advertisement of D&G (a clothing enterprise) and different opinions were presented and discussed. The situation described in the event is applied as an intercultural incident to the students, and they were asked to consider the unresolved intercultural misunderstandings and potential intercultural conflicts. In the final stage of the session, learners were asked to conduct a thorough analysis of the event and presented their ideas and reasonable explanations from the intercultural perspective.

Students' responses to the intercultural case analysis were detailed and productive. Their responses reflected their understanding of the different interpretations of Chinese culture, readiness to interpret feelings from different perspectives, and an effort to achieve mutual understanding and avoid unnecessary dysfunctions or conflicts. Meanwhile, feedback from learners on the teaching practice in TS9 shows that students were quite satisfied with the learning experience and ability development. Learners who have participated in TS9 provided an appreciation of both the teaching content and the teaching method. The majority showed considerable satisfaction with topics such as being more objective in intercultural issues, as a student said:

> *...because we have learned more, and when looking at some issues, in fact, we have something in common with foreigners. There are quite a few things in common. We can treat certain problems less emotionally* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 12).

When analyzing intercultural events, students are also more aware of the influence of culture and refer to certain cultural criteria. The course enhanced students' awareness of stereotypes and provided an idea of how other cultures view their own culture, for example, a student shared her analysis:

In fact, I don't think they actually said something bad about China in a straightforward manner, but they use a kind of understanding of the culture of their own country to understand Chinese culture and to express it. I found that they didn't really accept the differences between Chinese culture and Western cultures. They may just interpret it in a one-sided way (interview after the third-stage learning, student 5).

The student also consider that it is necessary to seek common ground, instead of causing conflicts:

I think what we should do is not to reprimand those people. Of course, we must protect our own country, but in fact, I think it is the reason why we have to understand cultural differences and narrow the gap (interview after the third-stage learning, student 5).

Through the analysis of intercultural events, students also think that it is important to integrate the strength of different cultures, as a student said:

…because seeking common ground while reserving differences is a good thing. In general, each nation has its own good and bad aspects, and sometimes the good will be transformed into the bad, and the bad can be transformed into the good, anyway, these things are so amazing, I like them very much, and I am very interested (interview after the third-stage learning, student 10).

Another student also expressed similar opinion when analyzing the news of D&G:

I think we should be particularly sensitive about this matter, for example, to promote our

Chinese culture, such as the chopsticks; 5000 years of culture, it cannot be interpreted clearly and easily. When we promote our own culture, we still have to think about it. At that time, those models all left the fashion show. Those Chinese staff who were behind the scenes, no one cares about them, they just saw the most superficial layer of this matter, but they did not see the hard work and efforts of the responsible Chinese workers (interview after the third-stage learning, student 6).

During interviews, students shared their gains from exploring and analyzing cultural conflicts, for example, a student commented on the news of a Chinese tourist in Sweden:

Cultural conflicts, because we are rooted in different fields, I think we should communicate with them to cope with cultural conflicts. Just like the news in Sweden today about those Chinese tourists. If we understand their culture, we can avoid this kind of cultural conflict, so there won't be such a piece of ridiculous news (interview after the third-stage learning, student 7).

Students are more aware of the existence of different perspectives that are rooted in various cultures and they learned to evaluate intercultural events in a more critical and objective manner, as indicated by a student who said:

Now I may think from the perspective of the other party, or through many aspects, and then think about it, what caused it to happen. I will not just pay attention to its results, maybe ponder over it, what caused this event, more layers, and more aspects, it is not so simple (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

Engagement in comparative reflection has not only enhanced students' awareness and the understanding of differences and cultural worldview of others, but also enhanced their cultural consciousness. Furthermore, it is important to cultivate a perspective of comparison and reflection, because exposure to different cultures and critical reflection can allow students

to immerse themselves in intellectual adventures, free them from their comfort zone, or the 'taken for granted' of their own culture, because such learning experience often stimulate students' thinking and inspire new ideas and discovery. Students' feedback reflected the successful fulfillment of the intercultural teaching approach applied in the course. For some students, seeing others' different perspectives was an eye-opening experience. Students also enjoyed the learning process, as a participant said, "Analyzing the causes and effects behind the phenomenon is a cool thing".

The intercultural teaching approach emphasizes cultural learning as a process to cultivate learners' intercultural competence in line with Byram's (1997) ICC savoirs as learning objectives. In summary, the session included an intercultural event as a threaded theme and several main phases including noticing with input, comparing and contrasting various perspectives, critical evaluation of the interpretations, transferring clarified reasonable perspectives to new contexts, generating a logical solution and evaluating consequences. There is no obvious separation between one stage and another, and students can transfer freely from one stage to another during the learning process.

It is important to reiterate that intercultural language teaching approach is likely to promote intercultural learning and boost intercultural competence if the teaching principles are followed, activities are properly designed, and if learners are appropriately prepared for their intercultural learning. From ethnographic activities to different collaborative and interactive activities, students experience a learning process that contains input, comparison, and active reflection. Specifically, group collaboration is useful in cultivating positive intercultural attitudes. With rich resources, students' intercultural knowledge and skills are more likely to be enhanced if they are encouraged to take part in interactive activities and explore various intercultural topics. In addition, encouraging students to discuss and evaluate critically on intercultural events is another important strategy that can be used for promoting

their intercultural awareness. Although students may experience different learning processes during the intervention, specific features are identified in their developmental process of intercultural competence and this can also be helpful in future intercultural teaching. The next section illustrates students' developmental process of intercultural competence through the course.

4.4 Students' developmental process of intercultural competence

In this section, students' developmental process of the four dimensions of intercultural competence and their learning process as a whole is analyzed and summarized. This helps to answer the third research question regarding the developmental process of student's intercultural competence during the course. As the course was conducted in three stages: in the first stage, students were guided to reflect on their attitudes by noticing and exploring various cultures and intercultural issues; for the second stage, more activities were organized to evaluate, compare, and analyze cultural products, perspectives, and practice, and students acquired more knowledge and skills; and for the third stage, learners were encouraged to develop critical awareness towards intercultural communication and reflect on own attitudes, knowledge, and skills. For each stage, the students' development tends to have different features for the four dimensions of intercultural competence. The following sections present the findings of student's intercultural competence developmental process from the perspective of the four dimensions.

4.4.1 Developmental process of the dimension of attitudes

4.4.1.1 Stage one

In stage 1, students' attitudes towards other cultures and culture learning improved, and the main changes include respect for other cultures, more active learning of cultural knowledge, and learning to consider cultural issues from the perspective of other cultures. The first change is that students emphasize respect of other cultures, which is very important

for doing business with people from other countries. A student shared her change in attitude towards customs:

> *I have now become more acceptable of some things. Like some customs in the Middle East, I feel more acceptable. I feel that the world is actually very beautiful* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 12).

In addition, students used to learn for passing exams, thinking that the knowledge to be tested in exams is more important, but now they think that learning culture is also important if you want to expand your horizons. This was well articulated by a student who said:

> *For culture, I am now learning more consciously. I used to learn the knowledge for exams. Now I think that I must learn the language in many ways. Exams are very important in China but if we want to open a new world, we have to understand the culture* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 10).

This view was further buttressed by another student who expressed the willingness to learn culture and interact with others:

> *Just because I know more, I am more willing to contact with others. In the past, I felt that I don't know much, so I was afraid, but now I know more, I am more willing to try to have some more interactions with them* (interview after the first-stage learning, student 15).

Many students started reading and learning more about cultural knowledge after class, which is beneficial for their development of intercultural competence. Furthermore, students started to take a step forward in their thinking and learned to think from other perspectives. This can help them in their future careers when they interact with partners from different cultural backgrounds.

4.4.1.2 Stage two

In the second stage, students' attitudes towards cultural learning and intercultural communication continued to be improved. Firstly, students tend to be more aware of the importance of learning culture and learned to view culture from different perspectives. They also believe that it is good to communicate with people from other cultures, making communication smoother and more decent. Some students reported their lack of cultural knowledge and plan to make up for that part. In addition, students changed the notion of viewing culture separately and simply equated culture with customs or limited areas of cultural facts. As the course progressed, they realized that culture is closely related to communication, and cultural differences may influence communication. Students were more eager to communicate and explore other cultures, as shown by the two examples below:

For intercultural communication, I want to understand it. I want to deepen my knowledge and have better communication, understand their culture, understand their knowledge, and understand their anxiety (interview after the second-stage learning, student 7).

It's another opportunity for me to learn about the world, so I will be more proactive and more willing to communicate. In the past, I may not have realized this and thought there is no need, and I thought I can get the knowledge by reading books, but now I feel that everyone is like a living book, and there is a desire to explore (interview after the second-stage learning, student 10).

The students were also increasingly aware that we are surrounded by culture, instead of being far from us. Students were becoming more familiar with culture, and their strangeness is getting weaker, and they paid more attention to explore the nuances of culture. Students tend to appreciate the charm of different cultures, as one student said:

It's very interesting because I got to know for the first time that I can put ginger in tea. It's quite interesting and I'm also aware that each country's culture has its own charm (interview after the second-stage learning, student 12).

Talking about culture and language learning, a student wrote in the reflective journal:

I feel that the culture of language can be so rich and colorful, and there are many ways of expressing it. I made progress in my expression ability and learned more means of expression, and has a deeper understanding of these things that are not accessible, and infiltrate the content of the classroom into the after-school life in order to further enhance ability and innovation (reflective journal, week 6, student 26).

Thirdly, students' attitudes towards communication have also undergone further changes. Some students reflected that it is important to think from the perspective of the interlocutor and focus on the interests and ideas of others. As the course progresses, students touched more complicated topics such as intercultural conflicts. It is good to discover that students consider learning culture as an opportunity to explore the world, and everyone is a part of a culture.

4.4.1.3 Stage three

In stage three, as a basic dimension of intercultural competence and intercultural communication, it is essential for students to further develop positive attitudes toward culture and communication. Throughout this course, students reflected that they become more open-minded, receptive, and curious about cultural differences, and more confident in communication.

First of all, students are more willing to learn the culture of other countries, and they are more curious about cultural differences and the factors behind different cultural phenomena. Also, students are more receptive to cultures different from their own and tend to understand

the cultural differences. As one student said:

> *I realized that there are many cultural differences from country to country in communication, and these differences are inevitable, but we can avoid the embarrassment and misunderstanding caused by differences through developing an understanding of them* (end-of-term reflective journal, student 20).

In addition, students consider it important to develop mutual understanding, communication and interaction with each other, instead of conflicting with one another. Some students expressed that there is need for them to know and learn about the beauty of other cultures and communicate with others, stating that this enriches their language learning. One student stated that:

> *I have learned quite a lot of cultural content that enriched myself, and indeed enrich a lot. The biggest gain in speaking classes is that I speak more and more English, and I am more and more used to it. I feel like it is a part of my life. I used to be afraid of speaking English and I was not good at it, but now I practice a lot and speak a lot* (end-of-term reflective journal, student 17).

Students also expressed their willingness to travel or study abroad and to experience the culture in person. In addition, as they gained more knowledge and developed more skills, students felt that they are more confident in communicating and interacting with people from other cultures, as one student shared her learning experience:

> *I will be more confident. I used to think that they come from another world, and I found that it was difficult to take the first step. Now I think there is a premise that everyone is a person, and still, think the same about some things, just different expressions. I am learning why the expression is different and I have made some progress* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 10).

Students also reflected that they are more open-minded, and more aware of the importance of learning. It is worth mentioning that students also reflected on their own culture and felt that they have become more sensitive and have a closer look at their home culture. Students believe that before engaging with people from other cultures, it is necessary to learn more about the culture to avoid conflicts or misunderstandings.

4.4.2 Developmental process of the dimension of knowledge

4.4.2.1 Stage one

In the first stage, the culture topics discussed focused mainly on time systems, food culture and taboos. The first area of cultural knowledge that is often mentioned by students is food culture. By learning the vocabulary and expressions of food, recipes, and cooking, students learned about different dietary cultures and different expressions in English and Chinese. By exploring different time systems, students learn more about time concepts in different cultures. Through activities and resources, the students discussed and learned about values with the assistance of the teacher. They also learned to pay attention to different values in intercultural interactions. For example, numbers can have different meanings in different cultures and some students were surprised to find that a popular number that has a positive meaning in Chinese culture may have a different meaning in another culture:

A lot of things have not been thoroughly understood in the past, I only knew their lucky numbers or that kind of bad numbers. I have not thought about it. For example, in China, 666 has a very good meaning, but I have never considered to compare the meaning in other countries. I haven't learned this before (interview after the first-stage learning, student 2).

After exploring the cultural factors behind the differences, some students realized that cultural differences can affect people's view in many ways and learned more after class on their own. For instance, a student shared her learning experience:

For example, in the last lesson about numbers, I checked the origin of numbers and found this related to people's likes and dislikes. In addition to this, there are some words that are particularly interesting. They express different meanings according to their favorite animals or something. I am very interested and want to continue to learn (interview after the first-stage learning, student 10).

In addition to cultural knowledge, students also reflected that they acquired useful knowledge for effective intercultural communication, such as applying different expressions in different situations and appropriate topics in small talks. These experiences enriched their cultural knowledge and prepared them for intercultural communication.

4.4.2.2 Stage two

In the second stage, students continued to learn about culture, communication, and intercultural communication. Firstly, students reflected that they have learned more about communication skills, such as using body language to assist communication. They know that it is critical to be prepared for effective interactions, especially in some business settings. In addition, students acquired more knowledge about cultural issues, including cultural differences in body language, etiquette and communication taboos. They appreciated the distinct beauty of different cultures. Thirdly, students have a better understanding of conflicts and misunderstandings in intercultural communication and a better understanding of underlying causes of conflicts and misunderstandings. In addition, they mastered more concepts and terminology about culture and intercultural communication and some students are interested in learning this part. An example from students' reflection provides evidence of this:

There are some cultural differences from country to country, and some tiny details may affect the entire communication (interview after the second-stage learning, student 11).

Students tend to pay more attention to details and integrate what they have learned from different sessions. In terms of language and expression, students learned more than expressions, delved deeper into the meaning behind words and phrases, and connect language with culture. A student shared her reflection from a session that included an observation activity:

I learned about the different actions and reactions of passers-by from different groups, and the insights and understanding of body language. In fact, there are many subtle facial expressions in daily interactions, but I didn't realize it until this lesson. Through this lesson, I pay intentional attention to other people's facial expressions and body language. This also makes it easier for me to better understand the meaning of facial expressions when I watch TV series or communicate with people (reflective journal, week 6, student 27).

It can be seen that students are gradually exposed to deeper layers of culture and communication such as value systems, cultural integration, and intercultural conflicts, and their learning has become more systematic and comprehensive. Some students have built their own intercultural learning systems. Students also reflected on their own culture, values, beliefs, and interactions in daily life.

4.4.2.3 Stage three

In the entire course, the knowledge learned by students covers many aspects, and these mainly include knowledge of other cultures, knowledge of cultural differences, and knowledge of communication.

First of all, students have gained massive knowledge of other cultures and cultural differences from the food culture, etiquette to value systems, such as what topics should be paid special attention to in communication. In addition, students are more familiar with their own culture through exploring more about home culture and detailed analysis of various

cases. Secondly, students developed more knowledge of communication and they now know better how to communicate in different situations, both verbal and non-verbal. It is also valuable for students to explore intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts, and they have a deeper understanding of culture and intercultural communication. This can be gleaned from observations made by one student who said:

After learning cultures, when I read some news online, I can almost automatically use some of the learned knowledge. I know why this happens, and I understand why there is the problem. This is something I didn't understand before (interview after the third-stage learning, student 12).

Students also value the acquisition of knowledge and consider that it is important for future study or work abroad, for example, a student said:

If I go abroad in the future, I will not interact with people with such a one-sided and superficial approach. If you are abroad, many things are different from China. Through this course, or I can learn more after class, I can live better in foreign countries (interview after the third-stage learning, student 9).

The wealth of knowledge also affects students' communication with their friends and family. Students are also willing to share what they have learned with their friends or family, for example, one interviewee said:

Culture and some customs, I didn't pay attention to before, because after all, I haven't really interacted with foreigners, and I haven't been abroad. I can only watch TV, but in fact, sometimes there may be many mistakes, and it has brought us some misunderstandings, but after learning, I may go home later and tell my families that those things are not right, and what they should be (interview after the third-stage learning, student 9).

Students learned more details in communication, such as different types of communications and how to start or end a conversation. Furthermore, students learned more useful language of culture and communication as well as business knowledge such as the negotiation process. With this knowledge, students are better equipped to deal with business issues. The development of knowledge learning has a positive impact in their daily learning life.

4.4.3 Developmental process of the dimension of skills

4.4.3.1 Stage one

In addition to knowledge, the acquisition of communication skills is another important component of this course. In the first stage, although it is more important to cultivate positive attitudes and learning knowledge, students have also made progress in developing skills of discovery and interacting, such as how to start a conversation, how to ask questions, and how to use simple body language.

Beginning with self-introduction and small talk, students learned to handle specific topics such as privacy issues and taboos. Respect, self-confidence, as well as politeness, are also important for a smooth conversation. Students actively reflected on intercultural communication and their previous beliefs, for instance, a student said:

In the past, when I watched a movie, when the actor said a statement, I might think that foreigners just talk like this, but now I know that what they say is related to their national culture and their personal values. Before I learned this, I used to think they wanted to say this, maybe foreigners just talk like this, very straightforward, but now I have a deeper understanding (interview after the first-stage learning, student 9).

Through the activity of street interview, students also learned some skills about non-verbal behaviors, including interpreting facial expressions and using body language to aid communication. After learning the relevant knowledge and skills, students also reflected their

behavior in the activities. Talking about this issue, a student said:

> *From the simplest five-sentence self-introduction to the part of company interviews,*
> *there are obvious differences. When I answered and others answered it, I also reflected*
> *on my own shortcomings. My thoughts were not detailed enough and I didn't consider it*
> *deeply* (reflective journal, week 1, student 2).

Sessions such as how to sustain a conversation also impressed the students. Through those teaching sessions, students developed some skills of interpreting and relating.

4.4.3.2 Stage two

In the second stage, students continued to develop intercultural communication skills, and learned more deeply and systematically. The main skills acquired include thinking from the other side, paying attention to own language during communication, applying strategies in interactions such as ending or opening a conversation proper, and using body language to assist expression.

Firstly, students tend to emphasize more respect in communication, and they are more aware of context, language, and non-verbal skills that could make interaction smoother and more effective. They also learned more about how to apply and adjust different skills during communication. In addition, students acquire the skill of thinking from the perspective of others in communication, and they consider that it is important to look at the problem from both sides' perspectives. As one student said:

> *The way I look at it, I can't always rely on the background of my own country in judging*
> *this matter. We should also look at a variety of balanced perspectives* (interview after the
> second-stage learning, student 14).

Students also develop richer communication skills, such as how to avoid embarrassment and how to expand a conversation. Some students enjoyed the learning process of

intercultural communication skills. For instance, a student reflected on learning about the usefulness of body language:

> *Sometimes when people communicate with others, they may not be able to make their meaning clear; just like I can talk but not clear enough. I found that body language is indeed likely to promote communication and make it more effective. For example, I noticed that when the teacher is teaching, it is not just language. It actually involves the body to help us better understand* (interview after the second-stage learning, student 2).

Thirdly, students learned to think more comprehensively and improve their skills when dealing with intercultural situations. They are more aware that intercultural communication can be complicated, and they believe that integration and cooperation of different cultures rather than conflict is important, so it is vital to consider the feelings and position of others. Based on the knowledge learned in the last stage, students developed more skills at this stage, acting as speakers and listeners in communication. Inspired by the course, students now pay more attention to the details of other resources such as TV programs, they also learned more communication skills from various resources.

4.4.3.3 Stage three

After completing the course, students reflected that they develop many skills of communication and intercultural interaction. Firstly, students indicate that they are more capable of applying verbal and non-verbal devices in communication. Many students acknowledge that body language facilitates interactions, and they even actively applied the skills they learned in some activities. Students learned to open, expand, and how to end a conversation. In addition, they also learned how to communicate in appropriate and flexible ways, and how handle some private or improper topics as well as how to pay attention to the context. Thirdly, in addition to skills of expressing, students also learned how to be good listeners and to respond to others in a proper and polite manner. Students developed more

skills in ensuring communication is effective and properly managed. They are now more mature in handling intercultural issues, as one student said:

…because we have learned more, and when looking at some issues, in fact, we have something in common with foreigners. There are quite a few things in common. We can treat certain problems less emotionally (interview after the third-stage learning, student 22).

Commenting on the news of D&G, a student shared her view:

Some people are very sensible. I think we should comment wisely, for example, our Chinese culture, such as the chopsticks, 5000 years of culture, it is impossible to understand so clear easily. When we promote our own culture, we still have to think about it. At that time, those models all left the fashion show. Those Chinese workers who were behind the scenes, no one cares about them, they just saw the most superficial layer of this matter. They did not see the hard work and efforts of the responsible Chinese staff (interview after the third-stage learning, student 6).

Students provided many detailed examples, which reflecting that their learning is impressive and practical. Students learned to cope with conflicts with others, which could help them in their future careers. They also learned more ways to express the same meaning in different situations, depending on the context.

4.4.4 Developmental process of the dimension of critical cultural awareness

4.4.4.1 Stage one

Through this course, students explored different ways of thinking, values, and beliefs, which can help them in interactions with people from other cultures. Students are becoming more aware of different values and other aspects of cultures and their influence in intercultural interactions, as portrayed in one students' comment:

It may be the same as communication, you may treat some things like a big deal, others may think differently. For example, there are differences in people's religious beliefs, and this will also affect their thoughts (interview after the first-stage learning, student 4).

Some students are also aware of the impact of ethnocentric perspectives, the connection between culture and language, and the influence of their home culture. A typical feature in this stage is that students gain insight into the connections among culture, language, and communication. This view is depicted in the following comments:

Culture influences people's communication. For example, if we want to have better communication, we will have to know something about the other person's culture, and we can identify topics for discussion and know how to talk to each other (interview after the first-stage learning, student 18).

My thoughts on culture and language have changed. I found that culture and language are inseparable. To learn a foreign language better, you must first understand their culture (reflective journal, week 1, student 12).

Although some students reported that they had learned about their home culture and other cultures through learning the course, the development of awareness seems inadequate in this stage. The reasons may include students' after-class learning habits, limited class time, lack of opportunities to communicate with foreigners, and the fact that it is the early stage of the intervention.

4.4.4.2 Stage two

Starting from exploring cultural differences, at the second stage, students were exposed to deeper layers of culture. Students gradually learned to evaluate different cultural products and perspectives, and they are more aware of the causes of cultural differences and tend to pay attention to details, as one student said:

I gradually understand why foreigners and Chinese deal with the same thing differently,

for example, things like romance, foreigners are very free and open, but Chinese are

relatively conservative (interview after the second-stage learning, student 20).

Students continued to reflect on their attitudes, knowledge, and skills and combined them in interpreting documents and events. Some students are aware of the importance of learning from other cultures and promoting own culture. Furthermore, learners are more aware of the impact of their own culture and position, and they are moving forward from ethnocentric perspectives to broader views. They analyzed intercultural documents and events from a more objective perspective, and some students also expressed the importance of learning from other cultures and the role of integrating perspectives. This is clearly illustrated by the example below:

Learning a language certainly requires an understanding of culture and values.

Throughout the learning process, I found that some values are the same. Here is an

example, the East and West's perception of time, the Western describe time as 'time

flies', and a Chinese idiom is 'shi guang fei shi, sui yue ru suo' which has the same

meaning. As a language learner, we must uphold such a concept-- understanding and

respecting the culture of other countries, absorbing and learning from the perceived

strengths of others, and promoting our home culture (mid-term reflective journal,

student 10).

4.4.4.3 Stage three

As a higher dimension of intercultural competence, critical cultural awareness requires efforts and reflections. Through the entire course, students also make improvements in the dimension of awareness. Firstly, students are more aware of the differences between English and Chinese, and between Chinese culture and other cultures. They are more aware of the

different features and they learned to pay more attention to the influence of the differences in communication. Furthermore, students also have a better understanding of the relationship between language and culture; especially, some deep culture dimensions such as value systems. Thirdly, students become more aware of intercultural conflicts and underlying causes through analyzing international events. The comments below illustrate students' progress in analysis of intercultural events and conflicts:

Now I may think from the other side and think more about the event. I will not only pay attention to its results, maybe think more about the causes of the event, with more layers in understanding (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

Regarding cultural conflicts, because we are rooted in different cultures, I think we should communicate with others to cope with cultural conflicts. Just like the incident which happened in Sweden, regarding the Chinese tourist. If we understand their culture, we can avoid this kind of cultural conflict, so such a piece of ridiculous news (interview after the third-stage learning, student 7).

Students also reflected on their interactions with friends and classmates and think more about the influence of language and culture. Some students reported that speaking fluent English is not enough, instead, it involves more than just language as culture also plays an important role in communication. Critical enquiry skills were evident in the discussions of intercultural events and it is satisfying to find that students are more critical in evaluating cultural issues and events. Just like a student shared her exciting learning experience in her reflective journal:

In the second half of the course, I discovered my interest in learning and began to explore deeper. For example, commenting on social events, I like multi-angled and deep analysis. I enjoyed the feeling of peeling an event off layer by layer, every time I couldn't

help but sigh: 'The original thing is like this!' (end-of-term reflective journal, student

10)

4.4.5 A brief summary of the development of students' intercultural competence through the intervention

The analysis of the development of students' intercultural competence in the four

dimensions indicate that students found participating in the intervention and the related

teaching sessions beneficial. A comprehensive figure is drawn to clearly illustrate the

facilitating role of the intervention on the development of students' intercultural competence.

The connection of the three research questions can also be found in the figure below.
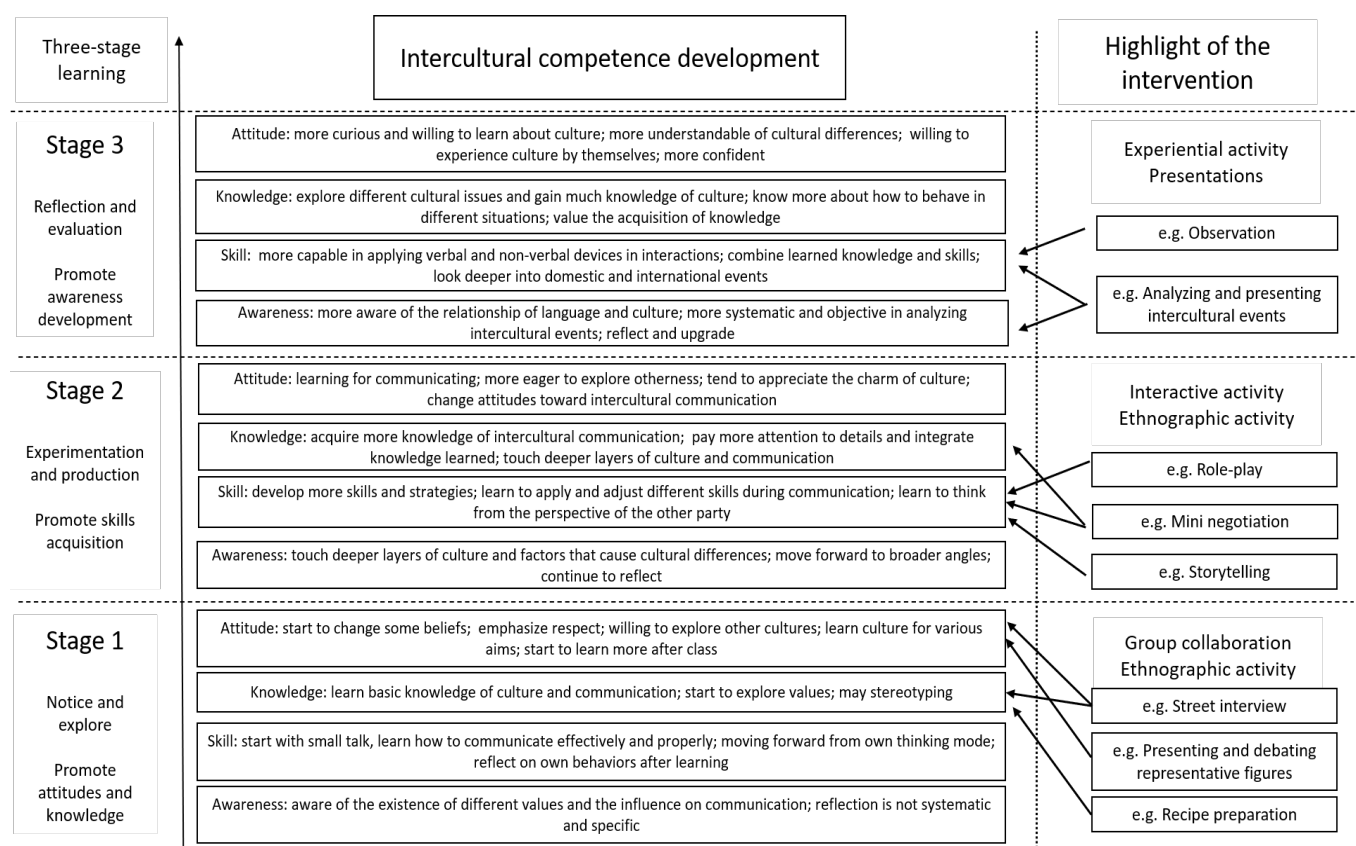
Figure 8. A comprehensive diagram of students' intercultural competence development

through the intervention

Figure 8 is an attempt to summarize the key findings of this study and showing the

relationships between the intervention and students' intercultural competence. To this end,

distinctions are drawn between different dimensions of intercultural competence, different stages of intervention, and the manner in which they interact. Firstly, a three-stage learning process has been summarized in the left side of the figure, which illustrates students' learning process including notice, experimentation, production, and reflection. Furthermore, in the middle part of the figure, three levels have been identified moving from basic intercultural competence to more advanced abilities. In this part, a range of features identified from students' reflections are summarized and presented. From the bottom to the top, students' developmental process can also be found; gradually, students consider that they are becoming more interculturally competent. Finally, in the right part of the figure, methods and activities that students considered beneficial for the development of their intercultural competence are highlighted, which also connect with students' three-stage learning. For the research, the three-stage learning process, beneficial intercultural language teaching activities, and students' intercultural competence development are connected.

In this way, students' intercultural competence development in the four dimensions, the facilitating role of the intervention on students' intercultural competence, and the developmental process are summarized through the comprehensive figure, which also elaborate the three research questions. The whole intervention is concerned with the development of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness in meaningful intercultural language teaching and students' authentic learning experience is highlighted in the learning process. It should also be clearly pointed out that the development of intercultural competence is not necessarily follow the three stages in a linear way described in this section and the figure is a brief summary of the findings of this specific study.

There are some specific features in the participating students' developmental process of intercultural competence. These include different changes and improvements in attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness, based on pedagogical approaches and active reflections. A

useful framework for the development of intercultural competence must provide specific descriptions and clarify the relationships between the dimensions or different developmental stages. Moreover, such a framework offers the most utility when constructed to redress the features related to the development of intercultural competence. Based on the above reasons, a tentative framework designed to address the concerns is discussed and illustrated in the following section.

4.4.6 A tentative developmental model for intercultural competence for college student

The tentative model of intercultural competence is a framework that explains the development of increasing sophistication in applying attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness in coping with intercultural situations. Based on Byram's (1997) ICC model, Liddicoat's (2002) intercultural language teaching process, and students' reflection through learning the course, this model tries to dig deeper into student's developmental process of intercultural competence.

This conceptual framework aims to reflect two elements, which are not obvious in the existing literature on the development of intercultural competence. First, in recognition that this is a complex competence, intercultural competence is interpreted as multi-dimensional, including a series of attributes such as attitude, knowledge, skill and critical cultural awareness. Second, it is recognized that students usually learn by taking a series of steps and are able to carry out more complex learning. The proposed framework not only determines the desired achievements itself, but also includes three steps that lead to the development of the competence, benchmarked along a developmental continuum. This framework appears in the form of 4×3 matrices that links the four dimensions of development (attitude, knowledge, skill and awareness) with three levels of development (basic, intermediate, and advanced). Table 10 is composed of 12 units, showing how the development of each dimension is carried out in the three developmental benchmarks. Next, a more detailed

explanation of each stage is provided.

Table 10. A three-dimensional developmental model of intercultural competence

Domain	Basic Level	Intermediate Level	Advanced Level
Attitude	Open, curious, and respectful to other cultures; positive in learning cultural knowledge and learn more after class; learning for various aims; change some previous beliefs	Attitudes towards culture learning and intercultural communication continued to be improved; emphasize more on learning for communication; willing to pay more attention to explore detailed cultural differences	Appreciate the beauty of various cultures; willing to experience other cultures by themselves through ways such as travel or study abroad; confident in communication and interaction with people from other cultures
Knowledge	Acquire knowledge of specific topics that closely connected with daily life; gain knowledge of intercultural communication, but limited; acquire knowledge of unfamiliar cultural products and perspectives, but may be biased	Know more about more complicated topics such as conflicts and misunderstandings in intercultural communication; acquire more knowledge of concepts and terms of culture and intercultural communication in detail; acquire more knowledge about communication such as using body language to assist communication	Acquire knowledge of communication in detail, and know more about how to behave in different situations, both verbal and non-verbal; take a deeper insight into the culture and explore more about home culture; the enrichment of knowledge also influences their communication with friends and their family
Skill	Learn to handle specific topics such as privacy issues and taboos; moving forward from own thinking system; reflect on own beliefs in intercultural communication; relate knowledge and skills to own behavior after learning	Develop richer communication skills and strategies for interactions in different contexts; develop skills of thinking from the perspective of the other party and consider it important; think more comprehensively and consider it is important for different cultures to integrate and cooperate	More capable to apply verbal and non-verbal skills to communicate; look deeper into domestic and international events, and analyze from different perspectives; combine and apply learned knowledge and skills more systematically; more capable to cope with others and manage conflicts
Awareness	Aware of the connection between language and culture; aware of the influence of home	Touch deeper layers of culture, and be more aware of the causes of cultural differences; moving forward from ethnocentric	More aware of the relationship of language and culture, especially for areas such as value system;

culture;	perspectives to view from broader and	aware of potential conflicts and causes,
aware of the existence of different	multiple angles;	and mediate;
cultures and their influence on	aware of the advantages of other cultures	more systematic, logical, and objective
communication;	and the importance of integration;	in analyzing intercultural events;
reflection is not systematic and	reflect and combine attitudes, knowledge,	critically evaluate own attitudes,
specific	and skills in analyzing events	knowledge, and skills

The second column of the table describes the basic level of the development of intercultural competence in the four dimensions, namely, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. At this level, learners change some previous beliefs and acquire knowledge of specific topics, especially those closely connected with their daily life. They learn to handle specific topics such as privacy issues and taboos. However, at this level, the learning is limited and may be biased, for example, different cultural views that do not conform to one's views are considered incorrect, not different. This stage has been characterized in several theories of intercultural competence development such as acquire knowledge of communicative acts (Balboni & Caon, 2014), and a conscious understanding of the influence of home culture on communication (Baker, 2011). At this level, learners may also show some weakness including being naive about different cultural practices and values, lacking understanding of other cultures, lacking understanding of how social systems influence group norms and differences between groups (King & Magolda, 2005). Although learners are aware that other cultures may be different, this awareness may lack the support of any specific systemic knowledge of the culture, and the ability to compare one's own culture with other cultures may be at the level of broad generalizations or stereotypes (Baker, 2011).

In the intermediate phase of the development of intercultural competence, attitudes towards culture learning and intercultural communication continue to be improved, and learners know more about complicated topics such as conflicts and misunderstandings in

intercultural communication and develop richer communication skills and strategies for interactions in different contexts. This shift is accompanied by an increasing reflection on own beliefs and views. The increasing uncertainty makes learners become more open to different perspectives. The intermediate phase has been characterized in previous studies as evolving understanding and acceptance of uncertainty and different views, willingness to interact with otherness and refraining from judgment (King & Magolda, 2005), positive disposition towards learning (Sercu, 2004), willingness to question one's own beliefs (Deardorff, 2006), examining one's cultural prejudices against other cultures and exploring one's own cultural background (Suh, 2004), specific knowledge of possible misunderstanding and miscommunication and capability to apply cultural knowledge to make predictions, capacity to move beyond generalizations and involve more complex understandings (Baker, 2011).

The advanced level of the development of intercultural competence is marked by the transition to knowledge and skills as constructed and as grounded in context. Learners appreciate the beauty of various cultures and they are willing to experience other cultures by themselves through ways such as travel or study abroad. They know more about how to communicate in different situations, both verbal and non-verbal, and are more capable to combine and apply learned knowledge and skills more systematically. This mature phase has been described in previous studies as understanding and appreciating human differences (King & Magolda, 2005), being friendly, trustworthy, and assertive (Spitzberg, 2000), ability to critically evaluate products, practices and perspectives in own and foreign cultures (Sercu, 2004), flexibility (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006), mediating among interlocutors conflicting perspectives (Deardorff, 2006), independent (Gill, 2007), and mediating and negotiating between different cultural frames of reference (Baker, 2011).

Research into the developmental process of participating students' intercultural

competence has revealed that, during the intervention, students gradually develop a clearer understanding of not only their own culture but also other cultural products and perspectives, and they become more positive and more understanding in viewing cultural differences, become more knowledgeable about a range of intercultural topics, develop skills for effective intercultural interactions, and take a critical view in analyzing intercultural issues. In addition, students feel valued, empowered, and are more engaged. Their valuable feedback about the course was also collected and analyzed for future teaching as discussed in the following section.

4.5 Students' feedback on the course

The learners' evaluation of teaching was elicited in interviews and journals to complement the findings from their responses in classroom teaching and learning. A wide range of views on the course emerged and the three main themes elicited are: learners' recognition of distinctive characteristics of the course, appraisal activities and resources of learning, and strategies suggested for future teaching. The students' improvement in language ability is also summarized as an additional section. These findings provide supplementary evidence about effective intercultural teaching in the course, involving how learners' attitudes changed, how they acquired their knowledge, how they developed their skills, and how their awareness was constructed.

4.5.1 Recognition of the distinctive features of the course

Students shared their impression of the course in interviews and reflective journals. Most of them found the course different from previous speaking courses, and they described the course as rich in content, planned in detail, systematic, practical, and interesting. Some students felt that the course was designed in a way that motivated the whole class to participate.

Firstly, it emerged that the participating students felt that their learning expectations

were achieved through learning the course. The students indicated that before the course begun, they thought that it would follow the previous routine, where the teacher would rely on the textbook, however, they were pleasantly surprised with the novel approach. Apart from being provided with experiences beyond the textbook, another aspect that was well received by the students is that the course content is not only limited to business knowledge and skills. As business English major students, most of the courses are business-related, but students want to learn more knowledge related to daily life, rather than focusing on too much business knowledge. An additional strength of the course is that while it keeps business knowledge and skills, the teaching content also closely connected with daily life and communication. As a speaking course, listening and speaking are two important aims, and students indicated that they had more opportunities to improve the two skills, especially speaking. Meeting the expectation of learning more about culture and other countries is also highlighted in students' reflection.

Secondly, students recognized specific features of the course that are beneficial to them. A considerable majority of the students felt that the course is different from previous courses to a large extent. The differences between the course and previous courses in terms of teaching approach and teaching mode are well articulated in the qualitative data. In terms of content, some previous speaking courses are not rich. For resources, it was revealed that the textbook was the main resource in the previous course. For this course, in addition to the textbook knowledge, the course provided rich knowledge from other resources, which makes students feel more interested and motivated. Students believe that their horizons expanded, knowledge of culture and communication was enriched through interesting and helpful activities. In addition, students think that the course provided them with more opportunities to do several different types of new activities, and they have more access to different resources. In addition, students evaluated the course as multifaceted, that is, it does not only focus on

one aspect, but covers many aspects. Students indicated that their learning improved gradually as the course unfolded. Students also felt that their abilities improved through learning the course, both language ability and other abilities such as team working skills.

In addition, from the perspective of class participation and learning engagement, learners were not satisfied in the previous courses, this emerged in the pre-course interviews. However, reflecting on the course, the participants said that although it cannot be ascertained that everyone is working hard, most of the students are willing to take part in the course, especially for the sessions that involve teamwork. Students highlighted that they actively engage in the activities and think continuously in the learning process, and this helped them to learn a lot from the course. As the course went on, students were evolving in the learning process. They worked more effectively in groups, engaged more actively and better in learning activities. They described their presentations as more successful and excellent. Talking about this, a student said:

> *I feel that the course is more special than all other courses, and I feel that I have learned a lot, not only the knowledge acquired in the classroom but also team spirit and the ability to be responsible* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 2).

Most of the students consider that they were well-motivated and willing to learn. A few students also stated that the course can always give them surprises in every activity. A significant majority of students think that the course is systematic, has an all-around style, and they also found the connection between the other courses they learned and the relationship of different language skills. In addition, it was observed that students were more prepared and willing to spend time after class in learning culture and communication from various resources such as the library and internet and reflect on their learning.

The classroom climate is also satisfying, especially in the second stage, and this is also created by the teacher and the whole class, and in turn, could further benefit students.

Students enhanced the relationship with their classmates through interacting in activities, and this further changed their attitudes and beliefs toward communication. Some students expressed that it is enjoyable to witness their classmates' improvement in skills and own improvement in cognitive development.

Besides improvement in the classroom climate, students considered that the course is interesting and their learning interest was also improved during the course. In addition, their interest in learning English and interest in learning culture was also improved. Being more interested in learning, some students said that they spent more time searching and learning after class. It can be found that increasing interest is important for the smooth conduct of the course, especially at the early stage. From the data, some reasons for this can be found. The first reason is that the new approach is more flexible and more related to daily life, which is one major difference from the previous courses. Furthermore, the relationship between the teacher and the students is friendly and flexible, and students did not feel pressured from the relationship. Another reason is the selection and organization of the course content, which is rich and new for students. Compared with the previous speaking courses, a student commented that:

> *The previous speaking course was really boring, the teacher taught according to the textbook and let us do some listening tasks, but this time is different, a lot of videos, dialogue activities, we really do a lot of tasks. We have done a lot in this semester, and there are many activities too, such as street interview* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 23).

The new teaching process which includes noticing, comparing, and reflecting, promoted students' learning interest. The process encourages students to think about different perspectives and try to solve different problems. Prompting review is necessary for the learning process, especially for intercultural learning as it requires students to review and

reflect after class. Students were interested in the sessions that enabled them to explore culture and communication with others by themselves.

In addition to the above differences, for the teaching approach, the usual routine for previous courses mainly relied on teacher-centered approaches where students just listened passively and take notes. In addition, it was revealed that students with weak language ability found it difficult to understand in previous courses and some students were not willing to speak. The new course provided them with more opportunities to search, explore, and think by themselves, and this helped to improve their learning attitudes and confidence. Students found the new approach more interactive, interesting and impressive, and they are more willing to take part in the activities. Commenting on the multifaceted feature of the course, an interviewee said:

Different aspects are learned, not just limited to one aspect, and each aspect involved some knowledge and opportunities for continued improvement. As a whole, getting better and better (interview after the third-stage learning, student 6).

Students provided valuable feedback towards the new approach, some students said the teaching approach surprised them, and they described the approach as very logical, creative, and flexible. Another positive influence is the new approach motivates students, and they tend to study actively, a big change from the previous passive learning mode. The change in approach impressed students, and many students mentioned this during interviews, especially the change of instruction and provision of opportunities for teamwork. From students' feedback, another helpful feature of the course is that learning is integrated with their life, and students also use what they have learned from the course in real-life communication, which is also good for future intercultural interactions.

For the arrangement and design of the course, students felt that the new course provides them with opportunities for both group presentations and individual work, which integrates

the advantages of different types of tasks. From the perspective of long-term learning, the course also plays an important role in encouraging learners to actively participate in classroom learning and they also learn more after class.

4.5.2 Evaluation of activities

The new approach moved a step forward beyond the textbook and guided students to explore more communication skills and knowledge. It is interesting that students think it may need much courage for other teachers to decide to adopt this type of activity as it requires much effort, both for the teacher and the students. Through the learning process, students learned to integrate various capabilities to cope with practical interaction issues. In groups, students also learned from the presentations and performance of their classmates, which is also beneficial for them. They commented that they feel happy to see their group members making progress, and the whole group working hard together. In addition, it is satisfying for the teacher to find that students applied what they learned in the course in communication, such as being more confident when communicating with foreign teachers.

As most of the activities are released and organized by the teacher, then directed, discussed, and conducted by the students themselves, this step-by-step process which consists of students' learning activities, is effective and fresh. For example, the mini negotiation activity, participants commented that the activities provided them with opportunities to fully communicate and interact in the classroom, and this kind of experience is helpful in their development. Students felt that the activities are not simply an activity, it is more like a practical opportunity to learn knowledge and practice, and they believe the activities allow room for both individual thinking and group cooperation.

Students provided a list of several activities they consider useful for various reasons. Some students were happy to do the kind of activity that could improve their relatively weak aspect of a specific ability or involve multiple dimensions of abilities. They also reflected

actively on their own learning and current status while some students prefer activities that they could experience by themselves, such as mini negotiation. Other activities including role playing of good and bad conversations, debate during class break, conversation skills activity, were also mentioned.

It can be found that those intercultural learning activities can benefit students, and such activities have some attractive features. The first one is to combine interest with benefit. Students are interested in role-play, but the arrangement and organization of the activity is important for its success. For example, a more compact time arrangement may motivate students. Another feature involves providing a sense of direct experience. Taking the mini negotiation activity for example, students were willing to take part in the activity, and they were impressed by the 'on-the-spot' experience, such as what to do during the negotiation process and how to cope with complicated issues. Talking about the direct experience from participating in activities, a student said:

> *One point is expressing myself, using my own personal experience to get some benefits. Because only when you say it and do it by yourself, you can know what is good and what is bad. The other point is learning from other students. We can observe what is good and what is not good* (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

In addition, adding some creative features to the activity can also benefit the class. Some students love the activity of storytelling as they can develop the ability of creativity and make up a whole story with their group members, and this also enhances their team spirit. Students posited that they benefitted from the activities that could activate their minds and integrate many issues within one activity. Furthermore, students also learned a lot from the thoughts and presentations of their classmates, which is also beneficial for their learning. As one student said:

Very practical, and there are a lot of new ideas when students are discussing and presenting, which have also helped me (interview after the third-stage learning, student 18).

Team cooperation in preparing, adjusting and presenting also assisted students' learning. Instead of working out a plan alone, some students enjoyed the sense of working together to work out a solution collaboratively. As one participant commented:

The feeling is like brainstorming, we have to express our thoughts as perfect as possible, so it forced me to open my mind. That process is very helpful to me (interview after the third-stage learning, student 10).

In summary, students evaluated the activities of the course as interesting, attractive, and rich in content. Firstly, students felt that the activities connected their life with language and culture learning, as one student said:

English and life are connected, and this can be related to the life around you. They are much more familiar, which will not give us a sense of being strange. I think it is good to be close to life, for example, the activity of observing other people's body language (interview after the third-stage learning, student 20).

In addition, students learned more effectively through own experience by participating in activities. As one student puts it, "I have the same feeling that was brought to me by each activity, that is, the feeling on the spot, which is very helpful to me at that time". This kind of direct and authentic learning experience enables students to know their strengths and weaknesses clearly, and they can also learn from others during the group activities. Thirdly, the activities encourage the development of a combination of abilities and motivate students to take various issues into consideration when dealing with problems. This improvement in cognitive ability and other abilities is helpful for students' future career. Some students

expressed their appreciation of group work as it provided valuable experience of cooperating with classmates in preparing, discussing, and presenting their plans that integrate everyone's ideas and efforts. Through participating in various intercultural learning activities, students were encouraged to explore culture and intercultural communication and reflected on own beliefs, attitudes, and awareness.

4.5.3 Evaluation of resources

After learning the whole course, students evaluated the resources as interesting, practical, and impressive, and they especially learned much from the resources that provided cases of various types of communications. Firstly, students consider the resources, especially, some videos to be interesting, and they are willing to watch them and learn. As one student puts it, "I feel that the short videos are very interesting, especially the video regarding two girls impressed me. I feel it's very fun and I am willing to watch it".

Besides, the students felt that the content of the videos closely connected with the activities and tasks, and it is easier for them to understand them. As a student said:

Maybe the content of the video is close to the activity we just completed, or the content of the assignment, we already knew something, so it is not so strange (interview after the third-stage learning, student 20).

Thirdly, students also learned much from examples that illustrate both proper and improper reactions and language, and they are clearer about how to behave in interactions. Talking about the usefulness of the examples, a student said:

For example, when telling us how to do something more effectively, both positive examples and counterexamples are provided, and we can understand exactly what we can avoid and what to take. I think it's quite good to present counterexamples (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

In addition, students stated that the videos combine many aspects of knowledge and skills, and students can learn more comprehensively, including after class as what others did. They also felt that the resources were direct and contextualized, making them easier to understand. As one student stated:

Connecting with the context makes it easier for contemporary college students like us to accept, because we may not really comprehend if the materials are full of theory, but if they are more contextual, they are more acceptable (interview after the third-stage learning, student 5).

The videos convey theory in a more systemic way and stick to the point, which is helpful for students to learn culture and intercultural communication. Although some students reflected that some videos are difficult to understand due to the speed and some difficult words, most of the participating students considered that the difficulties were not a big challenge for them. After receiving such feedback at the early stage of the intervention, the teacher enhanced teaching by providing a brief summary, with detailed explanation of the key points of the resources.

In addition to the cultural knowledge and intercultural skills, learners are also more confident about their language ability, an aspect that is discussed in the next section.

4.5.4 Students' improvements in language ability

In the survey, participants were also asked to evaluate their language abilities by self-assessing their proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), and the results of pre- and post-survey were also compared to find any changes. Table 11 shows the results of the paired-sample t-test of the treatment group students' improvement of language ability.

Table 11. Results of the paired-sample t-test of self-evaluated language ability of the

treatment group before and after the intervention

	Pretest		Posttest			
Domain	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Overall ability	2.76	.56	2.91	.52	-1.09	.28
Listening	2.55	.75	2.58	.66	-.19	.85
Speaking	2.48	.94	3.03	.73	-2.95	.01*
Reading	2.85	.71	2.88	.70	-.18	.86
Writing	2.58	.75	3.00	.71	-2.44	.02*

* $p < .05$.

Results of the paired-samples *t*-test show that the mean score of speaking ability differs before intervention ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.94$) and after intervention ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 0.73$) at the .05 level of significance ($t = -2.95$, $p < .05$, 95% CI for mean difference -0.92 to -0.17). In addition, the mean score of writing ability differs before intervention ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.75$) and after intervention ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.71$) at the .05 level of significance. As displayed in Table 4-9, there are statistically significant differences, at the .05 significance level, in pretest to posttest scores for speaking and writing ability, but not for listening and reading. It can be found that students' self-evaluation of the language abilities was increased through learning the course, and the mean differences of speaking ($p=0.006$) and writing ($p=0.021$) are significant. The course has a positive influence on students' self-evaluated output abilities.

From the analysis of qualitative data, three themes are revealed considering learners' improvements in language ability. Firstly, after the whole intervention, students are more willing to speak English, and they are more confident in communication through practicing in activities. As one student said:

I feel that I dare to speak. I think it is a big improvement as I was particularly unwilling

to speak English in the past. Through some activities that require expression in English,

I am slowly willing to speak English (interview after the third-stage learning, student 20).

Another student also reflected, "relatively, I can speak English fluently and express my thoughts with body language". Students made improvements in some specific areas of speaking including more capable to communicate smoothly and naturally, more accurate in pronunciation and intonation, and more precisely and properly in selecting words and phrases. One student shared her experience:

My language expression is a bit smoother, and the word choice is more accurate, because some words have different meanings, and I can use them more appropriately (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

In addition, students actively reflected on own problems and weaknesses in language learning during the course. Talking about this issue, an interviewee said:

Of course, we have to face up to our own problems and learn from others' good skills or good aspects with humility, we can't feel that we have no problem. I must find my own problem and be modest (interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

The teaching sessions evoked students to actively reflect on own language learning. For example, some students felt that the activities of video analysis provided them with opportunities to learn from the examples of lectures of celebrities in different situations, and they also learn useful skills about how to apply body language to assist their speaking. Students also made improvement in changing attitudes and beliefs of language, communication, and language learning. This was well articulated by one student who said:

We should take the initiative to learn because language is really helpful, it can not only help you to live better in the future but also help you to gain more insights (interview after the third-stage learning, student 7).

Another student echoed the same view:

I feel that I become more positive in learning English. In fact, exploring learning, or exploring the cultural charm of another country, the more in-depth you explore, the more interesting information you will find. It's actually quite interesting to learn (interview after the third-stage learning, student 22).

Besides richer expressions and vocabulary learned from the resources and activities, students developed a more flexible mind in communication. They go a step forward beyond simply finishing the assigned tasks to think more about whether their work is good enough.

4.5.5 Students' suggestions

After the whole intervention, although students are satisfied with the course, both the content and the form, they came up with some useful suggestions that could also help with improving the course. The first suggestion is about adding more activities that provide opportunities for simulation and role-playing within different contexts. Some students are interested in role-play or activities within certain situations. They feel that although these kinds of activities are time-consuming, they can learn from them. However, they need more guidance because they do not have much experience in such activities, especially when more teamwork is required.

The students also suggested that the teacher should arrange more activities that involve the whole class. For instance, students stated that they are interested in the debate activity, but they want to ensure that more students can take part in the activity. It is interesting that they want to do activities with the teacher or have an opportunity to compete with the teacher because they think it will be a valuable experience. In addition, some students want to try to teach themselves, and experience preparing a lesson, or try to organize an activity. As one student said:

Let students try to teach, but not to teach according to the textbook; instead, let students

organize an activity and integrate the course content, and it's interesting for the students

(interview after the third-stage learning, student 11).

Another suggestion is some students are willing to know more about specific cultural topics such as information about study abroad. Some of the topics were covered in later stages based on the suggestions collected during the intervention. Some students also expressed that it will be good to have more opportunities to practice the skills they learned in the course, for example, practicing some specific areas such as pronunciation.

Regarding resources, some students wanted to have access to rich resources such as more movies and short videos. They suggested that it will be better if there are more videos with subtitles. On the other hand, some students need more Chinese explanation during activities to better understand the meaning. This was expressed by a student who stated that:

When students speak English while doing activities, sometimes I don't understand. I

think they can explain the general meaning in Chinese a little bit, and then I can better

understand what they say (interview after the third-stage learning, student 7).

Some students also suggested to add some changes in group formation in order to ensure more opportunities to interact with other groups. In light of suggestions like this, in stage two and three, the teacher made some changes to group formation and encouraged students to interact with their classmates. For group cooperation, a student suggested that groups can be formed later after they became clearer about their advantages and outstanding features. As the student said:

I have a suggestion that when grouping, the teacher should familiarize with us a little bit

first as opposed to dividing us into groups during the initial stage. The teacher can

familiarize with the general attributes of each student, and then allow us to form groups

on our own. I think this is interesting (interview after the third-stage learning, student 10).

In addition to suggestions about the course, some students also suggested that it can be helpful for their learning if the college could organize some English clubs, stating that this could be a useful channel for them. This view was well articulated by a student who said:

I think it would be better if we have a club in college or somewhere. For example, if there is an English club, I think this will be a good channel for learning (interview after the third-stage learning, student 21).

For the gentle suggestions, there are some potential reasons. Most of the participants were not satisfied with previous speaking courses, which can be found from data collected before the intervention. Compared with previous courses, the course applied a new approach with rich content and various learning activities, students had new learning experiences that different from previous speaking courses to a large extent. Another reason for this is the relatively short period of the course, students may come up with more suggestions if the course can be extended to a whole semester or a year. Although the participating students are satisfied with the current arrangement of the course, their suggestions are important for improving the intercultural speaking course in some aspects, and upgrading intercultural language courses for promoting the development of students' intercultural competence.

Chapter summary

Based on data generated from survey, interviews, and reflective journals, this study aims to shed light on the development of college students' intercultural competence through intercultural language teaching. For the first research question, compared with pre-survey results, the intercultural competence of the treatment group did not improve significantly, but the dimension of knowledge improved significantly. The detailed analysis of qualitative data

reveals that students' intercultural competence improved in different aspects of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. For the second research question related to helpful teaching sessions, it was found that students benefit much from activities with ethnographic features such as street interview and observation, and they benefited from the activities such as the mini negotiation which provided them with authentic intercultural learning experience. Students also appreciate exams with new forms that are beneficial for cultivating multiple capabilities. For the last research question, the research also provides evidence of the developmental process of students' intercultural competence in the four dimensions. In addition, the participating students' self-evaluated language ability also changed positively after the intervention. Students gave a high evaluation of the course, and they considered the learning process to be fruitful and impressive.

The study shows that there are numerous actions that can be taken by language teachers to facilitate the development of intercultural competence of college students. This research provides pedagogical approaches and designs that are helpful for future teaching practice in facilitating the development of students' intercultural competence. In addition, this research provides more valuable details of different stages of teaching practice that could benefit students in their intercultural competence development process. For language teachers, in addition to be fully familiar with and having experience in using the various methods that can be employed to cultivate learners' intercultural competence, teachers also need to act as agents of transformation in the developmental process of students' intercultural competence. In addition, teachers need to be fully prepared. More discussion on how language education can be used to facilitate the development of intercultural competence is provided in Chapter five Discussion.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter focuses on the discussion of findings, and this is done in light of the consulted literature. The study sought to investigate the question about how the intercultural speaking course guided by intercultural language teaching approach promotes the development of intercultural competence in college English major contexts. The discussion chapter is divided into four sections: section 5.1 discusses the findings related to students' learning experience, needs, and confusions before the course; section 5.2 explores the findings of the first research question concerning the development of students' intercultural competence through the course; section 5.3 further discusses the teaching in the classroom, and proposes useful teaching approaches and teaching strategies for building intercultural competence; section 5.4 discusses the findings related to the third research question which focuses on the developmental process of students' intercultural competence; lastly but not least, the facilitating role of the college is discussed in section 5.5.

5.1 Students' learning situation, needs and confusions prior to the course

Regarding the previous learning experience of the participants before the course, the results indicate that a considerable majority of the participants had a general but not thorough understanding of culture. Most of them were not confident in communicating with people from other cultural backgrounds. It also emerged that most of the students were not satisfied with previous language courses, and they expressed willingness to learn more knowledge about culture and skills for practical use. With the findings, discussions for utilizing students' needs and coping with their confusions can be offered.

5.1.1 The need to utilize students' learning preferences and to provide flexible intercultural learning environments

This study sought to provide information on how much and how students who participated in the study developed intercultural competence. To make the necessary

adjustments and to facilitate effective intervention, students' self-evaluated intercultural competence, perceived language proficiency, and culture learning experiences were explored before the course.

Several issues emerged regarding participating students' previous learning experience. The first aspect is learners' preference on language and culture learning. The results from participating students' pre-course interview suggested that most of the students prefer learning from entertainment activities such as movies and TV series. In terms of students' learning habits, the study found that personal interest was the motivation for students' after-class learning, and most of the participants relied heavily on subtitles. Use of apps was also popular among students. These results are consistent with those from previous studies, for example, Erdemir (2019) found that learners tend to participate in more visually appealing materials where real life was presented and the target culture could be reflected more clearly. In addition, the participants in Erdemir's study also preferred real tools made up of auditory and visual components instead of tools for either auditory or visual stimuli. They also believed that visual types of media are more helpful in promoting their understanding of the target culture (Erdemir, 2019). In this study, the participating students expressed a preference for visual materials. Such material has advantages which include being vivid, attractive, informative, easy to remember, and are closely connected with students' habits of accessing information. Besides this, the materials are also useful in promoting high motivation and an enjoyable learning environment (Bajrami & Ismaili, 2016). The results provide some support for the potential of visual media integration into textbooks, they can be used as learning resources and should be integrated with other intercultural learning activities. Video clips can be potential learning materials for promoting students' understanding of the social and cultural realities embedded in selected clips, however, teachers need to critically consider the appropriateness, length, and how best to present and utilize the materials (Susilo, Yang, & Qi,

2019).

Regarding students' learning experience in previous language courses, it was found that teaching was highly dependent on the content from textbooks, and the classroom activities were limited in forms due to some reasons such as fixed room arrangement. Students expressed the desire of learning more about culture and cultural differences besides learning from the textbook. These results resonate with recent studies (e.g., Ahmed, 2017) that indicate the influential role of textbooks in language classrooms, especially in traditional language classrooms. In this study, students' learning experience in previous language courses highly depend on the textbook and teachers' instruction, and this brought some problems such as more emphasis on language skills and negligence of culture learning. This finding has important implications for developing and selecting proper textbooks for intercultural teaching. For language learners, in addition to the presence of a teacher who has cultural knowledge, the availability of a textbook is also important. Teaching materials are a very important part of the teaching and learning process. Textbooks may not meet all the needs of the learners, but their existence as a teaching resource is still of paramount importance (Wahyuni et al., 2019). Since textbooks are often considered as the main source of teaching materials, they are important for integrating cultural elements in teaching (Wahyuni et al., 2019). Language textbooks should provide cultural content so that foreign language learners can properly reach the authentic language, which involves some cultural elements commonly used in the communication of the target language (Cakir, 2010).

The presentation of culturally relevant content in textbooks should be an important component of the teaching practice given that language and culture cannot be separated in language classrooms (Wahyuni et al., 2019). It is important to select relevant contents for language and culture teaching. Teachers can present different cultural products and perspectives in language teaching to promote the development of students' intercultural

competence. As explained by Kramsch (2013), when a big c culture (e.g., history) is acquired, it usually leads to the pride and loyalty of English learners, as it adds meaning to the national identity of native English speakers. Once small c culture is learned, it can help interlocutors avoid misunderstandings in interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The study of the cultural components of language has always had a strong interest in the sociolinguistic appropriateness of the language used in everyday life, and students who are exposed to the small c culture can interact in a more appropriate way in cross-cultural environments (Labtic & Teo, 2019). As Bu (2019) pointed out, intercultural language teaching is not simply teaching students cultural knowledge in the classroom but also involves emphasizing empathy of culture and deep understanding of the concept of universal culture. This helps to cultivate students' understanding of the unique and universal features of culture. Intercultural teaching should keep pace with the times, integrate various teaching methods, encourage peer review, and provide timely and effectively feedback.

In addition to inadequate resources, lack of opportunities to communicate with people from other cultures is another barrier that constrain the development of participating students' intercultural competence. It is a pity that the course does not provide learners with the opportunity to interact with foreigners in the classroom; yet, it is designed by providing authentic communication resources for learners to organize discussions for the promotion of effective learning. During the course, the teacher also encouraged students to engage in intercultural interactions on and off campus. It has been found in the literature that classroom assignments can promote intercultural contacts (Kimmel & Volet, 2012), and the importance of intercultural contexts in an informal setting is also recognized (Lai & Smith, 2018; Lin & Shen, 2019). The findings of the study conducted by Lin and Shen (2019) reveal that intercultural exposure in informal settings such as interest groups or roommates has a greater impact on students' cultural intelligence compared to formal contacts. They also believe that

it is reasonable to assume that unpredictable and occasional cross-cultural experiences in colleges can complement the university's internationalization projects. Apart from its positive role in the development of intercultural competence, the findings of the study by Aubrey and Philpott (2019) also support intercultural exposure as an important factor for motivating students to learn English. In a formal setting, students communicate with each other for academic purposes, often under discipline and guidance, such as class discussions, group work, and workshops. However, intercultural engagement takes place informally, the purpose and environment are more random and dynamic. This includes activities such as going out with friends, joining interest clubs, attending extracurricular activities, and interacting on social media. Therefore, in addition to formal classroom instruction; it is also important to encourage students to participate in intercultural communication, to interact with people from different cultures, and to increase intercultural contacts.

5.1.2 Providing practical guidance and meeting students' expectations

Prior to the course, it was found that most of the students were eager to make improvements but some of them were not clear about the ways that are appropriate for them, and others lacked interest in the teaching content. The findings were supported by Song and Xiao (2018) who also found that for many Chinese students, unclear learning objectives are the key to students' doubts about learning and careers. There are many business English majors whose learning objectives are not clear. The purpose of business English students can be divided into the pursuit of personal development, internal interests, external environmental impact, the pursuit of academic achievements and determination to go abroad. If the purpose of learning is one of the above purposes, then they can improve their intercultural communication ability to a certain extent. However, if students are not aware of their learning objectives, their learning process will be seriously affected (Song & Xiao, 2018).

Besides sharing confusions, the participating students also expressed their willingness to

learn more about culture. Although some researchers (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; McKay, 2003) stated that when students learn the target language culture in the classroom, they are more likely to compare their own culture with the target culture, which may cause dissatisfaction (Wahyuni et al., 2019). The current study found that most of the participating students are willing to learn more about culture in language courses including how to interact with interlocutors from other cultures. Some participants expressed their willingness to learn more about culture in language courses, expressing that they wanted to learn for practical use. This is also in line with findings from previous research concerning Chinese college students' expectations of language courses (e.g., Gan, Humphreys, & Hamp-Lyons, 2004). The study by Lai et al. (2012) also indicates that Chinese students attach importance to gaining a job and accessing a future career in choosing programs. The researcher suggests that language teachers should provide more cultural knowledge when teaching English and cultivate students' practical ability to interact with foreigners. For teaching activities and methods, authentic materials and various interactive activities can be applied to develop the ability to interact in intercultural situations, and a livelier, communication-oriented teaching style can also enhance classroom teaching.

Overall, the analysis of qualitative data on students' previous language and culture learning found that, most of the students expressed the desire to learn more about culture and improve language abilities. The findings not only provide the foundation of the three-month course, but also gives valuable insights to anyone interested in finding out how students view their current situation in their language and culture learning. Fathoming the students' perceptions and their opinions are critical for teacher trainers who design materials for teacher education programs, and pre-service and in-service language teachers can reflect on how to promote intercultural learning in the classroom. Language teachers can also find insights and practical examples of students' learning situations, confusions and expectations.

Teachers could provide learners with more opportunities to notice, accept, and respect cultural diversities. In addition, colleges could also work hard to encourage a more flexible environment to positively influence students' intercultural learning. The following section discusses findings from the first research question which focus on the development of students' intercultural competence through the course.

5.2 The development of students' intercultural competence through the course

Regarding the first research question about the development of students' intercultural competence with learning of the course; overall, from the quantitative perspective, students in the treatment group evaluated higher in the dimension of knowledge in a significant level compared with the control group. However, the differences on the dimension of attitude, skill, and awareness are not significant between the two groups. From the qualitative perspective, students in the treatment group also made progress in the development of intercultural competence. The participating students reflected that they are more open, curious, and interested in culture and intercultural interactions. For the dimension of knowledge, students acquired knowledge of culture and intercultural communication, especially the social processes of other cultures. In addition, students also recognized that they develop useful verbal and non-verbal devices for effective and appropriate intercultural communication. They are also more aware of the influence of their own cultural position on communication, and they are better equipped to evaluate and analyze intercultural events in a critical manner. The issues that emerged from the findings related to the development of students' intercultural competence in the course are discussed in this section.

5.2.1 Attitude

A comparative analysis of the findings from the pre-survey and the post-survey reveal a decrease in the mean scores of the dimension of attitude after the course. From these results, it can be interpreted that students have higher expectations for own attitudes. Besides, with

more knowledge and concepts of intercultural communication learned, participating students may reevaluate and redefine own attitudes. There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by the students in this study and those described in the research by Engle and Engle (2004). The researchers studied the intercultural experience of American college students studying abroad and observed that many participants initially had great confidence in their intercultural abilities because they had only experienced superficial cultural differences. Once learners begin to experience 'real' cultural differences, some students will be surprised and may react negatively to these differences. As posited by Mellizo (2017), it is essential to conduct more research to explore how learners who experience hypothetical acceptance react when they are exposed to more diverse cultures.

The qualitative findings derived from the course support the claim that the intercultural speaking course positively facilitate the development of learners' intercultural competence, illustrating ample evidence of changes. It appears that students are more willing to accept generally accepted cultural practices and behaviors. As far as the more specific conventions they are going to participate in, their responses mostly focus on topics mentioned in the course such as cultural conflicts. Besides respect, viewing things from the perspective of other people is also necessary, both for daily communication and intercultural interactions, especially for business contexts. Within the dimension of attitudes, a representative area that students reflected made progress is that students tend to interpret and analyze issues from other perspectives and move forward towards neutrality. This improvement in attitude agrees with Wang and Kulich's (2015) findings which showed that many students became more open to other worldviews, and through the implementation of the project, they learned to put themselves into consideration for others. This improvement is mainly developed through activities such as negotiation simulation and case analysis. These activities are mainly conducted in the second and third stage of the course, which focus on comparison and

reflection in intercultural learning. Students' improvement in holding more neutral perspectives is valuable for their future career. In relation to this, Li (2019) pointed out that in the process of intercultural communication, the two sides must not only adhere to their own culture, but also understand and respect each other's culture. In addition, the other's culture should be properly empathized, and students should improve their intercultural communication ability while exercising language skills, and ensure feasibility and effectiveness in intercultural communication.

Besides being more neutral, another point worth discussing concerning development of the attitude dimension is that students reflected and reviewed their own attitudes and beliefs inspired by learning more about cultures, and they also reflected that they are more active in learning and engage in deep learning. The results of this research confirm that in addition to the educational benefits gained from the content of intercultural courses, learners also experienced more personal changes. This is in line with the broader literature on the impact of universities, which shows that university experience has tremendous potential for changes at both the intellectual and personal levels (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1996). It also reinforces the position of supporters, who say that intercultural courses provide a platform for personal development.

Another form of personal growth that is considered as the by-product of intercultural education is the improvement of self-confidence. The current study found an improvement in self-confidence among students completing the intercultural speaking course, and they reflected that they are more confident in using English in communication and coping with different issues in intercultural interactions. There are similarities between the development of attitudes identified in this study and those described by Neto (2006). On one hand, students are more familiar with cultural products and become more acceptable to cultural differences; on the other hand, students are willing to try and experience other cultures by themselves and

become more confident when faced with potential problems such as culture shock. These results are encouraging because they show that courses focusing on intercultural language learning can have a positive influence on learners' attitudes toward multicultural ideology, cultural diversity, and self-values.

5.2.2 Knowledge

Firstly, it is worthwhile discussing the significant changes in the dimension of knowledge. Although students' intercultural competence did not undergo significant changes, it was found that participation in the three-stage learning demonstrated tangible gains in the dimension of knowledge. In particular, students gained more knowledge about the lifestyle, value system, etiquette, taboos, social conventions, intercultural concepts, causes of misunderstandings, and effective strategies for intercultural communication. This implies that, their intercultural knowledge can change considerably through a well-designed intercultural language course.

From the detailed findings regarding the dimension of knowledge, participating students reflected that they acquired enriched knowledge of social distinctions and value systems, and this matches with results observed in earlier studies (e.g., Schenker, 2012). Many students reflected that they benefitted significantly from the discussions of proverbs. Proverbs have a function of reflecting social values and beliefs (Mieder, 2004). Studying the proverbs of a particular society can be the beginning of exploring its cultural values and beliefs (Hirotani & Fujii, 2019). Through the comparison of English and Chinese proverbs and idioms, students did not only learn a lot of useful expressions, but also explored the value system and cultural markers contained in the proverbs. This is also consistent with the study by Hirotani and Fujii (2019) which assert that learners benefit from improving their intercultural awareness and gain a sense of accomplishment. Clear teaching is essential to enhance the knowledge of students. Supplementary materials written in English will be useful and may even be

necessary for effective learning of pragmatic expressions (Hirotani & Fujii, 2019).

Besides enriched knowledge of social distinctions and value systems, another area that students recognized made progress is knowledge of intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts, as well as strategies for effective intercultural communication. These results are in line with the findings in a study by Busse and Krause (2015) which indicate that students believe that they have learned useful skills and strategies to improve communication with people of different cultures. In the process of language learning, one of the important factors that can help students speed up the process of language learning is culture. Language and culture complement each other, and language is the carrier of culture. Due to the potential differences between home culture and other cultures, if people understand and express ideas in their culture in a way that they think, language errors may be made which have a negative impact on their social work. Therefore, it is essential for students to develop strategies to cope with misunderstandings and potential conflicts in intercultural communication. For instance, in business English communication, as pointed out by Song and Xiao (2018), students need to communicate with people from different countries and if students do not understand the culture of these countries, they may have cultural conflicts, which ultimately lead to the failure of business plans.

Therefore, if the objective of language and culture courses includes the development of intercultural knowledge, the course should consider including themes related to social groups and meaningful intercultural issues, allowing learners to bridge the gap between different cultural systems and to be exposed to cultural differences. These suggestions reflect previous proposals, including more discussions of sociocultural differences (Talburt & Stewart, 1999) and instructive cultural comparisons (Koike & Lacorte, 2014).

5.2.3 Skills

Within the three-month learning, the dimension of attitudes, skills, and awareness were

not statistically significant; however, besides the overall intercultural competence, the dimension of skills and awareness did show mean scores trending upwards. This may suggest that the development of students' intercultural competence is aided by the intercultural language course and students actively pursuing intercultural learning. The new intercultural learning experience may require more follow-up support to facilitate growth in these areas toward more significant changes. Should programs wish to engage with these dimensions, courses that are connected to those specific competencies are necessary.

For the dimension of skills, the qualitative data also show that the students reported gains in various practical communicative skills and advanced in interactions. The participating students appreciated the acquisition of verbal and non-verbal skills, including how to cultivate active listening, eye contact and thoughtful questioning, among others; and these findings echo those from previous studies (e.g., Wang & Kulich, 2015). Many students stated that it was their first-time to learn and apply those devices, and they realized the importance of language skills and non-verbal devices, which they may have taken for granted in the past. More importantly, many students said that these experiences encouraged them to be more confident and flexible in interactions. It appears that the course provides a powerful intercultural learning opportunity for many students. A better understanding of how language presents culture and the role of knowledge and skills in communication enables students to better cope with challenges in intercultural communication (Root & Ngampornchai, 2013). In addition, given that many participants reported the use of gestures and other non-verbal devices as a new skill that they learned, information on non-verbal communication would be of great benefit to them.

In addition to the acquisition of useful non-verbal skills based on the learned knowledge, especially the knowledge of cultural differences, students reflected that they developed skills of combining the learned knowledge and skills to assist interpretation and expression in

interactions. The results of the questionnaire also echo the findings from qualitative data under this theme. For item 3 'able to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds with English' in the dimension of skills, the difference is significant. This also reflects that students are more confident in communicating with people from other cultures. This study supports evidence from previous observations (e.g., Eisenchlas & Trevaskes, 2007). In the case study of Eisenchlas and Trevaskes (2007), a project was developed to enhance interactions between learners from China and Australia in an informal face-to-face situation. The results of the current study are in agreement with Eisenchlas and Trevaskes's (2007) findings which showed that an important aspect of skill development is students' reflections on the cultural differences and human variables (such as age and religion) which play an important role in modifying expected behaviors in interactions.

In terms of skills development, the program sought to give students experience in interacting with new knowledge and skills, and also the opportunity to reflect on cultural practices that they often take for granted. This is a first step to improve skills of intercultural communication (Dlaska, 2000). Therefore, the focus of the course was to develop interpretation and understanding instead of enculturation. In this course, the teacher did not encourage learners to imitate behaviors that are viewed as appropriate in the target culture, as is usually done in intercultural courses, in this course, students are expected to use new knowledge and skills to interact in a flexible way and develop own skills and strategies for effective communication. On one hand, students admit the existence of cultural differences and the potential of dysfunctions in communication. Yet, on the other hand, they see the possibility of handling them in a proper manner.

5.2.4 Awareness

For the dimension of awareness, an important finding is that participating students indicated that they are more capable of interpreting values and evaluating intercultural events

using multiple perspectives. This finding corroborates the ideas of Mahoney and Schamber (2004), who suggested that this shift involves a perceptual change from focusing on basic similarities and underestimating differences to identifying and evaluating differences in intercultural situations. Culture plays an essential role in the development of a person's way of thinking and behavior, and there are great differences in the way people think in different cultural systems. For instance, for some cultural systems, the way of thinking focuses on the rigor of logic. Differences between Chinese and other ways of thinking can cause problems for students when engaging in business communication activities. Therefore, to improve intercultural competence, students also need to change the way of thinking in business communication (Song & Xiao, 2018). Under the guidance of teachers, cultivating intercultural competence through intercultural language learning is a gradual process. During the course, students continuously reflect their own learning as well as previous beliefs of culture and language. Reflecting on their own culture learning and intercultural communication is important for the intercultural competence development process. Instructional programs that foster intercultural awareness should create an environment that encourages reflection and a desire for growth (Mahoney & Schamber, 2004).

Besides becoming more aware of intercultural issues through analyzing intercultural events, students also felt that they became more aware of the relationship between language and culture and the complexity of culture and intercultural communication, and they also reflected on their previous beliefs. This finding was also reported by Wang and Kulich (2015). In accordance with the literature, the present study has demonstrated that participants experienced moments of transformation or repositioning, to different degrees. Most of them talked about changes in their views toward language and culture, and a few actually used their new learning experiences to open the door for further reflection. Understanding the complex nature of culture may enable learners to develop cognitive complexity, which is

considered to be a factor that affects intercultural competence (Arasaratnam, 2013).

Concerning the positive amount of qualitative data, there may have three main reasons, firstly, students' intercultural competence was not satisfying, and they considered themselves made improvements through learning the course; secondly, students were not satisfied with previous speaking courses, and the new course met their expectations to a large extent; in addition, the period of the course is relatively short to reveal deeper changes in students' intercultural competence development. From students' feedback, learners' enthusiasm mainly comes from their strong desire to improve and the rich content of the course. In order to achieve effective intercultural communication, students are keen to carry out various learning activities to support this goal. Their responses are highly connected with the course content. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to adapt the course content and teaching approaches to the actual situation of learners to enhance their potential for the development of intercultural competence. The next section discusses helpful teaching methods and activities that emerged from the course.

5.3 Effective teaching methods and activities emerging from the course

The study findings indicate that most of the students are willing to learn about culture and communication, and they are interested in exploring different cultures. In addition, it emerged that the intercultural speaking course offers a great deal of information about cultures and intercultural communication. The distinctive features of the course provide students with opportunities to explore, analyze and reflect. Regarding the second research about the teaching methods and activities in the intercultural speaking course, the effects of a range of methods and activities are recognized by the participating students in facilitating the development of their intercultural competence. For example, comparing and analyzing intercultural events have a positive role in promoting students' intercultural awareness. Students prefer experiential activities that provide them with authentic, direct, and interactive

learning experience, such as the street interview and the mini negotiation activities. Providing rich resources that contain authentic examples, encouraging students to take part in various forms of communication, actively reflecting on learning experience, are valuable experiences that emerged from the researcher's action teaching. In this section, specific activities and methods are discussed in more detail to offer insight into intercultural teaching and learning.

5.3.1 Integrating and applying different activities

From the findings related to the second research question concerning useful teaching methods and activities that could effectively enhance different aspects of students' intercultural competence, more details are discussed further in this section. These findings may help us to understand intercultural teaching and learning.

Collaborative activities

Most of the students' opinions in reflective journals and interviews are loaded with positive attitudes towards collaborative activities, and the analysis demonstrate that learners recognized the facilitating role of group activities, especially in developing attitudes such as openness and curiosity that constitute achievements in this research experience. In the course, group activities are introduced in a gradual manner until students who are inexperienced with this form of learning become more accustomed. Group work helps to achieve the goal of building intercultural competence, especially in terms of attitudes. Although individualism and competition are often seen as important features for student-student interactions in an educational setting, previous research has revealed that collaborative interaction models have some positive effects (Zea et al., 2009).

The outcome of a collaborative activity or project is not only one jointly produced text, it is collective cognition (Lazarević, 2017). When using cooperative interaction methods, students appear to be more effective in interpersonal communication because of cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1988). In addition, through cooperation, students seem to develop their

interactive skills better than students from a competitive or individualistic environment and have a more positive expectation of cooperating with others. It has also been noted that collaborative learning helps students feel confident and helps them remember better as well as generate more ideas (Macaro, 1997). Results of this study also confirm that those features of collaborative activities, including highlighting cooperation and enhancing confidence, benefited students' development of intercultural competence, especially the positive attitudes toward otherness and intercultural learning. Thanks to collaborative and interactive practices in the educational environment, students can learn to work together, regardless of their cultural background, can acquire and develop different skills, and cultivate a respectful and tolerant attitude.

Guided comparison with resources

In the second stage of the course, teaching contents and activities were arranged to help students to gain insight into cultural differences and intercultural communication by providing more opportunities for comparison and contrasting with different types of resources. Analyses of qualitative data suggests that the method influenced students' articulated representations of value systems and knowledge about processes of social interactions. Contrasting is an effective method to reveal cultural connotations. Bennett (1997) believes that language teachers can be more conscious in encouraging learners to experience reality using a 'culture-contrast' method, which is a similar method applied in the present study. In the current study, students were guided to conduct multi-level intercultural comparisons through the following stages: providing resources that illustrate cultural topics and stimulate students to notice any differences or similarities; informing students about how their native culture is related to communication and social action; comparing native language-culture patterns to other language-culture; reflecting achievement not just in terms of language but also in the intercultural achievements of culturally appropriate social judgment

and decision making.

The comparison activities applied in this research were helpful for students in two aspects, that is, the coding of students' own culture and the decoding of other cultures. Through coding and decoding, students explored deeply into cultural products, perspectives, and practice. In addition to native culture and the target culture, it is also beneficial for students to explore other cultures. Syahri (2018) suggested that English teachers make some adjustments to enrich students with other non-native language cultures. Teachers can provide learners with some texts or other types of materials illustrating the basic values, beliefs, thinking patterns and social behaviors of other non-native speakers. Not only the native culture and the target culture can be compared, but also the cultures of different nations, such as Japanese or Arabic cultures. To develop the students' intercultural competence, language teachers should be resourceful. They must have adequate understandings of the native culture and target cultures.

In summary, in view of the emergence of non-native English varieties and the fact that English are widely used in interactions among people from non-English speaking countries, classroom materials and activities should also include the non-native English cultures (Syahri, 2018). The explicit comparisons include different cultures, that is, the culture of the students, the native culture and the culture of other non-native speakers. Having knowledgeable English teachers, explicit comparison can be conducted legibly. The materials used in the classroom can be obtained from multiple sources, and the teachers and learners can also have easy access to instant online materials. What they must do is to create a platform where the learners feel the need to compare cultures and feel free to explore, compare, and discuss.

Experiential activities

Learners reported in the interviews and journals that teaching sessions such as TS6 'body

language' and TS8 'negotiate and mediate in cultural interactions' helped them to develop useful skills of interaction. In particular, in TS8, the activity of mini negotiation received a positive reflection of its role in promoting skill acquisition. In the teaching sessions, experiential activities that encourage students to apply and explore the new knowledge in interactions were applied to foster students' skill development. This type of intercultural language learning activity has the advantage of providing students with opportunities to apply and enhance the knowledge and skills they learned. Using a web-based platform, Jiang, Wang, and Tschudi (2014) designed a series of online interactive tasks such as free discussion forums to teach culture to Chinese and American business students, and the result demonstrated that the web-based teaching platform was helpful in reducing cultural barriers and bridging the cultural gap. This resonates with the present study findings which indicate that through completion of culturally focused experiential tasks, learners deepen mutual understanding and improve interpretation and expression.

Compared with more analytical activities, this form of activity also emphasizes authentic learning experience. The study by Busse and Krause (2016) shows that from the perspective of motivation, teaching that focuses on emotional experience seems more beneficial. The subsequent analysis of qualitative data further showed that experiential activities triggered stronger emotional reactions and led to additional reflection that are closely connected with intercultural learning (Busse & Krause, 2016).

The experiential method is an ideal way to learn intercultural communication, because culture is experienced (Valentine & Cheney, 2001). Culture includes the beliefs, emotions, values, behaviors and interpretations of a group of people. As Valentine and Cheney (2001) stated, living in the culture may be the best way to fully understand the issues and complexities of intercultural interactions. Although this learning method is not always feasible for some learners, experiential learning activities can replicate these experiences to a

certain extent. Experiential activities encourage learners to step forward from the 'front-stage' understanding of intercultural communication (such as etiquette knowledge), to the 'back-stage' interpretation of underlying cultural perspectives, so as to explain why specific practices and conventions are meaningful (Varner, 2001).

Case analysis combined with active reflection

Apart from experiential activities, utilizing different types of case analysis and encouraging active reflection can also facilitate the development of intercultural competence. In this study, the activity of analyzing critical incidents was introduced to promote the learning of the knowledge of cultural differences, other cultures' socializing processes and the knowledge of intercultural misunderstandings and related causes. Students indicated that they learned to interpret intercultural conflicts through this kind of activity, and this type of intercultural learning activity highlights reflection and critical thinking. The findings support the work of Harvey, McCormick and Vanden (2019) who posit that, such workshops and discussions provide participants with a safe and productive way to think about communication and misunderstandings and to connect with learning. They draw attention to the fact that learning is a process of forming relationships and behaviors that highlights the performance of people and the rest of the world by focusing on processes and building relationships, instead of products, outcomes, and personal perspectives. McConachy (2018) also believes that in today's era, being able to reflect and clarify one's position on the cultural representation of textbooks is an important part of cultivating language learners' intercultural interpretive abilities. These abilities do not only apply to specific cultural representations in language learning but are also widely used in practices and discourses in various intercultural interactions (McConachy, 2018). The positive feedback from the participating students further supports the idea of Luck and Swartz (2019) who consider that in today's world, the possibilities of graduates working in a multicultural team are increasing. One of the biggest

challenge teachers face is how to present diversity in the classroom. Through these activities, students can understand the role and pitfalls of global business communication and how to overcome cultural barriers while developing necessary intercultural capabilities to succeed in a global business environment.

Evaluating and presenting intercultural events is a form of case analysis activity that benefitted learners in this study. In the third stage of the course, the session on analysis of domestic and international events promotes the acquisition of the skills of interpreting and evaluating and critical cultural awareness. As Cooper (2019) suggested, our students should have a forum to openly talk about the intercultural issues and challenges they face in a complex society. In the same vein, Ghosh and Galczynski (2014) state that "teachers must help all students define their own worlds, speak their languages, and reflect on their experiences" (p. 67). Such discussions are necessary as our communities are becoming more diverse and, "true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking" (Freire, 2000, p. 92). This type of activity is beneficial as it presents students with the chance to develop higher levels of thinking skills that are essential for developing intercultural competence.

Critically thinking about other cultures can also improve critical analysis of one's own culture, as well as an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of one's own culture (Jensen, 2019). McConachy (2018) suggests that helping learners to participate in critically engaging with the cultural components of language textbooks is a useful and important activity in the classroom. In the same vein, Canale (2016) argues that this critical approach is important given that textbooks often build overly simplistic cultural and cultural differences. Through evaluation and analysis of domestic and international events, students developed more solid skills for comprehension and delivery of their own views on intercultural issues to others. This deliberate approach can be included in intercultural courses that foster critical thinking

and empathy (Børhaug & Weyringer, 2019).

Besides integrating beneficial classroom teaching methods and activities in promoting intercultural learning, proposed by Allen (2019) and some other researchers (e.g., Bickley, Rossiter, & Abbott, 2014; Levinas, 2012), effective teaching methods must include at least limited use of Chinese translations. In this study, for some challenging activities such as debate, learners were allowed to use the first language to a certain extent for assisting their explanation of complicated views. Translation can promote communication and understanding in the classroom (Bickley, Rossiter, & Abbott, 2014). It also helps to establish psychological connections and formal logic that accommodates cultural differences (Levinas, 2012). The use of native language also contributes to students' conceptual understanding (Simsek, 2010) and may provide more precise assessments (Bao & Du, 2015).

From the above discussions, it can be found that different types and forms of intercultural language learning activities have different roles in promoting students' different dimensions of intercultural competence. The instructional design for the cultivation of intercultural competence can integrate language learning, field trips, and projects around thematic units. This can provide a framework for teachers and students that includes components that identify different perspectives of participants and promote intercultural learning (Dimas, 2019). The various activities conducted in the three stages of the course provided students with opportunities to explore culture and communication. As suggested by Fan (2019), due to the limitations of the intercultural learning environment, there are fewer opportunities and ways for vocational college students to access intercultural knowledge. However, teachers can use a variety of teaching methods and activities to strengthen vocational college students' learning and guide them to explore Chinese and other cultures.

5.3.2 Providing rich resources

Apart from improving teaching methods, resources are another important aspect.

Through the analysis of a set of English textbooks, Huang (2019) found that the themes, texts and tasks of the textbooks in the perspective of authenticity, diversity, and cultural representation are decontextualized. The textbooks emphasize the grammatical function of English, rather than the communicative function of the language. Mofidi (2019) suggested that shortcomings such as the lack of descriptions of cultural identity in textbooks can be overcome by teachers or by providing materials that contain various cultural themes. By providing resources that complement the textbooks, students will have access to rich and authentic cultural information.

By applying rich resources, students' knowledge acquisition of culture could be promoted. Although the participating students majored in business English, in the course, they were encouraged to appreciate the charm of different cultures. For example, by providing short videos that present a brief history of changes in food culture or asking them to analyze the distinctive features of beautiful TV commercials. The feedback from students suggested that this did not only increase students' learning interest but also promoted knowledge acquisition. Wang (2019) suggested that culturally sensitive texts can be used to discuss how certain mainstream cultural assumptions are embedded or reflected in the use of certain words, phrases and even grammatical structures. Bobunova, Notina, and Bykova (2019) also proposed that teaching English for specific purposes through art education is an effective way to promote the development of students' language, professional and cultural abilities, and helps to improve the motivation for language learning. Incorporating artistic materials into professional language teaching can also change the shortcomings of lack of aesthetic components in the development of foreign language courses. Texts are a useful kind of resource for discussion of cultural topics and short comment texts received positive feedback when applied in discussing intercultural conflicts in the course. Besides texts and short videos, films also have great potential in promoting critical reflections and influencing

the changes of attitudes among college students. In the same time, they provide students with access to different perspectives and issues that they may not discover directly. According to Lee (2019), the use of film can make the language learning process more interesting and provides important opportunities to expand learners' perceptions of social issues.

5.3.3 The teacher's role in facilitating intercultural learning

The results of this study underscore the important role of the teacher in creating an environment that is sufficiently supportive, safe comfortable, and inspiring for the development of students' intercultural competence. Students reflected that their learning is free of pressure and they are keen to compete with the teachers in some of the activities. The course enabled them to create a non-threatening 'cultural space' that encourages students to explore and reflect on the cultural values of themselves and others. In addition, students indicated that the topics of the course are closely connected with their life. As a result, their participation in different activities inspired them to explore intercultural communication and learn many practical knowledge and skills that are useful for effective communication. Students' authentic learning experience highly depend on the course content and different tasks. Guided by the principles of intercultural language teaching, especially, the principle of active construction and making connection, the activities of the course constitute a safe and inspiring platform that encourage students to explore, experience and to reflect. There are similarities between the course design in this study and those described by Göbel and Helmke (2010) which show that when intercultural content is accurately defined, teachers can find it easier to put into practice and guide students to discuss their opinions and intercultural experience. It seems possible for students to refer to own experiences and views when reflecting on specific situations (Sercu, 2002).

Apart from creating a safe and stimulating learning platform, it is also important for teachers to facilitate learners' intercultural learning process. Intercultural language teaching

and learning is not simply a method of including language learning and culture learning. As argued by Liddicoat et al. (2003), it is an overall orientation that influences decisions from developing a course to ongoing renewal, and from curriculum design to carrying out classroom tasks. The new teaching process, from noticing, comparing, to reflecting, encourages students to think about different perspectives and try to solve different problems. In the current study, compared with previous speaking courses, students consider the intercultural speaking course more interactive, interesting and impressive. Consequently, they were more willing to take part in the activities. Their feedback reveals the important role of the teacher in facilitating the learning process. Instead of acting solely as knowledge provider or presenter, one of the issues that emerged from the current study is that in intercultural language teaching, it is essential for teachers to design activities that are suitable for learners' cultural backgrounds and learning objectives. They should organize and adjust their practice according to the prevailing situation on site and encourage students to reflect on their intercultural learning experience continuously.

Cultivating students' intercultural competence in a language course is a great challenge, and this is a top requirement for teachers. This view reinforces Zhang's (2019) observation that teachers should not only master professional knowledge, but also certain linguistics, literature and other subject knowledge. In addition, vocational education teachers face the challenge of presenting the practical application of language and cultivating learners' intercultural competence. Another task for educational practitioners is to ensure that intercultural learning experience is integrated into the curriculum in a natural manner (Mellizo, 2017). As Zhou (2019) pointed out, in vocational English teaching, learners need to be encouraged to actively use non-verbal communication skills and linguistic communication skills, and to develop a full grasp of Chinese and foreign cultural differences through various forms and methods. Similarly, as reflected by the students in the current study, a supportive

environment and continuous facilitation can have positive influence on the intercultural learning process.

The third research question focuses on the developmental process of intercultural competence. Hence, the next section provides a further discussion of the developmental process of students' intercultural competence in the course.

5.4 The developmental process of intercultural competence in the course

As indicated earlier, this section provides a discussion of the answer to the third research question which focuses on the developmental process of students' intercultural competence through participation in the course. In the three-month intercultural language learning, starting with noticing with input, students became more curious about culture and learned to cope with certain forms of communication such as small talks. As the course progressed, through comparison and analysis, students learned more devices of communication, and implemented these in various activities. In the third stage of the course, learners were encouraged to actively reflect on own attitudes, knowledge and skills, and learned to critically evaluate and analyze intercultural issues. As some students reflected, although they met some difficulties, the whole learning was fruitful and impressive. In this section, specific features of the developmental process of students' intercultural competence identified from students' reflections are discussed.

5.4.1 Attitude

The current study found that in the early stage of the course, students emphasized respect, and they started to change some beliefs and learn culture for various aims besides exams. Gradually, they became more eager to explore otherness and tended to appreciate the charm of culture. After completing the whole course, they reflected that they became more curious and more understandable of cultural differences. Some students also expressed the willingness to experience culture by themselves.

Some features of students' developmental process of attitudes are in line with Bennett's (2004) intercultural sensitivity development process model, especially the stage of ethnorelativism. He introduced the term ethnorelativism to mean "the opposite of ethnocentrism – the experience of one's own beliefs and behaviors is just one organization of reality among many viable possibilities" (Bennett, 2004, p. 62). During the first stage of ethnorelative, acceptance, cultural differences concerning behavior and values are accepted and respected, instead of viewed as threatening (Olson & Kroeger, 2001). Meanwhile, the integration stage has the features of being able to move "in and out of different cultural worldviews" (Bennett, 2004, p. 72) and willing to "analyze and evaluate situations from one or more chosen cultural perspectives" (Olson & Kroeger, 2001, p. 123). Consistent with the literature, this research found that participants also reflected that they became more understandable of cultural differences and capable to view experiences from other perspectives, and these changes of attitudes mainly happened in the later stage of the course.

As pointed by Vogt (2006), it is difficult to trace the development of positive attitudes, especially from the willingness to discover other points of view to the willingness to question one's own beliefs or assumptions, which includes reflections on one's own values. To retrace the development of attitudes, students' weekly based reflective journals provide valuable information, since they have a retrospective feature and reproduce the individual stages to some extent. They represent a personalized approach because they reflect the changing views of students in the intercultural learning process. As retrospective tools, reflective journals help to describe and evaluate the learning outcomes at a certain point after a session.

Describing a developmental process requires clarifying an ultimate objective of intercultural training (Bennett, 2017). According to the general consensus among intercultural practitioners at that time, the goal of training was to enable people to communicate more effectively under different cultural backgrounds. Deardorff (2006) and Jackson (2011) further

assert that the acquisition of intercultural competence is a continuous process and it is important to provide students with the opportunity to reflect and evaluate their intercultural capabilities.

5.4.2 Knowledge

The developmental process of students' intercultural competence is highly connected with the content of the course. From the acquisition of basic knowledge of culture and communication to the exploration of deeper layers of culture and intercultural communication, students' knowledge acquisition improved with learning the course. At the end of the course, students reflected that they gain much knowledge of culture through exploring different cultural issues and they also valued the acquisition of knowledge.

It was found that in the early stage, students' knowledge acquisition may be biased or stereotyped. This corroborates the ideas of King and Magolda (2005), who suggested that in the initial level, knowledge claims can be easily judged as right or wrong, which is an obstacle to learning or accepting different opinions. With more sessions conducted, in the intermediate phase, the view on knowledge shifted from believing knowledge is certain to more recognition of uncertainty. This shift is important as it shows students' improvement in their ability to take different factors into consideration in interactions. The shift is accompanied by a decrease in reliance on authority's knowledge claims and an increase in reliance on the individual knowledge claims. Increasing uncertainty has made people more open to different opinions, and the personal handling of knowledge claims has produced the idea that different people can hold various opinions. The mature stage of the enrichment of knowledge is marked by the shift to knowledge as integrated and context-based. The ability to integrate knowledge learned in different sessions and multiple views developed in multiple environments leads to the application of multiple cultural frameworks and devices in interactions.

Hunter, White, and Godbey (2006) use the term 'global capabilities', which they define as "having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others" (p. 270). They consider this as the basis for determining knowledge, skills and experience to achieve global competence. According to Hunter, White, and Godbey (2006), it is important for students to keenly understand own cultural norms and explore cultural, social and linguistic diversity. The later phase of knowledge development involves acquiring knowledge of globalization, that is, understanding the increasingly integrated knowledge of different societies, cultures and economies around the world. This can be achieved using both formal and informal ways. Through completion of the different phases of knowledge acquisition, individuals can make great progress in becoming globally competent.

5.4.3 Skills

The developmental process of skills is also closely connected with the course arrangement. Beginning with simple situations such as small talk, students explored different types of interactions and reflected on own behaviors. Gradually, more skills and strategies were learned. After completing the course, students reflected that they are more capable to apply verbal and non-verbal devices in interactions, being more flexible in communication and looking deeper into domestic and international events.

A remarkable feature of students' skill development, especially in the later stage, is that students tend to consider cultural differences and become more flexible and sensitive in communication. According to King and Magolda (2005), a mature level of intrapersonal development is characterized by self-awareness. Regarding this self-awareness, various aspects of identity are integrated to provide a culturally sensitive and deliberate foundation for decision-making in intercultural communication. This is characterized by the ability to participate in intercultural communication that are interdependent, mutually respectful and mutually negotiated. They tend to enhance own identity and interact as an active member of

society rather than experiencing interactions such as degrading own cultural values.

Besides verbal and non-verbal skills for effective communication, students also evolved in skills of analyzing and evaluating, especially in the third stage of learning. Unlike the discussion on knowledge and awareness, a direct description of a student's advanced thinking skills is not easy. In a study by Toyoda (2016), it was shown that initially, participants tend to use basic forms of reasoning that prove superficial assessment or limited thinking, however, with the accumulation of knowledge and experience, students begin to use a variety of high-level thinking skills in tasks. There are similarities between the developmental process in this study and those described by Toyoda (2016). The shift in skills of interpreting and relating from reporting facts to critical evaluation and reflection demonstrates how students begin to look at issues critically and analytically. As pointed out by Laal and Laal (2012), when learners are socially and emotionally challenged, thought exchanges could promote critical thinking.

5.4.4 Awareness

Regarding the dimension of awareness, in the beginning of the course, although students reflected that they are more aware of the existence of different values and the influence on communication, their reflection was not systematic and specific. With more discussions and reflections, students moved forward to broader angles and tend to be more systematic and objective in analyzing intercultural events. They also reflected that they become more aware of the relationship of language and culture and the complexity of intercultural communication.

A representative feature of the development of students' awareness, especially in the later stages, is the shift from previously fixed beliefs toward culture to view from multiple perspectives and a recognition of the complexity of culture and intercultural communication. This finding resonates with Baker's (2011) observation that the mature stage of intercultural

awareness moves beyond treating cultures as bounded entities, and recognizes that cultural references and practices in intercultural interactions may have nothing to do with a particular culture. That is, people also have a certain understanding of the emergent feature of intercultural interactions through English as a global lingua franca (Baker, 2011). This requires the participation of many other factors such as the knowledge of cultural references and the competence of mediating and negotiating between different cultural references and communication modes.

The development of intercultural competence is a continuous process. This research only reveals learners' developmental process during the three-month intercultural learning. Deardorff (2006) believes that as time goes by, learners continue to learn, change, evolve, and the learning process will never end. In the process of becoming interculturally competent, learners sometimes move ahead and sometimes return to more in-depth research on previously encountered concepts (Moeller & Nugent, 2014). Language teachers can actively promote the development of students' intercultural competence by designing activities that promote the development of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. Colleges can also play a part in facilitating the process. The next section provides some suggestions for this to happen.

5.5 The facilitating role of colleges

Cultivating students' intercultural competence in English teaching can enable students to better cope with the development trend of economic globalization and promote interactions between different regions and countries. As Zeng (2019) pointed out, for a long time, traditional English teaching has paid more attention to the delivery of language knowledge while ignoring the cultivation of intercultural competence. However, the survey by Qian and Garner (2019) reveals that the focus of Chinese literature has gradually shifted from cultural contrast, as evidenced by comparing specific cultural facts and their lexical connotations.

Therefore, colleges can enable students to gain knowledge and emotional support in language learning. They can not only improve the cultural adaptability, confidence and interest in English learning, but also adopt effective strategies to foster learners' awareness and improve communication skills. This helps to cultivate a high level of intercultural communication talents for the society.

The first aspect that comes from the initial stage of teaching is the need to encourage students to take part in intercultural interactions, both in classrooms and outside the classrooms. As Vafina, Srukova and Galimzyanova (2018) posited, in addition to providing lectures on important aspects of intercultural competence for students, extracurricular work has received great attention. It is also essential to encourage students to actively participate in intercultural exchanges, such as receiving foreign guests, holding joint activities and participating in other cultural events (e.g., ceremonies and competitions). There is no doubt that meetings, dialogues and personal experience with other cultural representatives can make a valuable contribution to the successful mastery of intercultural skills. In this research, in the teaching session of small talk, students were encouraged to conduct street interviews, and through the process of preparing and conducting interviews, they gained massive experience in communicating with strangers and explored verbal and non-verbal devices for effective communication. Giving students the opportunity to relate their ideas to the many interpretations of the world in which they live is the foundation of intercultural learning (Reid, 2019).

In addition, as suggested by Lin and Shen (2019), universities can also adapt some strategies to foster an integrated environment that encourages active intercultural engagement. Colleges can create opportunities for meeting and interacting with students from different cultures. Specifically, colleges could provide students with more opportunities to participate in various university activities, including academic courses, study abroad

programs, service-learning projects, and club activities. In addition, if necessary, bringing in a team that provides a neutral perspective can be beneficial to keep the group grounded in the established mission (Furco & Lockhart, 2018). Outside the campus, it is also necessary to involve local communities such as NGOs in promoting intercultural interactions. In designing programs that aim to facilitate students' intercultural learning, it is also essential to take students' needs and expectations into consideration.

Colleges and universities can play an influential role in cultivating global talents by providing more opportunities for intercultural communication and intercultural learning. As Wang et al. (2019) proposed, institutions of higher education should actively respond to the documentary spirit of organizing college students for internships in major international organizations. Universities can provide students with a good atmosphere for learning, increase publicity and develop suitable training programs. At present, colleges and universities do not only need to promote professional learning, but also need to cultivate talents with strong intercultural capabilities (Wang et al., 2019). Therefore, regarding the current lack of development of intercultural competence among the Chinese college students, providing relevant cultural courses or promoting various forms of overseas programs to better support these students to improve intercultural competence is necessary. As posited by Lee, Rosen, and McWhirter (2014), culturally competent school counselors and psychologists can assist teachers to teach in a culturally responsive manner. Intercultural education can only play a limited role in cultivating learners' intercultural competence, if educational institutions continue to rely solely on the willingness of motivated teachers and counselors.

Cultivating students' intercultural competence cannot be achieved through only one course such as speaking course or intercultural communication course. Harper (2019) argues that teaching intercultural competence in an EFL environment requires a shared responsibility to ensure the development of intercultural competence across the different courses of the

curriculum. The researcher also recommends including multiple cultures in intercultural teaching. By exploring cultural similarities and differences, by interpreting and appreciating various cultures, and by making comparisons and contrasting, students can use their language classroom learning experience as a way to achieve a truly global mindset.

To sum up, in terms of building the participating students' intercultural competence, the intercultural speaking course has a positive role in facilitating the process. The course provides opportunities for students to explore, analyze, and reflect on culture and intercultural communication with the teacher's appropriate guidance in organizing discussion and encouraging reflection. Intercultural education is not just about intercultural communication between individuals as pointed out by some researchers (e.g., Gorski, 2008; Halualani, 2011). As exploration of issues at the national level, for instance, immigration policies cannot be ignored. Learners must be able to recognize the potential to change the world and gain the tools as well as the motivation to act and to intervene (Sobre, 2017). If intercultural education is carried out consciously and systematically, learners can make great progress in the development of intercultural abilities. In particular, English teaching and learning is no longer considered to primarily promote the development of language skills. Instead, language is used to understand and respect other countries and their cultures, and to show the world the life, culture and values of Chinese (Qian & Garner, 2019).

Chapter summary

This chapter further discussed the related theme of 'cultivating students' intercultural competence in language courses'. Teachers can promote students' intercultural learning through different ways including the provision of rich resources, designing of activities that can increase students' authentic intercultural learning experience, encouraging students to actively engage in various forms of intercultural interactions, increasing interest in various types of classroom activities, and making use of learners' home culture and first language.

Cultivating students' intercultural competence cannot be achieved through a single course or reliance on a teacher's commitment only. Universities can also make an effort to provide more intercultural learning programs and to create a conducive environment to facilitate the development of learners' intercultural competence.

Chapter 6: Implications and recommendations

This chapter presents the implications of the study and suggestions for further research. As indicated in the literature review chapter, Byram's (1997) ICC model was considered to be particularly relevant to this research as it goes beyond the narrow concept of interpersonal communication and proposes specific objectives. The data from the study provide insight into how the components of the model could be conceptualized, interpreted, and promoted, particularly in the context of an intercultural language course. The chapter is divided into two sections: the implications of the study findings (6.1) and recommendations for future research (6.2). The following section focuses on implications of the study findings, and these are discussed from the perspectives of resources designers, language teachers, colleges, and students, respectively.

6.1 Implications of the study findings

This action research showed that the intercultural language course could provide participants with opportunities to develop intercultural competence. The course played a significant role in facilitating the development of students' positive attitudes towards intercultural communication and cultural diversity, the acquisition of intercultural communication knowledge and skills, and the ability to critically evaluate and analyze intercultural issues. In addition, students acknowledge that the course helped them to improve their understanding of various English language uses, enhance business-related abilities, and learned to cooperate. The study found that with proper design, planning and management, students can benefit from a variety of intercultural learning activities. The researcher also proposed that well-designed intercultural teaching, which integrates critical reflection and empirical learning with free learning dynamic, can foster characteristics and abilities that are necessary for effective intercultural communication. The results could shed light on policy and practice in culture teaching and learning such as the incorporation of proper methods and

activities. The study, therefore, has educational implications for teaching resources designers, language teachers, colleges, and students.

6.1.1 Implications for teaching resources designers

It emerged from this study that students can benefit from rich resources that illustrate cultural topics and issues of intercultural communication. The resources designers of formal English teaching and learning could facilitate the development of students' intercultural competence through selecting appropriate resources and developing proper curricula activities. In view of the prominent position of textbooks in foreign language education (Sercu, 2006), resources designers of language teaching could provide rich learning materials that contain authentic examples of communication and intercultural issues to support effective teaching and learning.

To achieve the above goals, several suggestions are made. Firstly, the results from this research support the idea that authentic resources and materials closely connected with learners' daily life can be beneficial. Therefore, textbooks that contain sections that reflect real-life communication are suggested to be produced for use in language classrooms. For example, when introducing non-verbal behavior, short videos or related TV series can be accompanied by a textbook to better illustrate the knowledge and skills. Furthermore, a corpus of clips can be developed or selected from various resources which involve categories of intercultural themes. This study's findings indicate that various types of resources can be integrated to provide students with different interpretations of a specific topic. Taking intercultural events as an example, the clips which express the theme of intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts could be put together, and then these could be further divided into different sub-themes that could facilitate instruction in the classroom. The resources can be further updated according to the needs of students and course's teaching objectives. Moreover, as proposed by Karabinar and Guler (2013), textbooks should be

organized in a way that facilitates students to benefit equally from both the cultural components and the linguistic knowledge. They should provide students with equal opportunities to compare their own culture with other cultures and promote intercultural understanding. Therefore, it is recommended that intercultural perspectives should be encouraged when selecting language teaching materials.

It is worth noting that textbooks occupy an important position in foreign language teaching, therefore, it is vitally important to design materials that suit the needs of specific subjects. Resources designers can make use of the internet to provide authentic and multimodal resources. Using technology to engage in professional activities helps teachers integrate technology into practice. Resource designers can also help to build a professional community, in which teachers can develop their skills, evaluate and select appropriate materials to achieve their teaching objectives, and communicate with other teachers who have similar interests and pedagogic considerations (Sahin & Thompson, 2007). Given that technology support teachers' professional needs (Judson, 2006), it is important to understand teachers' needs in the use of technology and their perceptions on the position of technology in language teaching (Li, 2014).

6.1.2 Implications for language teachers

At the practical level, in general, results from this research can be useful for language teachers. They reveal the benefits of the intercultural language course from different perspectives, that is, in terms of language teaching and improving the development of students' intercultural competence. Moreover, language teachers can inspire students by raising their awareness of personal attributes such as team spirit and improving their entrepreneurial skills. In addition, teachers can use this experience to improve cultural and language learning skills and mentality.

The findings from this research have significant implications for the understanding of

how language teachers could facilitate the development of learners' intercultural competence through the provision of meaningful and authentic intercultural learning experience. In order to promote students' intercultural competence, firstly, teachers are encouraged to set clear teaching objectives (i.e., the development of specific aspects of a certain dimension of intercultural competence) for each teaching session. This can not only guide the design of an intercultural language course but also make the intercultural teaching activities more targeted and focused. Based on the objectives, teachers are suggested to identify any potential opportunities in the curriculum to involve students in authentic and meaningful intercultural language learning. In order to achieve these goals, teachers should be encouraged to adapt various teaching approaches and provide rich resources.

In the literature produced in the Chinese context, a common view of teachers is that in addition to assisting learners to learn, teachers should also tell learners what to do and what to think about. For instance, You (2009) suggested that teachers choose movies to help learners to understand western culture from a 'correct' perspective and cultivate a 'correct' philosophy of life. This view is incompatible with the cultivation of intercultural competence which requires learners to de-center and interpret events and issues from multiple angles without having to make judgements on correctness. The intercultural language teaching approach emphasizes that language teachers should act as a facilitator to provide help and guidance, rather than telling learners the 'correct' way of thinking (Yang & Fleming, 2013). Instead of placing emphasis on correctness, teachers could provide guidance and encourage students to take part in various intercultural learning activities and explore different cultural products and issues of intercultural communication.

In addition to the teaching activities and methods for beneficial intercultural learning, this research suggests that learners themselves can be treated as a source of materials. This is because they This is because they carry out complicated meaning-making activities that

provide rich and dynamic meanings that can be used for teaching and learning. For instance, in the activity of presenting an individual that could represent the core value of culture, students reflected that in addition to learning from preparing and presenting, they also learned much for others' views. Besides, the rich content provided by students can also act as meaningful materials for classroom discussions. Bearing the objective of developing intercultural competence in mind, this view resonates with the observation made by Yang and Fleming (2013) that students' highly diverse, culturally specific and individualized meanings, explanations and reflections can also be used as teaching materials. For instance, through group discussion and presentation, learners' different views towards an intercultural event or a specific cultural topic can be further discussed and reflected.

Educators should also be open to other teaching concepts and goals based on different contexts and needs, and be willing to adapt to other methods of task design or project development as much as possible. The results of this study show that it is important to consider students' actual situations and needs, and classroom activities should be tailor-made for students. For example, when selecting effective ways of presenting information about students' home culture, Wedell and Malderez (2013) suggest that teachers can introduce content in a more vivid and communicative manner to inspire learners' personal experiences and promote their understanding in different situations. Sharing personal interests and interacting with others is more important than memorizing cultural knowledge in textbooks in helping learners to interpret their own culture (Liu & Fang, 2017). In the same vein, as proposed by O'Dowd (2011), educators need to be able to cooperate with their colleagues and to find compromises suitable for students in task design.

As a college English teacher, the researcher knows that many teachers are willing to implement culture teaching in language classrooms. For example, Han (2010) found that Chinese teachers expressed their willingness to use cultural awareness as a means of

stimulating learners' interests, and they believed that cultivating learners' intercultural competence was a reasonable goal. However, she also found that teachers' conceptualization of culture is limited to daily life in the UK and the USA. In addition, a low level of classroom engagement with interculturality was also revealed, and language teachers lacked detailed and clear curriculum guidance. The current study also showed that preparing and designing an intercultural language course requires effort and skills, which pose great challenges for language teachers. Therefore, teacher training plans that focus on how to integrate intercultural learning into the language teaching curriculum and how to effectively promote the development of students' intercultural competence is highly recommended. For language educators, as Byram and Wagner (2018) proposed, they need to critically review their professional identity, their perceptions on language and culture, and their views on language education and its objectives. In addition, the researcher also proposes that an intercultural language teacher should be a life-long learner who focuses on the continuous professional development of intercultural competence.

6.1.3 Implications for colleges

In Chinese universities, students have access to some intercultural courses. Regarding the purpose, objectives, curriculum and teaching methods of English teaching, there is a view that is worth noting and convincing, that is, English teaching should cultivate learners' intercultural competence to meet the needs of the internationalization of higher education in China, and ultimately serves the national interests of China's further opening up (Shu, 2013). These English courses help to cultivate learners' intercultural competence, but intercultural education should be more based on activities, rather than pure traditional classroom teaching (Huang, 2017). The intercultural language teaching syllabus designed for this research can offer useful information for the cultivation of intercultural competence, especially the intercultural teaching objectives and classroom activities design. It is hoped that the findings

from this research will inspire more educators to participate in this process. As pointed out by Gu (2016), the official policies in the national curriculum guidelines play an important role in the development of teachers' implicit theory. Therefore, new guidelines should be formulated to clearly reflect the intercultural perspective of language teaching (Gu, 2016). The different aspects of intercultural language teaching approach advocated by this study are also worthy of examining using multidisciplinary research projects. Although this research was conducted in a vocational college, the researcher believes that some of the basic aspects recommended in intercultural language teaching can be more widely used. As Gómez and Fernando (2012) pointed out, applying proper methods with accompanying guidelines and tasks to help students explore and interpret culture in a more accessible way is a viable approach.

In the context of internationalizing higher education in China, intercultural teaching and learning started receiving increased attention (Zhao & Coombs, 2012). The results of this study also revealed that students need more opportunities for intercultural learning and intercultural communication. To support the development of a comfortable and encouraging environment, universities can provide opportunities for community building that promotes cooperation and self-development. Apart from intercultural language courses, there may also be other opportunities to further advance these activities and make them more effective through institutional engagement (Smith, 2015). In addition, programs can be revised to recognize the changing working environment of learners' future career, with the goal of promoting transferable skills (McKinley et al., 2019).

Besides programs designed for students, specific strategies for training qualified intercultural teachers should become an important focus of teacher training. In order to draw the teachers' attention more to culture teaching and improve their related knowledge regarding the development of intercultural competence, teacher training courses or professional development activities should also be provided, including necessary culture

teaching methods and skills. These courses or activities can lead English teachers to realize the importance of facilitating the development of intercultural competence (Karabinar & Guler, 2013). Teachers need better guidance and support to promote the development of students' intercultural competence in classrooms (Göbel & Helmke, 2010). In addition, the findings on students' previous learning experience highlighted in this research support the idea that textbooks play an important role in foreign language education. This view is echoed by Sercu (2006) who consider that teacher training should also provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on the quality of teaching materials in order to promote the development of students' intercultural competence and help teachers to adjust existing teaching materials.

Phipps (2013) raises an important observation that language pedagogy often leaves the colorful combination of discovery and learning behind and understands language learning as a technical and instrumental experience that is out of touch with the 'outside world'. Yet, intercultural language teaching and learning is more than a technical and instrumental experience. On the contrary, we may find interesting and rich experiences between failure and success, which as Woitsch (2012) argues, is exactly what is needed to re-understand intercultural language learning.

6.1.4 Implications for students

As for the vocational college English-major students, this study indicates that it is beneficial for them to take an active part in intercultural learning. Since intercultural communication tasks are more connected with students' intercultural social relationships and involve conventions of intercultural interactions, language teachers should incorporate these tasks into language classrooms. Learners need to engage in different social roles and speech events by participating in different intercultural learning activities, such as role play and classroom discussions (Hu, 2014).

In addition, the results from this study support the idea that it is beneficial for learners to keep thinking and reflecting on own intercultural learning. It can not only benefit the development of students' intercultural competence but also promote the development of other abilities such as working effectively in a team. It is suggested that students should make sense of classroom activities and materials through actively participating and reflecting. Besides formal classroom learning, they could also seek opportunities for intercultural interactions, for example, joining interest clubs. In addition, for intercultural learning, not only textbooks but TV series and news can be useful learning materials. Students can also learn the skills of seeking out and analyzing cultural points from the materials. Consequently, they can apply these knowledge and skills in intercultural communication.

Linguistic ability alone is not enough to make learners who learn a language competent for that language (Krasner, 1999). Language learners must know what forms are culturally suitable for addressing people, expressing gratitude, making requests, and agreeing to or opposing someone. In addition, learners should be aware that behaviors and intonation patterns that are appropriate in their own culture may be interpreted differently by people from other cultures. They must understand that, to communicate successfully, the use of language must be linked to other culturally appropriate behaviors (Heidari, Ketabi, & Zonoobi, 2014). Furthermore, the researcher argues that both educators and learners should critically reflect on their behaviors and roles in and outside the classroom. From this perspective, language teaching plays an important role in promoting education for social justice (Byram & Wagner, 2018). Through various intercultural courses and projects, teachers and colleges can help learners to understand the value of language learning in their lives beyond the classroom walls.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

This study explored in some detail use of intercultural language teaching approach for

facilitating the development of students' intercultural competence. Based on this study, there are several recommendations for future research.

Firstly, regarding the methodological aspects, participants from different cultural backgrounds would possibly help to develop new directions. Further research can explore whether other multicultural teams, as well as teams of two or more different cultures, combine different stereotypes, which is also conducive to intercultural language learning. As to the participants, diverse age, cultural backgrounds, and more learners and teachers could be interviewed to broaden the spectrum of perceptions and opinions. The corresponding study of language teachers' understanding of intercultural competence and their teaching style is another potential area to be studied. Another possible further topic is the applicability of the approach developed in the study to other English teaching settings than Business English.

Moreover, projects with longer periods of intercultural language teaching can also be conducted to understand the effect of time on the development of intercultural competence of the participants in the context of intercultural learning. Several rounds of teaching could be conducted and explored to see their affordances, allowing a comparison of the learners' improvements to be made, all of which could deepen our understanding of, and capacity to cultivate intercultural competence in language classrooms.

Additional research is also needed to further explore the impact of intercultural learning activities on the development of intercultural competence, including the specific impact of technology and particular types of activities, as well as the different dimensions that construct intercultural competence. In addition, regarding the developmental process of students' intercultural competence, the tentative model of intercultural competence development proposed in this study also provides directions for future research, and the specific developmental process students experience in intercultural learning would also constitute interesting future research directions. The impact of intercultural language activities on the

development of students' intercultural competence in different milestones during the learning process could also be examined. Finally, how to design assessment and how to measure the development of a learner's intercultural competence in the dimensions of attitude, knowledge, skills, and awareness is also an important area.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This is the last chapter of the thesis and it provides a summary of the key conclusions drawn from the action research. The chapter is divided into three parts namely: the contributions of the study (7.1), its limitations (7.2), and summary of the action research (7.3). The following section focuses on the contributions of the study and these are considered at the practical and theoretical level.

7.1 Contributions of the study

As stated in the second chapter, research on culture teaching in language education in Chinese context is relatively weak, and the cultivation of learners' intercultural competence is widely accepted as its new goal. This study adopted this goal and explored the role of intercultural language teaching approach in promoting the development of intercultural competence through a three-stage teaching model. The study focused on the analysis of students' reflections from surveys, interviews and reflective journals; and explored the role of the course in facilitating the development of students' intercultural competence. This study enriches the research of culture teaching from the aspects of both pedagogy and theory.

7.1.1 Pedagogical contributions

Practically, the study contributes to the pedagogy of promoting the development of college students' intercultural competence in the Chinese context. Three aspects illustrate this claim. First and foremost, the study indicates that intercultural language teaching approach can be applied in language classrooms to cultivate students' intercultural competence. Current culture teaching largely relies on textbooks and teachers' instructions in the classroom. However, as found from students' pre-course data, this form of teaching has its shortcomings, for example, textbooks may not provide adequate authentic examples of intercultural communication. Through this study, it turns out that intercultural language teaching approach can provide opportunities for learners to explore cultural differences and implement

knowledge and skills of intercultural interactions. Compared with the other approaches that propositional explain or describe abstract cultural knowledge, which lack interactions and interest; the approach adopted in this study provides possibilities for learners to explore various cultures, analyze intercultural issues, and reflect on own learning. The use of intercultural language teaching approach in classrooms has thus been shown to be an effective way of culture teaching, especially for knowledge acquisition and skill development.

Secondly, this study demonstrates that cultivation of intercultural competence is possible in college language classrooms in Chinese context. This study explored the pedagogical methods and activities that would facilitate the development of intercultural competence in the language course. This practical study supports language teachers to think about using the intercultural language teaching approach in the classroom to cultivate students' intercultural competence. Since many vocational college students may not be able to gain opportunities to learn abroad or engage in other forms of overseas experience, to a large extent, it provides an opportunity for learners to explore cultural differences with authentic and various examples. It also offers them a chance to experiment with knowledge and skills in different activities, and to prepare for future intercultural interactions. Teaching methods and activities such as discussion, debate, case analysis, collaboration, and reflection can be used in the classroom. Through these approaches, the possibility of cultivating intercultural competence in language classrooms could be realized.

Finally, this study shows how the concept of student-centered teaching and the intercultural language teaching approach was applied. The building of intercultural competence with the use of intercultural language teaching approach encourages learners to actively take part in the learning process and gradually construct their own attitudes, knowledge, skills and awareness through learning and reflecting. This study provides

language teachers in Chinese context with a new perspective in designing classroom activities, and integrating different methods.

7.1.2 Theoretical contributions

Based on the discussion of the findings and responses to the research questions, the study makes a contribution towards new understandings of important concepts such as culture teaching in foreign language education and intercultural competence development. As illustrated in Chapter two, the relationship of language and culture is integrated. Even though culture teaching has always been advocated, to integrate culture into language teaching, and how to combine language and culture in classroom teaching is challenging, hence, culture and language tend to be separated in actual teaching. This study embodies well the combination of language with culture. As analyzed in Chapter Five and discussed in Chapter Six, the three-stage intercultural speaking course illustrated how culture is expressed in language and how language teaching facilitates culture teaching. The teaching of culture with the use of intercultural language teaching approach is an effective way to integrate language and culture.

Therefore, this study provokes a new understanding of culture teaching in foreign language education. Culture teaching not only refers to traditionally imparting the target culture, but also means to cultivate the learners' intercultural competence to support their intercultural interactions. An interculturally competent learner is able to compare different cultures, to reflect on their own culture, to respect cultural differences, and to share cultural similarities.

Finally, the exploration of how to promote the development of intercultural competence with the use of intercultural language teaching approach in this study also provides a deeper understanding of the process of intercultural competence development. A tentative model of intercultural competence development is therefore provided. In this model, there are three

levels of intercultural competence including: basic, intermediate, and advanced level, and a description of each level is provided from the perspective of attitude, knowledge, skills, and awareness. The model can facilitate teachers' course design and teaching practice, and it can also help with students' reflection on own intercultural competence development.

7.2 Limitations of the study

This study has got some limitations. Firstly, the study is limited in that only a relatively small number of students were involved in this project. Thus, findings would usefully be tested with more participants to consolidate the credibility of the claims made. Besides, although the validity of the questionnaire is relatively high, as the number of participants is limited, there is need for caution when referring to the quantitative results.

The intercultural competence mentioned in this study was self-evaluated by participating students using a 5-scale survey. Sinicrope, Norris, and Watanabe (2007) raised the difficulty of assessing intercultural competence in an earlier review that outlined the main criticisms of self-reporting tools, mainly the impact of social expectations and some participants were unable to evaluate themselves, especially in relation to hypothetical situations. A range of assessment tools have been found more effective in assessing intercultural competence in a more direct way, such as behavioral observations during role-playing or real-time interactions (Ruben, 1976), analysis of interview content (Fantini, 2006) or portfolios (Byram, 1997). However, these tools are often used for short periods of time, whether in an hour-long interview or a one-week intervention, which may offer a limited perspective on learners' intercultural abilities. These limitations have led to the development of comprehensive assessment instruments, such as the Intercultural Assessment Project (INCA) (Byram et al., 2004), which combines observations, interviews, self-evaluated reports, and portfolios. Such assessments require greater effort, time and resources (Hellerstein, 2017).

In addition, students reported in surveys or semi-structured interviews, and there is no

way in data collection design to confirm that the reported behavior is consistent with actual behavior. Therefore, more replicable and generalizable research should be conducted to help increase credibility and understanding. The researcher regarded the questionnaire, reflective journals, and interviews as the major sources of data. Apart from these sources, other sources of data such as notes from classroom discussions, students' oral speeches, and the interaction in classrooms can also provide more evidence for the research questions. Besides, if the intervention could be conducted in more than one cycle, the facilitating role of the intercultural language course and the usefulness of the intercultural learning activities could be revealed more deeply. In addition, if the course was to be conducted over a longer period, more diverse activities could be explored, and the usefulness of specific types of intercultural language learning activities could potentially be illuminated in greater detail.

Finally, the research was conducted using a convenient sample drawn from a vocational college in a particular region of mainland China. Therefore, any attempt to generalize the results of the study to students of other types of colleges or geographic regions should be done cautiously.

7.3 Summary

This thesis describes an action research experience carried out in an English classroom of the business English department at a vocational college in China. The study proposes the inclusion of intercultural perspective in the English classroom through the implementation of intercultural language teaching approach as a means to promote the development of students' intercultural competence. Data were collected from pre- and post-survey, interviews, and reflective journals to show how those intercultural language teaching activities engaged learners to explore culture and intercultural communication, to negotiate meaning, and to develop intercultural competence.

The main findings revealed that the course facilitated participants to develop the

dimensions of intercultural competence including attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. The research also showed that the dimensions were not developed in the same way. For attitudes, students' increasing interest in exploring cultural phenomena, both familiar and unfamiliar ones was found, and students are also more willing to engage with otherness. In terms of knowledge, evidence suggests that students are more interested in activities that acquire knowledge about social interactions, social distinctions, and knowledge of misunderstandings in communication. Regarding skills, students were inclined to develop skills for identifying misunderstandings in interactions, identifying similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, and acquire verbal and non-verbal devices for intercultural communication. As for the dimension of awareness, students reflected that they made progress in terms of identifying and interpreting values in intercultural events and evaluating behaviors in a more critical manner. Students' self-evaluated speaking ability was also improved through learning the intercultural speaking course. Students' development process in the three-month learning period was also revealed. Students demonstrated positive attitudes towards language learning, culture learning, and intercultural communication. They developed insight into products, practices, and perspectives in own and other cultures. These behaviors are directly related to the development of intercultural competence and could have positive influence in their intercultural interactions with interlocutors from other cultures.

This research makes significant contributions to the theoretical background of intercultural language teaching and learning. It also provides practical suggestions for promoting the development of students' intercultural competence in language education. In addition, the implications of findings can also be helpful for areas including teacher education, curriculum development, and material preparation. Further research can be conducted to explore the impact of similar courses over a longer teaching period to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of intercultural language teaching activities in facilitating

different dimensions of students' intercultural competence.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Objectives of the four dimensions in Byram's ICC model (1997, pp. 57-64)

Attitudes: Curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.

A1: willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality; this should be distinguished from attitudes of seeking out the exotic or of seeking to profit from others;

A2: interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices;

A3: willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment;

A4: readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence;

A5: readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction

Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.

K1: historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries

K2: the means of achieving contact with interlocutors from another country (at a distance or in proximity), of travel to and from and the institutions which facilitate contact or help resolve problems

K3: the types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins

K4: the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from

the perspective of one's interlocutor's country

K5: the national memory of one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on it from one's own

K6: the national definitions of geographical space in one's own country and how these are perceived from the perspective of other countries

K7: the national definitions of geographical space in one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own.

K8: the processes and institutions of socialization in one's own and one's interlocutor's country

K9: social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's

K10: institutions, and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's interlocutor's country and which conduct and influence relationships between them

K11: the processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country.

Skills of interpreting and relating: Ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.

S1: identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins;

S2: identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present;

S3: mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena

Skills of discovery and interaction: Ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

S4: elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and to develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena;

S5: identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and

connotations;

S6: identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances;

S7: use in real-time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country and culture, taking into consideration the degree of one's existing familiarity with the country and culture and the extent of difference between one's own and the other;

S8: identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and country;

S9: identify and make use of public and private institutions which facilitate contact with other countries and cultures;

S10: use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture.

Critical cultural awareness/political education: An ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

C1: identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures;

C2: make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria;

C3: interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of them by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Appendix B: Questionnaire based on the assessment of intercultural competence of Chinese college students (AIC-CCS) (Wu, 2013)

中国大学生跨文化能力自评问卷（综合评价版）

第一部分 个人信息

1. 性别: A.男　　B.女

2. 你的四级成绩：

3. 你认为你的英语水平如何？("1"代表最低，依次递增，"5"代表程度最高)

整体	1	2	3	4	5
听力	1	2	3	4	5
口语	1	2	3	4	5
阅读	1	2	3	4	5
写作	1	2	3	4	5

4. 是否曾经出过国？

5. 你在国内与来自不同文化的人(外国人)接触过吗？

6. 你参加过跨文化交际的活动吗？

第二部分 跨文化能力自评

填写说明:本部分是中国大学生跨文化能力自评量表，包括六个方面。请依据你自己的实际情况，从"1"到"5"中选择一个数字进行自我评分并在数字上打勾 ("1"代表程度最低，依次递增，"5"代表程度最高)，具体参照如下:

1- 非常弱/些微 2-较弱/一点 3-一般/一些 4-较强/较多 5-非常强/非常多

1. 了解本国的历史

2. 了解本国的地理

3. 了解本国的社会政治知识

4. 了解本国的生活方式

5. 了解本国的价值观知识

6. 了解本国的社交礼仪

7. 了解本国的宗教文化知识

8. 了解外国的历史

9. 了解外国的地理

10. 了解外国的社会政治知识

11. 了解外国的生活方式

12. 了解外国的价值观知识

13. 了解外国的社交礼仪

14. 了解外国的宗教文化知识

15. 了解外国的文化禁忌知识

16. 了解和比较不同文化的基本规范行为知识

17. 了解文化和跨文化交流与传播等概念的基本知识

18. 了解跨文化交流误解产生的原因

19. 了解一些成功进行跨文化交流的策略和技巧

20. 愿意和来自不同文化的外国人进行交流和学习

21. 愿意尽量去宽容外国人不同的价值观、饮食习惯、行为等等

22. 愿意学好外语

23. 愿意了解外国人

24. 愿意了解不同文化间在行为，价值观，态度以及风格等方面的差异

25. 愿意反思和质疑自己的文化价值观和预设想法

26. 能在出现跨文化交流误解时和对方协商、解释本国文化从而达到让双方满意

27. 能在出现语言交流障碍时借助身体语言或其他非语言方式进行交流

28. 能使用外语和来自不同社会文化背景和领域的人进行成功交流

29. 能在与外国人交流时礼貌对待他们

30. 能在与外国人交流时尽量避免在语言、穿着和行为举止上冒犯他们

31. 能在与外国人交流时尽量避免对外国人产生偏见和成见

32. 能在与外国人交流时会避免提到外国人有关隐私话题

33. 具有对跨文化差异敏感性的能力

34. 能利用各种资源了解自己与其他文化和国家之间的当下和过去的关系

35. 能了解并利用促进与其他文化和国家接触的公共和私人机构

36. 在看待其他国家发生如政治、经济、宗教等方面的事件时会从不同文化和多角度看问题

37. 能解读文件或事件中的以本国文化为中心的观点并解释其来源

38. 能通过文件或与外国人的接触直接获取跨文化交际相关知识

39. 能运用各种方法、技巧与策略帮助学习外国语言和文化

40. 能在出现跨文化冲突和误解时进行反思和学习并寻求妥善解决途径

41. 意识到自己和他人文化中显性或隐含的价值

42. 意识到自身文化价值观和意识形态是如何在各种不同的情境中体现的

43. 意识到自身和他人文化价值观的潜在冲突并进行互动和调解

44. 意识到与外国人交流时彼此存在文化相似性和差异性

45. 意识到与外国人交流时自身文化身份和对方文化身份的差异

46. 意识到文化风格和语言运用的不同，以及它们对社会和工作情景造成的影响

English version of the questionnaire (partially based on Peng, Wu, & Fan, 2015)

Part I: Background information

1. Gender: (A) Male (B) Female

2. CET-4 grade:

3. Please evaluate your language ability using from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high)

Overall	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5

4. Have you been abroad?

5. Do you have any communication experience with people from other cultures (foreigners)?

6. Do you have any intercultural communication experience?

Part II: Intercultural competence

This section is designed to collect your self-evaluation of intercultural competence. According to your own understanding, choose the most appropriate score from 1 to 5.

Please read the following items and evaluate yourself using the 1-5 scale:

(1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) average (4) agree (5) strongly agree

1. understanding native history

2. understanding native geography

3. understanding native socio-political affairs

4. understanding native lifestyle

5. understanding the native sense of values

6. understanding native social etiquette

7. understanding native religion

8. understanding foreign history

9. understanding foreign geography

10. understanding foreign socio-political affairs

11. understanding foreign lifestyle

12. understanding the foreign sense of values

13. understanding foreign social etiquette

14. understanding foreign religion

15. understanding foreign cultural taboos

16. understanding the basic conventions of different cultures

17. understanding basic concepts of intercultural communication

18. understanding the causes of misunderstandings in intercultural communication

19. understanding some strategies of successful intercultural communication

20. willing to communicate and learn from those who come from different cultures

21. willing to respect foreigners' different values, customs, behaviors, etc.

22. willing to learn foreign languages

23. willing to know about foreigners

24. willing to understand the differences in behaviors, values, attitudes and styles among different cultures

25. willing to reflect and question one's own cultural values and preconceived ideas

26. can negotiate with each other when misunderstandings occur in intercultural communication and explain one's own culture so as to satisfy both parties

27. can communicate with foreigners by using body language or other non-verbal devices when dysfunctions occur

28. can successfully communicate with people from different social and cultural backgrounds in English

29. can treat foreigners politely when communicating

30. can avoid offensive words, apparel, and behaviors when communicating with foreigners

31. can avoid preconceived prejudices against foreigners when communicating

32. can avoid touching foreigners' privacy when communicating

33. being sensitive to intercultural differences

34. can use various resources to understand the current and past relationships between one's own and other cultures and countries

35. can avail yourself of the public and private institutions that promote contact with other cultures and countries

36. can take different cultural perspectives when encountered with different political, economic, and religious affairs in other countries

37. can interpret the ethnocentric viewpoints in documents or events and explain their sources

38. can directly acquire knowledge of intercultural communication from documents or contacts with foreigners

39. can use a variety of strategies to learn foreign languages and cultures

40. can reflect and learn when intercultural conflicts or misunderstandings occur and find solutions

41. be aware of the explicit or implicit value in the culture of one's own and others

42. be aware of how one's own cultural values and ideologies are embodied in different situations

43. be aware of the potential conflicts between one' own and others' cultural values and engage in interaction and mediation

44. be aware of cultural differences and similarities when communicating with foreigners

45. be aware the differences in cultural identity when communicating with foreigners

46. be aware of the differences in cultural styles and language use, and their impact on social and work scenarios

Appendix C: Journal prompt for reflection (adapted from Su)

Instruction: Please write your responses to the following prompt

Written Reports

During and at the end of the course, you are encouraged to engage in personal reflection. Think about how you have changed as a result of attending the session and this research project. Reflect upon what you learned about culture and language, and what you learned about yourself. In approximately one page, please reflect upon what you learned from the session, especially your intercultural developing experience. You might consider the following questions:

Continue to ask yourself the following questions:

1. What you learn from the session? Do you achieve the intercultural learning objectives?

2. With the classroom activities, can you provide an example to show what you learn?

3. Are you continuing to hold any values and beliefs (stereotypes, ethnocentric views, prejudices) you had about other cultures? Why/why not?

4. In what ways are these values and beliefs being confirmed or challenged? How? Why?

5. What new aspects of cultural attitudes, values and concepts you learn from the session?

6. Does the session help you develop intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness? If yes, or no, please explain in detail.

7. Does the session help you develop insight into your culture learning? If yes or no, please explain.

8. What process of learning and thinking you experience through learning the session (please describe in detail)?

9. In what ways and in what contexts are you/are you not more interculturally competent?

10. What activity and resource help you most?

Appendix D: Interview guide (the format is adapted from Creswell, 2008, p234)

Project: intercultural language teaching approach to facilitate intercultural competence development

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of the interviewee:

Describe the project, tell the interviewee about the purpose of the study, individuals and sources of data being collected, what will be done with the data to protect the confidentiality of the interviewee, how long the interview will take

Have the interviewee read and sign the consent form.

Turn on the tape recorder and test it.

Questions:

1. Please describe your feelings about the course.谈谈你对这门课程的整体感受

2. Did the course meet your expectations? Why? Explain and give specific samples. 这门课是否符合你的期待？

3. Is it interesting or boring? Explain 这门课有趣吗？还是无聊？

4. Did the course affect your culture learning? 你对于文化学习是否有转变？

5. Is there any other change in your beliefs or attitudes on handling intercultural situations or communicate with other people? 在跨文化场合或者跨文化交际方面你的想法是否有转变？

6. Do you learn new cultural concepts? 你是否学到了新的文化概念？

7. Do you learn new knowledge have you gained? Explain 你是否有学到新的文化知识？

8. Did the course help you improve your understanding of culture issue or phenomena？通过这门课，你是否在理解文化现象有进步？

9. Do you develop new skills? Explain 你是否有学习到新的技能？

10. Can you describe your overall cultural learning process？你能描述一下你的文化学习的过程吗？

11. Will you continue developing your intercultural abilities? How？你会继续发展你的跨文化能力吗？

12. Is there anything impressed you during learning the course？学习期间有什么印象深刻的事情吗？

13. How will you evaluate learning materials of the course？你觉得学习资料怎么样？

14. How will you evaluate learning activities of the course？你觉得课堂活动怎么样？

15. What did you find lacking in the course? Explain 你觉得还缺少什么？

16. What can be improved? Do you have any suggestions？怎么改进呢？

17. Are there any other things that you want to add？还有其他要补充的吗？

Thank the individuals for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and the potential for future interviews. (Some questions are adapted from Baker, 2009; Qin, 2015; Su, 2011)

Appendix E: Teaching objectives and syllabus

Session	Stage	Objectives
Weeks 1–2	Stage 1 Intercultural acquisition (Noticing)	Self-reflection upon attitudes referring to a range of universal values Basic concept of intercultural communication and related abilities Proper attitudes towards cultures and intercultural interaction
Week 3-4	Stage 2 Intercultural engagement (Noticing and comparing)	Identify ethnocentric perspectives and misunderstandings related to intercultural situations Knowledge of self and other cultures in social conventions and business culture Reflect on own intercultural skills and cultural knowledge Skills of interpreting and relating
Week 5-6	Stage 3 Intercultural engagement (Noticing and comparing)	Identify similarities and differences between home cultures and foreign cultures Reflect on own intercultural skills and cultural knowledge Knowledge about intercultural interaction Skills of discovery and interaction
Week 7-8	Stage 4 Intercultural engagement (Comparing and reflection)	Apply the learned attitudes, knowledge, and skills in intercultural interaction Develop own skills and ways to negotiate and mediate in intercultural situations Reflect upon own intercultural communication
Week 9-10	Stage 5 Intercultural reflection (Reflection)	Reflect upon own attitudes, knowledge, and skills in a critical way Learn to cope with cultural conflicts
Week 11-12	Presentations and closing	Reflect what has been learned

Unit	Topic	Language skills	Key culture and intercultural concepts	Activity
1	Self-introduction Company introduction	Introduce and ask information of a company	Various company culture (Change; social organization) Culture behind slogans (Value system)	Movies (Borghetti & Lertola, 2014; Chao, 2013; Lee, 2012; Truong & Tran, 2014; Zoreda & Vivaldo, 2008) Story-telling with pictures (Chen & Yang, 2014) Oral translation task (Takimoto & Hashimoto, 2010)
2	Daily work Work arrangements	Describe daily work Discuss work arrangements	Company structure (Social organization) Concept of time (Value system)	Role-play (Corbett, 2003) Learning with news and videos (Hoff, 2013) Values in proverbs (Hiller, 2010)
3	Business meeting	Arrange business meeting and business dinner Discuss in meeting	Conventions concerning formal situations (Interpersonal relationships)	Songs Icebreaker (Hiller, 2010) Role-play (Corbett, 2003)
4	Product sales	Describe product sales Talk about sales with others	Figures Foods Milestones (Change; value systems)	Storytelling with pictures (Chen & Yang, 2014) Group project (Bocanegra, 2015; Chen & Yang, 2016; Li & Liu, 2017; Su, 2011; Wang & Kulich, 2015)
5	Set up relationships with potential partners	Find and discuss possibilities of setting	Set up relationships with people from other cultures	Critical incidents (Hiller, 2010) Role-play (Corbett, 2003)

		up relationships	(Interpersonal relationships)	
6	Factory visit Introduce product	Show and introduce a place Introduce products	Body language (Interpersonal relationships)	Group project (Bocanegra, 2015; Chen & Yang, 2016; Li & Liu, 2017; Su, 2011; Wang & Kulich, 2015) Learning with news and videos (Hoff, 2013) Guest speaker (Lee, 2012)
7	Inquiries and offers	Make and answer inquiries Make and ask information about an offer	Negotiate and mediate in cultural interaction (Interpersonal relationships)	Critical incidents (Hiller, 2010) Role-play (Corbett, 2003)
8	Accept and conclude a business	Make acceptance and make an order Conclude a business	Negotiate and mediate in cultural interaction (Interpersonal relationships)	Critical incidents (Hiller, 2010) Role-play (Corbett, 2003) Group project (Bocanegra, 2015; Chen & Yang, 2016; Li & Liu, 2017; Su, 2011; Wang & Kulich, 2015)
9	Packing and shipment	Express requirements Use terms	History of transportation Intercultural communication through world events Culture behind terms (Change; social organization)	Learning with news and videos (Hoff, 2013) Movies (Borghetti & Lertola, 2014; Chao, 2013; Lee, 2012; Truong & Tran, 2014; Zoreda & Vivaldo, 2008) Guest speaker (Lee, 2012)
10	Problems and complaints	Deal with problems Make complaints	Deal with cultural conflicts (Interpersonal relationships)	Critical incidents (Hiller, 2010) Role-play (Corbett, 2003) Guest speaker (Lee, 2012)
11-12	Summarizing and closing	Presentation	Review and reflection	Group presentation Peer-review and reflection

Appendix F: Lesson plan (Detailed objectives are highlighted in intercultural concept section)

Sample 1:

Course name	Business English Speaking	Duration	Week 4
Topic	Unit 4 Do you hit the target?		
Language objectives	1. To write down figures and get the details about product sales 2. To know the basic points of describing products sales 3. To be able to talk about product sales with others 4. Describe product sales and talk about sales with others		
Intercultural objectives	1. Notice and compare 2. Identify ethnocentric perspectives and misunderstandings related to intercultural situations 3. Knowledge of self and other cultures in social conventions and business culture 4. Reflect on own intercultural skills and cultural knowledge 5. Skills of interpreting and relating		
Language Focus	Describe product sales Talk about sales with others		
Intercultural concepts	Numbers (value systems) A K1 K2 K4 K9 S1 S2 Foods (cultural knowledge) A K3 K8 K9 K10 Icons (Change; value systems) A K1 K4 K5 S6 S7 C		
Outline of Teaching Content			

Phase 1. Listening and speaking
Task 1. Warm-up
Read these numbers. Then listen to the record and check your answers.

Task 2. Active listening
1) Listen to the conversation between a sales manager and his Japanese area sales representative. Find out the meaning of the following figures.
  Listen to the conversation again. Answer the following questions according to what you hear.
2) A president of an outdoors company is having a meeting with his sales manager and finance manager. Fill in the blanks with proper prepositions after you listen to the recording.
  Listen to the record again and repeat all the figures in English.
3) Listen to the presentation about sales of Harry's hamburgers in 1998. Answer the questions below according to the presentation.
  Listen to the presentation again. Note down all the figures and try to draw out the graph according to what you hear.

Task 3. Listening and speaking
1) Listen to the presentation about how to conduct a meeting. Answer the questions below.
2) Work in groups of 3-4 people. Suppose that you are working in the Sales Department of Morrisons. Hold a meeting to discuss the sales figures of Sainsbury and the reason for their success. Try to give some suggestions to your own company.

Task 4. Situation performance
1) A sales manager is reporting the annual sales situation to the board members. Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F). Correct the statement if it is false.
2) Listen to the report again and try to retell it by your own words.
3) Look at the chart below. You work in the Sales Department of your company. Now you

are asked to report the annual sales figures to your sales manager.

Phase 2. Intercultural exploration
Task 1. Icons
Outline
Learners explore varying perceptions of the five most famous people in their own country and their perceptions of the five most famous people from another country. When learners compare their perceptions, they often find that their choices vary, which is a useful basis for discussion.
Focus
Language of personal characteristics and achievements
Level
Lower intermediate and above
Time
30 minutes plus
Guide students to prepare with the worksheet.
Organize a balloon debate.

Balloon debate
Divide the class into three or five groups. Each group must choose one of the famous figures discussed, ensure each group selects a different person.
Explain that these figures are in an aeroplane that is going to crash. Unfortunately, there is only one parachute, each group must think of reasons why their famous figure deserves to get the parachute. If necessary, you can brainstorm with the class some possible reasons that different figures might give for having the parachute.
Each group then selects one learner to represent their chosen figure in the debate. The representatives, in turn, take the role of the famous figures and give their reasons why they should receive the parachute.

Worksheet: Writing about a founding figure
1. Identify a founding figure for your home nation and, if you are in a monolingual group, choose a founding figure from a different nation as well.
2. Write a brief description of his or her story, including as much of the following information as you can find, e.g.
• place and date of birth
• upbringing
• difficulties faced
• achievements
• personal qualities
• if no longer alive, the circumstances of his or her death
• how he or she is remembered in the nation (e.g. on banknotes, by statues, by buildings or places named after him
or her)
3. Decide if this person reflects the core values of the nation.
Note the sources of your information after the description you have written.

Task 2. Culture behind figures
1) Brainstorm any story about figures (Chinese and English).
2) With more examples, think about the difference use and meanings of figures. (notice with

input)
3) In groups, come up with, select, and discuss figures that contain different or similar meanings in different cultures. (compare)
4) Discuss and learn idioms of numbers. Can you find similar idioms in other language?
5) With the resources, discuss the cultural values behind small talk. (reflect)

Task 3. Culture behind foods
1) Brainstorm food that can represent your hometown and China.
2) With examples, come up with representative food in other countries. (notice with input)
3) In groups, come up with, select, and discuss foods in different cultures.
   Why are they different? (compare)
4) With the resources, discuss the cultural values behind food. (reflect)

Reference	Icebreaker (Hiller, 2010) Role-play (Corbett, 2003)
Resources	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xk3PrRIPja0 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5E9csIaFkc https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSSa-r86a2s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzjXIOvWVt0 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyNRAb90ixc https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8FCL1LqQpk https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M55165hJ5mY https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GqbvwfHZi0 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ry1E1uzPSU0 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWhcXB5hYDE https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_MXFP_kguA
Notes	

Sample 2:

Course name	Business English Speaking	**Duration**	Week 10
Topic	Unit 12 Everything can go wrong		
Language objectives	1. To understand the main idea and select the specific information of describing problems 2. To deal with problems effectively and efficiently 3. To make complaints about products or services		
Intercultural objectives	1. Reflection 2. Reflect upon own attitudes, knowledge, and skills in a critical way 3. Learn to cope with cultural conflicts		
Language Focus	Deal with problems Make complaints		
Intercultural concepts	Deal with cultural conflicts (Interpersonal relationships) K3 K11 S3 S7 S10 C		
Outline of Teaching Content			

Phase 1. Listening and speaking

Task 1. Warm-up

Brainstorm with a partner about what could go wrong in the business world. Then match the words in the left to the definitions in the right.

Task 2. Active listening

1) Listen to the conversation between Susan and Mike and decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F). Correct the statement if it is false.

Listen to the conversation again and decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F). Correct the statement if it is false.

2) A buyer and a supplier are talking on the phone about the delivery. Listen to their conversation and complete the blanks by filling in proper words.

Listen to the conversation again and answer the following questions.

3) Listen to a line manager who is reporting on the services of their hotel based on a recent travelers' survey. Then decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F). Correct the statement if it is false.

Listen to the presentation again, and answer the following questions in your own words.

Task 3. Listening and speaking

1) Mr. Brown is going to check out of the hotel and is settling the account at the counter. Listen to the conversation and answer the following questions.

2) Work in pairs. One acts as Mr. Brown and the other acts as the line manager. Role-play the conversation before the classmates.

Task 4. Situation performance

1) Watch the presentation about how to respond to a complaint. Answer the questions below.

2) Practice the following conversations with a partner. You can invent any details. Make sure you will use the expressions in the table.

Phase 2. Intercultural exploration

Task 1. Culture in the office

Outline

Learners role plays in an office environment, consider messages managers and employees send each other through body language.

Focus

Requesting, reprimanding, describing and evaluating behavior

Level

intermediate and above

Time

40 minutes

With examples, the teacher guides the class to think about communication in office situations. What is happening? What are they doing? Why they do that? (notice)

With other situations, students think about other ways to achieve a communication aim. (compare)

Guide students to prepare for the role play, organize the role play, and let students to observe and reflect the performance. (interact, compare, and reflect)

Role play: Requesting

Speaker A (Manager): Ask one of your employees to photocopy a document for you. You

need the photocopied document immediately.
• Pick up the document and go to your employee's desk.
• Sit on the edge of the desk. Move the employee's stuff around a little. Use expressive hand gestures.
• Ask the employee to photocopy your document. Tell the employee that you need the photocopy immediately.

Speaker B (Employee): You are very busy at your desk. Your manager is going to ask you a question. Choose which body language to adopt while your manager is talking:
either:
a) Relax. Fold your arms, cross your legs and sit back. Look directly at your manager. Look in his/her eyes.
or:
b) Clasp your hands in your lap. Look down. Nod politely, but do not look directly at your manager.

Task 2. Culture in politicians' body language
Outline
Learners consider the kind of body language that is used by politicians and other people in authority, to encourage listeners to have confidence in them
Focus
Language of persuasion and body language
Time
40 minutes
With the model speech, let students to think about how to deliver a good speech. (notice)
Organize the activity, instruct students to prepare for the observation and performance. Also pay attention others' performance and their use of body language. (compare)
Reflect and discuss how we use body language to express our ideas. (reflect)
With resources, learn more about non-verbal communication.

Ask students to turn away from the screen, and listen to a politician giving a speech. They must not watch the clip at this point. Play the speech again, the learners should mime the speech, using appropriate body language. They can then turn towards the screen and compare their own body language with that of the politician.
Next, ask the students to prepare a short, two-minute, political speech of their own.
Introduce a new political policy such as a new national holiday or a new policy for recycling household waste.
Say why the policy is important.
Attack the policies of the political opponents as inadequate.
Encourage the audience to support the new policy.
The learners write a short speech and then rehearse their speeches in groups.

Reference	Learning with news and videos (Hoff, 2013) Movies (Borghetti & Lertola, 2014; Chao, 2013; Lee, 2012; Truong & Tran, 2014; Zoreda & Vivaldo, 2008) Guest speaker (Lee, 2012)
Resources	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e_rdSvwh_E https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmVF23QXY10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8nnj0Rebng https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KCsELZYYRo

	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cm8vZzOp2C4
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_hi8gX9WuA
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Sp68AsDxQ0
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibbTbisWfJk
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pd4UlwWqDnI
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3NWmpbpw0Q
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6cWa8OXbcw
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo1X0uuF1sw
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLRIW64ZcOo
	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gyp1Ac7I0I
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