

**An Investigation of Intercultural Competence Inclusion in the EFL Curriculum and
Teaching: A Case Study in a University in Vietnam**

by

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Statement of Originality

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Abstract

The globalization of higher education has highlighted the value of intercultural competence (IC) in foreign language education. Accordingly, English language education must prepare learners by incorporating IC to achieve successful cross-cultural communication and avoid cultural shocks. However, teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) hold ambiguous perspectives of IC implementation, and IC is not adequately integrated into EFL classrooms. Meanwhile, extant literature contains minimal investigations on IC inclusion in EFL curricula and the multilayered factors influencing IC teaching. Therefore, investigating the presence of IC in the EFL curriculum and teaching practices and the factors influencing IC incorporation is imperative to generate some directives for developing students' IC. The current study aimed to investigate IC inclusion in the EFL curriculum and teaching practices, specifically (a) curriculum designers' perspectives on IC integration and the inclusion of IC in EFL curriculum documents; (b) teachers' perceptions of IC implementation and their IC practices; and (c) the factors facilitating or impeding the integration of IC in EFL teaching and learning practices. A qualitative case study was conducted at a Vietnamese university with an ethnically diverse student population. To investigate the inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum and teaching practices, the current study included (a) documentary review of the EFL curriculum framework and 48 course outlines, (b) interviews with 2 curriculum designers and 8 EFL teachers, and (c) class observations with 8 teachers. The findings showed that IC was not adequately addressed in the EFL curriculum framework, and it was included in only a few course outlines. Although the curriculum designers held positive perspectives of embedding IC in the curriculum framework, they tended to place the onus for doing so on individual teachers. As for teacher participants, 6 participants stated they had positive perspectives of IC inclusion; 1 participant held ambiguous opinions, and 1 held

negative opinions. The teacher participants highlighted *cultural attitudes*, *cultural knowledge*, *skills of discovery and interaction*, and *critical cultural awareness* rather than *skills of relating and interpreting*. During class observations, 6 out of 8 teacher participants had IC implementation, and the IC components they taught differed slightly from the IC components they highlighted in the interviews. The other 2 participants did not implement IC because they could not find the available IC content in the course books. The findings also contained the influential factors EFL teachers perceived as facilitators or hindrances to implementing IC. These were connected to the curriculum framework, class time, teacher training, teaching materials, communication environment, assessment system, class size, teaching facilities, teachers' awareness, students' attitudes, teachers' IC, and teachers' utility of online resources. Some implications for language education policymakers, universities, faculties involved in EFL teaching programs, EFL curriculum designers, material developers, and EFL teachers were also presented for enhancing IC integration in EFL teaching and learning. The study has contributed to the pool of literature on the inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum and classroom practices. It calls for an innovation of the national curriculum frameworks of English and IC policies to enhance students' IC.

Key words: intercultural competence (IC), IC implementation, EFL curriculum, Vietnam

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
EFL	English as a foreign language
IC	intercultural competence
ICC	intercultural communicative competence
BA	Bachelor of Arts
MA	Master of Arts
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages



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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides information on the value of intercultural competence (IC) in higher education in Vietnam, IC conceptualization, and an overview of current literature on implementing IC in EFL teaching at the tertiary level. Then, it discusses the context and concerns about the policies and practices with IC in Vietnam. The last part of the chapter indicates the research gaps that need to be filled, and presents the study's aims and objectives, research questions, and theoretical and practical significance.

1.2 The value of IC

The 21st century is witnessing an increase in people's mobility, which is causing super-diversity in the world community (Vertovec, 2007). Today's world is more multicultural and interconnected than ever, which makes intercultural communication, mutual understanding, and respect necessary (Gao & Lai, 2018; Starkey, 2018). Foreign language instruction is consequently essential for giving students an understanding of the target languages and cultures, as well as the abilities and attitudes needed for cross-cultural communication, given the global environment and the globalization of higher education (Corbett, 2003). As Plough (2016) explained, IC is an essential constituent of globalization and must be developed to advance the internationalization. In this sense, foreign language education, particularly English as a foreign language (EFL), has acknowledged and elevated IC (Munezane, 2019).

Political, economic, and cultural shifts in the Vietnamese society have a significant impact on the growth of IC. IC instruction was first promoted in 2007 when Vietnam became a member of the World Trade Organization and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community in 2015. In this new era, many additional educational and cultural exchanges are held among ASEAN countries to promote awareness of the region's different cultures (Samovar et al., 2012; Tran, 2014). Those who seek further education also have more opportunities to study in ASEAN countries (T. T. Tran, 2014). Apart from the demand of English language proficiency, citizens of ASEAN countries are required to be more open to, knowledgeable of, and courteous in the others' cultures so they can mingle in a multicultural, transnational community (Tran & Duong, 2015a). English language teaching is therefore necessary to equip students with IC to successfully navigate cross-cultural communication while avoiding cultural shock and communication breakdowns (Tran & Duong, 2015a).

1.3 IC in higher education of Vietnam: A paradox between policies and practices

For over 20 years, in response to the needs of rising globalization and internationalization of higher education, the Vietnamese higher education system has implemented significant reforms involving IC development (Ministry of Education and Training, 1997). The Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004) manifests culture learning and teaching for EFL curricula at the tertiary level in Vietnam. Two out of four training objectives of that curriculum mention cultural aspects. In particular, Objective 1 mentions, “Providing learners with broad knowledge of the English language, British and American culture, societies and literature” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, p. 1). Objective 4 is “Equipping students with active learning skills for self-study in order to continue to enhance knowledge and practical language skills, initially developing critical thinking and scientific research capacity about

issues of language, literature or culture-civilization of English-speaking countries” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, p. 1). However, the official statement in Objective 1 is clearly rather outdated in perceiving ‘the target culture’ as British and American cultures only, which seems to be a major limitation to the design of EFL curricula of many Vietnamese universities and students’ IC development.

Additionally, the Ministry of Education and Training governs the curriculum frameworks of all higher educational study programs with one expectation. That is, Vietnamese higher education will be able “to satisfy the increasingly diverse demands of various sectors of the new economy, and to prepare competent human resources for the nation's industrialization, modernization and global integration” (Ngo et al., 2006, p. 231). To achieve that expectation, Vietnamese higher education has to equip students majoring in foreign languages with IC to become intercultural interlocutors in the diverse community (Tran & Duong, 2015a). The inclusion of cultural content in tertiary EFL curricula is intended to enable students “to perceive the fineness of the target literature; evaluate the cultural and social values of literary works” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, p. 7); and “compare and relate the target culture to their own culture and civilization” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, p. 8).

Although the importance of IC in foreign language education is highlighted in the internationalization of higher education in Vietnam (Tran & Dang, 2014), IC teaching has not been adequately embedded in classroom practices (Tran & Duong, 2015b). As Nguyen T. M. H. (2007) and Nguyen T. T. T. (2017) indicated, there have been no concrete guidelines for the integration of IC into EFL teaching, and EFL teachers almost provide students with cultural knowledge instead of developing the attitudes, awareness, and skills necessary for intercultural interaction. Furthermore, in his study in 2011, Ho found that university EFL

teachers scarcely integrate IC into their teaching; and some culture-related courses in the EFL curriculum, such as Culture of English-Speaking Countries, American-British Culture, and American-British Literature, are the only sources to equip EFL students with cultural knowledge of the target language countries. The situation leads to the fact that Vietnamese students placed more emphasis on learning the language competence instead of developing intercultural communication skills (T. L. Nguyen, 2013). As a result, EFL students did not have good adjustments in cross-cultural interaction and in communicating with people from other cultural backgrounds, they faced cultural shock or had biased attitudes toward other cultures (Vo, 2017).

1.4 IC conceptualization and research

Byram (2000) defines IC as people's "ability to interact effectively with people with different cultures other than one's own" (p. 297), and this definition of IC is widely accepted among researchers. According to Byram et al. (2002), IC in foreign language education relates to the *attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness* that a language learner needs to master. In other words, a language learner who possesses IC can achieve effective communication by (a) showing curious and open attitudes, (b) having knowledge of how social groups function and what intercultural interaction involves, (c) being skillful in understanding and interpreting a cultural event from a certain culture and relating it to the event of their own culture, (d) being skillful in learning new knowledge and combining it with their background knowledge, (e) possessing cultural awareness to evaluate other people's cultures from a multicultural perspective, and having a good combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness in intercultural communication contexts (Byram et al., 2002).

Educators perceive IC as an inseparable element for forging intercultural communicators who are “aware of both their own and others’ culturally constructed selves” (Roberts et al., 2001, p. 30). Bennett (1997) emphasized, “To avoid becoming a fluent fool, we need to understand more completely the cultural dimension of language” (p. 16), which is especially true in the context of globalization. Miscommunication unavoidably happens with increased intercultural communication. As Xiao and Petraki (2007) warned, serious communication problems may be resulted from a lack of IC apart from a possible insufficiency of target language knowledge. T. M. H. Nguyen (2007) also considered cultural differences a main obstacle that prevented foreign language learners from achieving effective intercultural communication. As such, Tomalin (2008) considered IC the fifth skill, together with listening, speaking, reading, and writing, that needs to be highly valued in foreign language education. Many models of IC, such as Deardorff’s (2006) process model of IC (with knowledge, attitudes, skills, internal outcomes, and external outcomes), and Byram’s (2009) model of IC (including knowledge, attitudes, skills to understand, skills to learn, and awareness) have manifested their values in English language education (Deardoff, 2009; Quyen, 2018; Tran & Duong, 2018).

A thorough examination of recent research indicates that EFL teachers’ opinions regarding the integration of IC are unclear and that IC is not effectively integrated into EFL teaching practices (Ruiz & Spínola, 2019; Vo, 2017). International literature indicates that language competency is prioritized over IC, and that IC is not adequately applied in EFL classes, even in spite of clearly specified cultural objectives and understanding of IC's value (Ruiz & Spínola, 2019). For instance, teachers have found it difficult to include IC into their lessons because of the strict teaching schedule and the absence of IC in the curriculum (Lázár, 2007). Furthermore, when teachers have attempted to foster IC, they have mostly concentrated on

imparting cultural knowledge rather than the awareness, attitudes, and abilities needed for effective IC (Castro et al., 2004). As for the presence of IC in the curriculum documents, Baroudi (2017) analyzed the policy sheets to investigate the extent to which IC was addressed in the English language teaching course outlines for the Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, and doctoral programs in a university in North Cyprus, and showed that a third of the course outlines in the curriculum addressed IC.

Per the literature search, in Vietnam, the sole empirical research on curriculum analysis is Ho's (2011) work. He disclosed that teachers considered culture as a secondary concern in EFL teaching, and that program designers for EFL paid little attention to the importance of cultural learning. Additional empirical research, such as that conducted by Tran & Dang (2014) and Vo (2017), shows that even while some EFL teachers understand the value of IC cultivation, they still give IC less priority in their teaching practices. Furthermore, Tran and Duong (2015b) discovered that IC teaching has not been fully integrated in classroom practices, and T. M. H. Nguyen (2007) and T. T. T. Nguyen (2017) noted the absence of specific guidelines for incorporating IC in EFL teaching practices in the existing literature.

Extant literature in Vietnam also contains minimal investigations regarding how IC is embedded in foreign language curricula. Furthermore, while some studies have explored the factors that influence the integration of IC in foreign language teaching and learning, researchers rarely have conducted systematic analyses on the multilayered factors that influence IC teaching and learning. Therefore, more study is required to investigate how curriculum designers actually address IC in EFL curricula, how EFL teachers treat IC in their teaching practices, as well as which factors influencing IC inclusion in a localized context, to generate some directives for students' IC development.

The reason for investigating IC integration in EFL teaching practices also comes from the researcher's personal motivation and suitability. As a learner of English, the researcher was interested in the stories related to her teachers' experiences abroad. Moreover, she faced some misunderstanding when communicating with foreigners and going abroad, and wanted to learn IC and explore cultural differences. As an EFL teacher, she finds that EFL teachers need IC to explain the cultural differences in their lessons so as to facilitate language teaching, and students also need IC to understand the language knowledge and communicate with foreigners. Therefore, the researcher has a strong desire that IC should be included in EFL teaching practices and teachers should be required to develop students' IC. Her aim in conducting the current study is to have a thorough understanding of the incorporation of IC in the EFL curriculum and teaching practices, as well as the influential factors of IC implementation and provide theoretical as well as practical implications for enhancing IC in language teaching. She chose Vietnam, her native country as the research site because it was convenient for her to approach the curriculum documents and participants, and she could give some implications for the innovations of the EFL curricula and teaching practices to contribute to the higher education development in her country.

1.5 Aims and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate IC incorporation in the EFL curriculum and classroom practices drawing on the case of a single Vietnamese university.

This study seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding of (a) curriculum designers' perspectives on IC integration and the inclusion of IC in EFL curriculum documents; (b) teachers' perceptions of IC implementation and their IC practices; and (c) the factors facilitating or impeding the implementation of IC in EFL teaching and learning.

1.6 Research questions

To achieve the above research objectives, the study sets the following research questions.

1. How is IC rationalized by curriculum designers and addressed in the EFL curriculum?
2. How do EFL teachers perceive and implement IC in practice?
3. From teachers' perspectives, what factors facilitate or hinder the integration of IC into EFL teaching practices?

1.7 Significance of the study

Using one university as an example, the current study investigates how IC is set up in the EFL programs offered by Vietnamese institutions. The findings have some implications for improving the EFL curriculum to promote IC teaching and learning since they illustrate the nature of IC in the curriculum. The research also calls for introducing IC policies to support students' IC and reforming the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English. Additionally, teachers in the EFL program provide their opinions and experiences with IC teaching for this research, which enables them to gain a better understanding of their IC teaching strategies and recognize their setbacks when incorporating IC into EFL training. The study's findings will also offer an empirical database for developing IC curricula and IC integration in international literature, supporting educational internationalization in Vietnamese universities in keeping with the growing trend of internationalization of higher education in Vietnam and around the world.

Moreover, EFL students can benefit from this study. Curriculum designers and practitioners can use its findings and implications to enhance the integration of IC into the EFL curriculum

and teaching practices, which may better cultivate and promote students' IC. Higher levels of IC will make students more confident in intercultural contact with people from other countries, especially those from the ASEAN community (Gorjian & Aghvami, 2017; Li, 2017). Likewise, to grow and thrive in the era of globalization and educational internationalization, higher education institutions will be able to offer more training opportunities to teachers, helping them to become more interculturally competent to deliver IC to students. Furthermore, the study's empirical data can add to the existing literature on the integration of IC into EFL teaching and learning. By examining EFL curricula, IC teaching practices, and facilitating and hindering factors of the integration of IC, the current study will contribute a new level of knowledge of the fields. Future studies can additionally take into account various levels of analysis (including curriculum design and implementation) based on the results of this study.

1.8 Organization of the thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters. This first chapter presents the conceptualization of IC, the value of IC, IC in higher education in Vietnam, and the research gaps. It outlines the research aims, objectives, and questions and introduces the significance of the research. The chapter closes with the organization of the thesis.

Chapter 2 reviews and critiques the extant literature regarding (a) the definition of IC, (b) the value of IC and the inclusion of IC in EFL curricula, (c) teachers' perspectives and implementation of IC, and (d) the facilitating factors and constraints in IC teaching and learning in the global context as well as the Vietnamese context. The last part of the chapter delves into an exploration of the the research gaps to be filled by the present study and proposes the conceptual framework that will be applied for the current study.

Chapter 3 outlines and justifies the research methodology used in the current study. It commences by presenting the research design, the research site and participants, the methods of data collection, procedures, and the data analysis approach. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations and strategies to ensure the credibility of the data collection and analysis methods.

Chapter 4 reports on the findings of IC inclusion in the EFL curriculum. The first part of this chapter focuses on the curriculum designers' perspectives of the importance of IC and IC integration, as well as their perspectives of the IC components to be integrated into the curriculum. In the second part, the findings from a documentary review of the English Language Program's curriculum framework and course outlines are presented.

Chapter 5 reports the findings of EFL teachers' perspectives of IC integration and their IC teaching in practice. The first portion of this chapter focuses on how EFL teachers perceive IC. The second part of the chapter reports how EFL teachers implement IC in practice. This chapter also shows the commonalities and differences between the findings on teachers' perspectives and curriculum designers' perspectives, as well as between teachers' perspectives and practices with IC.

Chapter 6 describes the teacher participants' points of view on the influential factors of the integration of IC. Specifically, it presents the perspectives of EFL teachers regarding the influential factors as facilitators or hindrances to implementing IC.

Chapter 7 discusses relevant perspectives about issues relating to (a) the curriculum designers' perspectives of IC inclusion and the presence of IC in EFL curriculum documents; (b) teachers' perspectives and implementation of IC; and (c) the factors that condition the

integration of IC in EFL teaching and learning practices. The chapter also elaborates on these findings in connection with prior research and examines how the current findings echo those of existent research as well as how they are unique and different. In addition, the findings of the current study are contextualized through references to EFL policies, EFL curricula, and the IC development in the Vietnamese context in relation to the global developments.

The final chapter summarizes the study findings and states certain potential implications for practice for language education policymakers, universities, faculties involved in EFL teaching programs, EFL curriculum designers and material developers, and EFL teachers. It also presents the shortcomings of the study and delves into recommendations for future research endeavors in the field of IC development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the definition of IC and highlights its importance. Then it critically reviews the existent literature regarding the presence of IC in the EFL curriculum and the curriculum designers' perspectives of IC inclusion, teachers' perspectives and teaching practices with IC, and the influential factors of IC teaching and learning in the global and Vietnamese contexts. The next portion indicates the research gaps to be filled by the current study and proposes the conceptual framework that is used in the current study. The chapter closes with a chapter summary.

2.2 Definition of IC

When offering the definition of IC, scholars generally consider IC in connection with *intercultural communicative competence* (ICC). According to Arévalo-Guerrero (2009) and Byram (2009), the concept of ICC is the combination of communicative competence and intercultural competence. Byram (2009) emphasized that ICC contains two main elements: language competence or communicative competence (with linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences) and intercultural competence (involving cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, awareness and skill sets). While many other studies have more emphasis on ICC, the present research explores IC only as it places primary focus on the intercultural aspects of English language teaching. This study emphasizes IC rather than communicative competence because training students' language competence is already considered the main task in foreign language instruction, while a multicultural focus is becoming more imperative in enabling students to mingle in the global environment (Moeller & Nugent, 2014).

Scholars have offered a variety of definitions of IC. A widely accepted definition of IC among researchers (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1999; Fantini, 2006; Wiseman & Koester, 1993) is “the ability to interact effectively with people with different cultures other than one’s own” as Byram (2000, p. 297) wrote. According to Byram, IC is composed of intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes, awareness, and skill sets. Sharma et al. (2009) shared a similar notion of IC, and stressed IC conceptualizes the cultural knowledge of the target language society, and the competence to cope with cultural differences in cross-cultural interaction. Similarly, Bennett and Bennett (2004) defined IC as “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (p. 149). They noted an individual could achieve effective communication because of the attitudes, skills, and concepts they gained from experiencing and communicating with people from diverse origins. Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009) considered IC “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent cognitive, affective, and behavioral orientations to the world” (p. 7). Spitzberg and Chagnon highlight the various cultural backgrounds as a cause of cognitive, affective, and behavioral variations that led to cultural differences. All these researchers defined IC as the capacity to achieve successful cross-cultural communication with people from various cultures and countries.

As per Byram et al. (2002), IC consists of five components: (a) knowledge, which involved the understanding of the social groups and practices in one's own and the interlocutor's countries; (b) attitudes, which include being open-minded and curious about oneself and others' values and beliefs, as well as being willing to modify of preconceived notions about other cultures; (c) skills to understand, which is the capacity to analyze, evaluate, and relate a cultural issue or event to one's own culture; (d) skills to learn, which include the capacity to

acquire new cultural knowledge and engage in genuine communication; and (e) awareness, which involves evaluating one's own and other cultures critically. Researchers stated that among these IC components, cultural attitudes were the foundation of IC, and they considered cultural knowledge an important factor to help learners mingle with the global community (Byram, 2000; Byram et al., 2002; Estaji & Rahimi, 2018; Gorjian & Aghvami, 2017). Moreover, Byram thought skills of discovery and interaction helped the communicator master new cultural knowledge as well as utilize the knowledge and attitudes in real interaction. Furthermore, other researchers (e.g., Byram, 2012; Fantini, 2012; Liddicoat, 2002; Schulz, 2007) emphasized that the cultural awareness needs to be seen as the core IC component in foreign language education because critical awareness may enhance the development of cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Meanwhile, all IC components were thought to be highlighted in IC implementation because of their interrelatedness (Fantini, 2009).

Byram's conceptualization of IC encompasses a wide range of IC aspects that have been offered in the existing literature, proving that Byram's five components of IC constitute the most appropriate definition of IC (Sercu, 2006). It has also been evaluated that Byram's IC conceptualization is the most comprehensive and influential in the field of foreign language teaching and provides direction for the development of students' IC (Harjanne & Tella, 2012). Although widely used, Byram's model has been criticized for being too Eurocentric (Risager, 2007). To ensure that Byram's model is effectively applied in non-Western contexts, local cultural values need to be taken into account (Alred et al., 2003). The current study will adhere to Byram's definition of IC and its constituents, particularly cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, awareness, and skill sets.

2.3 Importance of IC in foreign language education

Language and culture have been shown to involve in an interactive and interdependent connection in foreign language education (Ho, 2009). Through learning a language, learners can know the country's culture, history and people's lifestyles (Chen, 2015). Remarkably, Qin and Tian (2008) unearthed that when people learn a foreign language, they need to learn how to communicate in that language and learn about the culture connected to it. Particularly in the era of globalization and internationalization of higher education, foreign language teaching and learning should pay extra attention to cultural elements. As Baker (2008) cautioned, it would be impractical to separate language learning from learning about the target culture. Therefore, IC has been regarded as a component of competency as well as an integral part of foreign language education at all educational levels, but particularly in higher education (Laopongharn & Sercombe, 2009). This idea implies that the curriculum should view language teaching and culture teaching as one integrated whole rather than two separate parts. Previous studies indicate that teaching about the target culture enhances student's language proficiency, intercultural communication skills, and other competencies. Li's (2017) study in China, for instance, showed that integrating IC training into the EFL curriculum enhanced students' language skills and eagerness to learn while simultaneously building their confidence in IC and intercultural communication. According to Gorjian and Aghvami (2017), the IC intervention course helped students become more conscious of their cultural background and improve their reading comprehension and communication skills. Samovar et al. (2012) concluded that IC-integrated English language programs can help students close the cultural gaps and improve their intercultural communication skills.

Otherwise, as Hejazi et al. (2015) warned in their research in Iran, English language learners would be biased against unfamiliar cultures. In their research, Hejazi et al. revealed English

language learners who do not notice cultural aspects might have prejudices against different cultures and have an inflexible mind in language comprehension. The study considered the factors that hindered the reading comprehension of 228 learners in Iran. The researchers employed actual TOEFL reading tests and the Home Culture Attachment Scale questionnaire to assess the relation between the participants' reading scores and the extent they attach to their home culture. Findings demonstrated that learners who got lower reading scores had higher attachment to home culture awareness, especially in terms of nationality and religion. This study stresses that lack of IC, embodied in biased attitudes towards certain beliefs, may limit learners' reading skills. This shows that if learners do not pay attention to cultural aspects they will not be able to acquire the language well and implies that IC instruction will help increase language achievement and cultural understanding.

In Vietnam, the value of IC in foreign language education has increased as a result of higher education being more globally connected (Tran & Dang, 2014). Cross-cultural communication has been increasingly important as a requirement of the participation process since Vietnam joined the ASEAN, the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, and the World Trade Organization (Quyen, 2018). In the increasingly interconnected world of today, becoming an intercultural speaker is crucial for foreign language learners, and particularly learners of English (Tran & Duong, 2015b). Beginning with the ASEAN Economic Community 2015, residences from every country of the ASEAN community have been exposed to more opportunities to work, study or travel in ASEAN nations (ASEAN, 2008; Tran & Duong, 2015b). Additionally, there have been prejudices and discriminations among Vietnamese people due to differences in cultures (Cu, 2021). In his study in 2015, Cu indicated that the differences in cultural backgrounds among people from different regions of Vietnam are one cause of discriminations and conflicts between them. To avoid the problems,

Vietnamese individuals must connect and communicate well in cross-cultural settings, respect other people's cultures, and learn to live with cultural differences. According to Tran and Duong (2015b), IC is a necessary ability in the modern context to assure harmony in intercultural communication, and IC practices in EFL settings could improve teachers' and students' intercultural awareness as well as help them avoid cultural shocks, misunderstandings and even conflicts. Their point of view is reinforced by T. L. Nguyen (2013), who stated that the overall objective in foreign language education is to prepare students to become effective intercultural speakers, or to enhance students' IC. In addition, P. T. Tran (2020) revealed in her study findings that IC teaching can help enhance students' intercultural sympathy, tolerance and sensitivity, widen their worldviews, as well as improve their language skills and learning motivations. The above results show that teaching IC not only helps students meet the requirements for intercultural communication but also helps them develop internal factors and empathy.

The current study examined IC inclusion in foreign language education, especially in teaching EFL, because EFL teachers and students as well as the EFL curricula are the most appropriate for IC integration. Compared to teachers within other major social studies education, EFL teachers generally include more IC-relevant content because they need to cultivate EFL learners to blend with other cultures and mingle in intercultural environments (Tran & Duong, 2015a). Therefore, they are the most appropriate to be examined about their IC teaching. IC is also crucial for EFL students. EFL students and graduates will potentially be involved in intercultural contact. They must be equipped with IC to become successful intercultural speakers in the globalized world (Tran & Duong, 2015b). Investigating IC integration in the EFL curriculum has implications for promoting EFL students' IC and also increasing IC teaching and learning in the future. In addition, EFL curricula contain many

English-majored courses in which teaching resources include authentic materials about many countries and cultures (Ho & Ton, 2020). Compared to the curricula of other majors, EFL curricula are more suitable to provide learners with knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding various cultures, which best enables IC teaching and learning.

2.4 IC integration into EFL curricula and teachers' perceptions and experiences

Few studies have examined EFL teachers' perceptions of and experiences with IC integration in conjunction with the existence of IC in EFL curricula. According to Ho's (2011) evaluation, the EFL curriculum frameworks of two undergraduate English major programs at two Vietnamese institutions placed insufficient focus on the importance of cultural learning. Data from questionnaires, class observations, and interviews with 14 EFL teachers showed that the teachers give culture a low priority in EFL teaching. This shows that there is a large gap in the curricula being used, which may impair students' comprehensive IC development. In a similar vein, Ruiz and Spínola's (2019) study in Cuba, which examined an English language course and interviewed ten teachers, showed that while the course's cultural objectives were clearly stated, language competency was given more weight in the curriculum than IC. With this imbalance in curriculum design, students are not fully equipped with the intercultural skills needed to communicate in real-world situations.

Other research related to analysis of curriculum documents also showed that some of the five IC components were emphasized more than others. In their research in 2015, Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak revealed EFL curriculum documents in 14 countries and territories (i.e., Brazil, Croatia, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, Hong Kong, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Singapore, Sweden, and Czech Republic) focused more on cultural knowledge and cultural attitudes than developing the critical cultural awareness and skills needed for effective

communication. These curricula will make students highly knowledgeable of knowledge and cultural attitudes but they hardly apply the skills effectively in real communication. In a similar vein, the findings from Dlasaka's (2000) research in the United Kingdom revealed EFL curriculum documents rarely create opportunities to raise students' critical cultural awareness. This is a real shortcoming because when students do not have opportunities to engage and reflect the cultural differences, their IC cannot fully develop.

In addition, in the curriculum theory proposed by Snyder et al. (1992), there were fidelity, adaptation, and enactment models to indicate the relationship between the planned curriculum and the implemented curriculum. The model for measuring fidelity of implementation (Molla & Lee, 2012; Ruiz-Primo, 2005) was chosen as it was the most suitable with the present study. Five criteria to gauge implementation fidelity were listed as (a) adherence—whether the intervention's components are being delivered as intended; (b) duration—the quantity, length, or frequency of sessions carried out; (c) quality of delivery—how well the program is delivered by the implementer using the procedures, processes, or techniques outlined; (d) participant responsiveness—how much participation is shown in the program's activities and content; and (e) program differentiation—whether the program's essential elements are present or absent during implementation (Dusenbury et al., 2003). This model emphasizes the importance of teaching content, teaching methods, program adherence and responsiveness to students' needs, and also shows the complexity of applying the program into practice.

Furthermore, research focusing solely on the EFL teachers' opinions and practices reveals that these teachers have conflicting ideas about instructing IC. Vo (2017), for instance, conducted interviews and questionnaires with 108 EFL teachers in Vietnam. Although the teachers' responses indicated that they had favorable opinions of IC integration, they seldom

engaged IC activities in the classroom because of the shortages of time, teaching resources for teaching IC, IC contents in the teaching curriculum, and intercultural environments for communication. This suggests that even when teachers recognize the importance of IC, they are still unable to implement IC teaching due to many systemic barriers. These barriers require the university support and curriculum changes. Similar findings were indicated in P. T. Tran's (2020) study findings in Vietnam in which the teachers' views of IC implementation of IC collected from the interviews mismatched their IC practices observed in the classrooms.

Moreover, the teacher participants in L. Nguyen et al.' (2016) research reported that they had little information on the government education policy as well as on the innovations in language and culture teaching; and they were not aware of their role in teaching culture. Similarly, Young and Sachdev's (2011) research in the United Kingdom, the United States, and France employing diaries, focus groups, and questionnaires uncovered that EFL teachers considered IC as less significant in the classroom because they believed it to be necessary but impractical. Such a view creates a vicious cycle where IC is not valued and not taught properly, and students will not be able to acquire the skills needed to communicate interculturally in a multicultural environment.

On the contrary, as presented in Sercu's (2005) study employing a questionnaire with 150 foreign language teachers in Belgium, many teacher participants felt that spending class time on helping students build their IC was not worthwhile because they thought students needed language competence more. In the same vein, Thi's (2019) research in Vietnam found that Byram's five components of IC were not sufficiently reflected in EFL teachers' conceptions of IC. As such, they seldom developed students' IC to a satisfactory level and prioritized only language competence. Focusing on language teaching rather than IC teaching may deprive students of the opportunity to effectively use the language they learn in intercultural

situations. Thi stressed EFL teachers devoted most of their teaching time to the activities that trained students' linguistic competence, and they addressed IC only when the cultural issues were explicit or in the contexts that required cultural explanations. Her finding is in alignment with T. L. Nguyen's (2013) study in Vietnam revealing teachers neglected many of the cultural contents mentioned in the textbooks and only incidentally discussed culture in class. These outcomes corroborate Aguilar's (2007) discovery that teachers think IC instruction is inferior in their classroom practices.

Current studies on teachers' experiences with IC demonstrate that IC is not applied well in EFL teaching. For example, Castro et al.'s (2004) research, involving 35 EFL teachers in Spain, found that teachers allotted only approximately 20 percent of their class time to discussing culture, and that teachers' IC instruction primarily concentrated on intercultural knowledge, excluding intercultural skills, attitudes, and awareness. Furthermore, through interviews with 15 EFL teachers at a Vietnamese university, T. L. Nguyen (2013) identified that while setting cultural objectives, the majority of teachers limited their objectives to imparting cultural knowledge and cultural attitudes rather than developing all IC components necessary for communication.

Likewise, teacher participants in Sercu's (2005) study conducted in Belgium acknowledged that they addressed IC primarily by transferring cultural knowledge to students through common topics including customs, daily routines, food and drink. Another study conducted in Finland by Larzén-Östermark (2008) also brought attention to this deficiency. In it, teachers responded their IC activities were merely providing students with factual cultural information than giving them genuine communication opportunities to exercise their IC skills. These results are consistent with Thi's (2019) conclusion that teachers typically transmitted cultural knowledge to students rather than fully and thoroughly developing every component of IC

and L. Nguyen et al.'s (2016) explanation that teachers' IC practices depended heavily on and were mostly limited to the content provided in the materials.

Regarding the five IC components developed for EFL students, they did not receive equal emphasis. Thi's (2019) research on teachers' perceptions of IC in terms of Byram's (1997) five IC components indicated all the teacher participants highlighted the role of cultural knowledge over the other four components and paid more attention to the differences between the Vietnam culture and other countries' cultures. Meanwhile, the findings from Fantini (2012), Byram (2012), Liddicoat (2002) and Schulz's (2007) research indicated cultural critical awareness was considered a fundamental element in developing people's cross-cultural competence. Additionally, Byram (2009) and Byram et al. (2002) concluded the communicators' cultural attitudes were considered the foundation of IC development, and their cultural attitudes would make them willing to discover other people's experiences. Furthermore, Gorjian and Aghvami (2017) determined that cultural knowledge was more necessary for students' engagement in their future careers and helped them mingle within the global community.

2.5 Influential factors that condition the implementation of IC

According to empirical research (e.g., Gonen & Saglam, 2012; T. L. Nguyen, 2013; Vo, 2017; Zhou, 2011), the influential factors of IC teaching and learning include (a) class time dedicated to IC teaching; (b) the existence of IC-relevant contents in the curriculum and teaching materials; (c) language-focused EFL assessment systems; (d) teachers' intercultural experiences and teacher training; (e) class size; and (f) the intercultural communication environment. These important factors can be displayed at the macro, meso, and micro levels.

2.5.1 Class time for IC teaching

The limited amount of time allotted to IC in EFL lessons is the most frequently mentioned constraint. The majority of class time is spent on language practice due to an overburdened curriculum, leaving teachers with little time to teach IC (Gonen & Saglam, 2012). In his study in 2013 in Vietnam, T. L. Nguyen (2013) conducted classroom observations, field notes, and interviews with EFL teachers, and figured out that the restriction of class time for IC instruction is the biggest difficulty that hinders IC teaching. Vo's (2017) research demonstrated similar results in her study in Vietnam. She reinforced that most teacher participants in her study rarely engaged IC activities in their class due to insufficient class time.

Likewise, in Sercu's (2005) research in Belgium, data from a questionnaire completed by 150 foreign language teachers revealed that teachers had extremely little class time for IC instruction. This study corresponds with Zhou's (2011) research in China involving EFL teachers' experiences with IC. Through a survey with 201 university teachers and interviews with eight of them, Zhou showed that the limitation of class time impeded IC implementation in EFL teaching. These studies have something in common with Hong's (2008) and P. T. Tran's (2020) work revealing that EFL teachers rarely have enough class time to include culture-related contents in their EFL classes.

2.5.2 IC relevant curriculum contents and teaching materials

Zhou (2011) emphasized that EFL teachers need assistance from the curricula and instructional resources to implement IC. According to Gonen and Saglam's (2012) research conducted in Turkey, IC activities in EFL classrooms were significantly influenced by the

teaching curriculum. In their study through questionnaires and interviews with 60 Turkish EFL teachers, Gonen and Saglam found that the teaching curriculum typically served as the guide for teachers' IC practices. They argued that while EFL teachers could possess some intercultural understanding, teachers' IC integration may be restricted if the course syllabus lacks IC materials. In the interviews, two of the study's eight teacher participants said they were required to teach the fixed language content according to the course syllabus which allowed little space for IC integration.

In addition, the key to IC cultivation is the use of textbooks and other resources with more intercultural content and IC activities (Dai, 2011). In their research in 2011, Young and Sachdev applied a cultural approach to EFL classes in the United States, United Kingdom, and France and exposed many challenges teacher participants faced related to insufficient IC content. Data from diaries, focus groups, and questionnaires showed constraints in conducting IC instruction include a lack of cultural content and an inadequacy of interculturally based activities. Moreover, T. L. Nguyen (2013) highlighted the integration of culture contents was hindered by a deficiency of helpful teaching resources. Vo (2017) and Young and Sachdev (2011) also shared this opinion. They indicated insufficient IC contents in the curricula and a dearth of appropriate IC teaching resources could jeopardize teachers' instruction of IC.

2.5.3 Traditional EFL assessment system

A noticable barrier to the development of students' IC is the test-based educational framework that prioritizes assessing students' language competence. T. L. Nguyen (2013) observed in his research on how Vietnamese teachers incorporated culture into language teaching that because assessments and exams solely evaluated students' language proficiency,

teachers gave priority to language proficiency and devalued culture. In a similar vein, Zhou (2011) found that teachers were under a lot of pressure to fulfill students' language exam requirements, and that emphasis trumped numerous potential for IC cultivation. Due to their heavy workloads, students wanted to learn only information related to the tests rather than IC, so teachers tended to focus on test-relevant content.

In contrast, it has been demonstrated that IC assessment is insufficient for teaching EFL. Gu's (2016) investigation of Chinese university EFL teachers' attitudes towards IC assessment and implementation revealed they were prepared to measure IC, but their understanding of IC conceptualization was unclear, so the measurement of IC was inadequate. One factor contributing to teachers' deficiencies in teaching and evaluating IC has been highlighted as the absence of resources for material development and administrative assistance. This result is similar to the research conducted in Kazakhstan by Smakova and Paulsrud (2020) regarding the inexperience and ignorance of EFL teachers when it comes to evaluating students' IC. Ho's (2011) and Nguyen et al.'s (2016) studies produced comparable findings: IC was hardly ever promoted in the educational system outside intercultural education.

2.5.4 Teachers' intercultural experience and teacher training on IC teaching

Teachers' intercultural experience and training on IC teaching are important influencing factors in IC implementation (Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Tran & Seepho, 2015). According to the teacher participants in T. L. Nguyen's (2013) study in Vietnam, one constraint to IC integration is teachers' lack of intercultural knowledge. Furthermore, Zhou (2011) demonstrated that teachers' experiences abroad profoundly impacted their IC instruction. Having no broad intercultural expertise derived from life experiences, teachers faced challenges in IC implementation and inspiring their students. Teachers who had no prior

intercultural experience were insecure and frequently avoided addressing IC in their lessons. The results are consistent with Lázár's (2007) observation that teachers' international experiences play a crucial role in facilitating the successful implementation of IC.

In addition to the knowledge they learn from their own experiences, EFL teachers must receive adequate professional training on IC teaching. Without sufficient training on IC and pedagogical methods, teachers cannot effectively carry out IC activities and instruction. They will also face challenges in measuring students' IC level and the changes in students' attitudes towards IC (Gonen & Saglam, 2012). The impact of teachers' training on IC instruction was proved to outweigh that of international experiences (Lázár, 2007; Sercu et al., 2005). Vo (2017) showed teachers' lack of training on teaching culture is a challenge in promoting students' IC. The findings support Sercu's (2005) and L. Nguyen et al.'s (2016) viewpoint considering teachers' limited professional training a shortcoming in implementing IC in their language classrooms.

2.5.5 Class size and intercultural environment for communication

Another influential factor to integrating IC into EFL instruction is large class sizes. Due to the challenge of serving a high number of students, teachers find it more difficult to organize IC activities in overcrowded EFL courses. In T. L. Nguyen's (2013) study, teacher participants stated that they rarely addressed cultural aspects because they had to spend more time working with students on language teaching when there were more of them. According to Eken (2015), who conducted semi-structured interviews with five university teachers at a Turkish university, packed classrooms hindered EFL teachers from accomplishing their IC goals.

In addition, an inseparable factor for the development of students' IC is the multicultural communication environment (Jon, 2013). The primary obstacle to students' mastery of IC was identified by EFL teachers in Smakova and Paulsrud's (2020) research conducted in Kazakhstan as the absence of real contexts for intercultural interaction. Similarly, the teachers who took part in Vo's (2017) study in Vietnamese institutions stated that the lack of conditions conducive to intercultural communication was a big hindrance in IC teaching and learning.

2.5.6 Students' interest and motivation in IC learning

One of the factors that impede IC incorporation is students' low interest and motivation in English learning, including IC learning. Students' readiness and cooperation are indispensable during the process of IC implementation. However, students' lack of motivation to learn IC leads to minimal integration of IC in EFL teaching (T. L. Nguyen, 2013). With little time and effort devoted to it, they ignore IC and focus only on language knowledge and skills for examinations. Students' uninterest in IC learning has proved to be caused by their low proficiency of the English language (Tran & Seepho, 2014).

Sercu (2005) and Zhou (2011) also noted teachers face problems when some students are uninterested in IC activities and consider IC irrelevant. When students have low language proficiency, they are not ready to acquire IC. They expect teachers to help them master language competence before teaching them IC (Sercu, 2005). The points are echoed by other studies showing students' low motivation is a challenge hindering teachers' implementation of IC (Eken, 2015; Vo, 2017).

Taken together, current literature shows teachers' ambiguous attitudes towards IC integration and inadequate implementation of IC in practice. Despite their awareness of the role of IC implementation, many EFL teachers seldom engage IC activities in their classrooms due to certain difficulties and put more emphasis on language competence (L. Nguyen et al., 2016; Ruiz & Spínola, 2019; Vo, 2017). When IC in EFL programs in Vietnam has received more attention, further research on teachers' perspectives and practices with IC as well as the enablers and hindrances of IC implementation will be needed to lessen the discrepancy between EFL teachers' attitudes and practices of IC and to foster the proper implementation of IC in EFL classroom practices. Existing research on the influencing factors of IC integration did not provide a thorough examination of the multilayered contextual factors in line with Vietnam's EFL administrative framework. In order to identify the factors that affect IC teaching at the macro, meso, and micro levels, this study adopts a systematic approach. Furthermore, the way that IC is addressed in EFL curricula has received little attention. By illustrating the picture of IC integration in EFL curricula and classroom activities, this study advances the existing literature. It explores at how IC is included into the EFL curriculum, how teachers view and practice IC instruction, and what influences the implementation of IC.

2.6 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for the current study was developed from Byram's (2009) IC model. In his IC model, Byram described the crucial constituents of IC (knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skill sets) as prerequisites for students to become intercultural speakers as well as for setting educational objectives of foreign language teaching (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Byram's (2009) Model of IC (p. 323)

Byram (2009) states that the five attributes are:

- Attitudes: showing curiosity and openness towards the communicators' values and others', and willingness to change their preconceived ideas about other cultures or modify the beliefs about their own culture;
- Knowledge: understanding how social groups function and what goes into intercultural interaction in their country and the countries of their interlocutors;
- Skills of interpreting and relating: having the ability to understand and relate cultural issues or events to those in their own culture;
- Skills of discovery and interaction: possessing the capacity to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real-time interactions;

- Critical cultural awareness: showing the ability to critically evaluate the practices of their own and other cultures or countries.

Compared to other IC models, Byram's (2009) IC model is significantly more influential and more commonly recognized. It is the IC framework that works best for EFL teaching. Every IC component in Byram's model was developed as a goal for teaching foreign languages (Baroudi, 2017). Each component of IC is thoroughly explained in order to provide guiding principles for IC instruction and evaluation (Harjanne & Tella, 2012). Remarkably, Borghetti (2012) indicated that Byram's IC model has well-defined IC components that teachers can easily and independently employ in the classroom.

Byram's (2009) IC model has been extensively used in many research about teachers' perceptions of and practices with IC, organizing IC activities, and developing and evaluating students' IC. In particular, Thi (2019) investigated whether teachers' perceptions of IC aligned with the five elements put forth in Byram's IC model. In a similar vein, Smakova and Paulsrud (2020) followed those IC elements in the model to investigate the perceptions and awareness of IC among EFL teachers in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the IC activities in EFL classrooms were designed using Byram's IC model, as noted in the works of Vo (2017) and Quyen (2018). Additionally, Byram's IC model played a crucial role in Vu and Dinh's (2021) investigation into how students perceived IC and what IC learning outcomes they achieved based on the five IC components. They recommended making changes to the curricular documents, teaching practices, and even policies utilizing Byram's IC constituents.

Despite being extensively accepted and employed in language education, Byram's IC model has drawn criticism from certain academics. First off, it should be noted that the model does not take into account the cultural relativity of the learners' own culture; instead, it

concentrates mostly on the cultural differences between the learners and the target culture. Rather than fostering international understanding, this model may result in oversimplification and misconceptions about other cultures (Khan et al., 2023). This critique suggests the necessity of developing IC in language teaching through a context-specific methodology. Second, Byram's model is critiqued by Avgousti (2018) for not sufficiently address the role of emotional intelligence in intercultural communication and for emphasizing the cognitive aspects of international communication (such as cultural knowledge). Without a due emphasis on emotions, the model's capacity to foster empathy and cross-cultural understanding may be reduced. The model which highly values cognitive seems to overlook affective and behavioral aspects of intercultural encounters. Third, the model does not clarify the relationships between its components which may hamper a comprehensive knowledge of how IC is formed and implemented in real-life settings. Its educational application is similarly restricted to defining the components' scope, articulating learning goals, and directing evaluation of learner results (Matsuo, 2014).

In order to better understand teachers' experiences with what enables or hinders their IC implementation, the multilayered influential factors of IC integration—which are connected to the factor inquiry—are added to Byram's IC model in the current study (Figure 2).

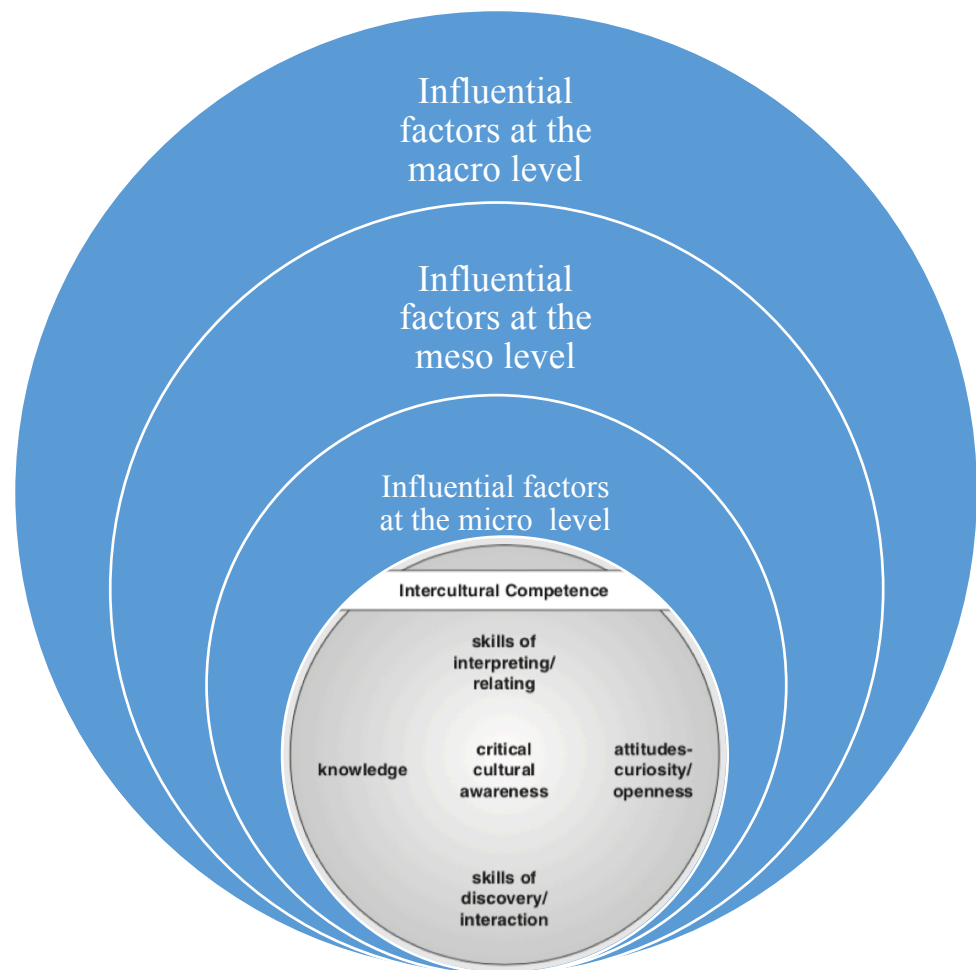


Figure 2 Conceptual framework in the current study

The macro, meso, and micro levels in the conceptual framework were divided according to the EFL administrative structure in Vietnam. The macro-level enabling and inhibiting factors in this study are those that are subject to the determination of both national (the Vietnamese government and the Ministry of Education and Training) and international levels. The factors at the meso level are those that the faculty of foreign languages and the university can solve. The factors at the micro level involves individuals including teachers and students. The factor presented in a multi-layered structure shows the interconnection and complexity of the influential factors and suggests systemic solutions from many levels of authorities.

Using this conceptual framework, the study addressed Research Question 1 (which deals with how IC is rationalized and addressed in the curriculum) by following the five IC components when collecting data from interviews with curriculum designers and by examining the course outlines and curriculum framework to find possible places for IC development in terms of awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and skill sets. The conceptual framework served as the guideline by which the protocols for observations and interviews were designed in order to collect data for Research Question 2, which concerned teachers' perceptions and implementations of IC. Regarding Research Question 3 (involving the influential factors of IC implementation), this study used this theoretical framework to systematically analyse the influential factors of IC inclusion experienced by teachers across the macro, meso, and micro levels. This systematic analysis offered a thorough grasp of the opportunities and obstacles for IC integration.

2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter presented how different researchers defined IC and indicated Byram's five constituents of IC is the most precise way to define IC, and it showed how this study has adhered to Byram's notion of IC and its elements, including knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skill sets. The chapter also highlighted the value of IC in EFL teaching in terms of enhancing students' language ability, intercultural communication skills, and other abilities. In addition, it proved the internationalization of higher education increasingly requires the inclusion of IC in English language education; therefore, becoming intercultural speakers is necessary for EFL students.

In this chapter, a critical review of literature in the field showed limited research has analyzed the IC-related contents in the EFL curricula together with teachers' perspectives of and

experiences with IC integration. Extant research on EFL teachers' perceptions and practices has shown teachers had ambiguous attitudes towards IC teaching, and IC was inadequately implemented in EFL classrooms. Empirical research has indicated the important factors that facilitates or prevents teachers from embedding IC into their teaching practices. They include class time allotted for IC teaching, IC relevant contents in the curriculum and teaching materials, a language-focused assessment system, teacher training on IC teaching and teachers' intercultural experiences, big class size, and intercultural environments.

The conceptual framework for the current study was developed on the basis of adopting Byram's (2009) IC model to help address the three research questions. It served as the guideline to the data collection from the curriculum designers' interviews and the analysis of the EFL curriculum framework and course outlines to figure out the existence of IC in the regard of cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, critical awareness and skill sets. Additionally, the conceptual framework helped analyze teachers' attitudes towards IC integration and their practices with IC on the basis of the five IC dimensions. The study also used the framework mentioned above to identify the influential factors that teachers experienced during their IC integration. The factors were systematically analyse across the macro, meso, and micro levels.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides details regarding the explanation of the study's methodology. It commences by outlining the research design, study context and participants. Subsequently, it reiterates the research questions introduced in chapter 1 and elaborates the data collection methods used for each research question. In the following parts, the procedure and data analysis approach are presented, with consideration given to the trustworthiness of the data collection, analysis methods and ethical issues. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

3.2 Research design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach. As Maxwell (2013) pointed out, qualitative research can help shed light on explaining and describing a phenomenon rather than numbers, and it focuses on the process rather than the outcomes. Thus, it aided an in-depth understanding of the process of IC integration and the factors that affects that process. From that, the participants in this study perceived the significance of IC inclusion and indicated their opinions about the experiences they engage in. In addition, Fairbrother (2007) reinforced that qualitative methods can best explore and transmit research participants' perceptions and experiences. Qualitative research relies on "meanings, concepts, context, descriptions, and settings" (Picciano, 2004, p.32) and enabled identification of unanticipated phenomena and opinions from open-ended answers from the respondents (Maxwell, 2008).

In order to obtain the findings that are as close to reality as possible, this study employed a case study design and a university with an ethnically diverse student population as the case to gather contextualized data to help investigate a contemporary, real-life context through extensive, insightful descriptions and analysis involving multiple data collection methods (Creswell, 2018).

3.3 Research site

The research site for the present study was a university located in Kien Giang Province, Vietnam. This university was selected due to its culturally diverse campus and surrounding areas, which necessitate IC in daily communication. The cultural diversity of the people living in the district where the University is located renders it a representative case in terms of culturally diverse for investigating IC development. Among the residents there, the Kinh people group (the majority ethnic group in Vietnam) makes up 61.12%; the Khmer ethnic group accounts for 31.28%; the Chinese ethnic group makes up 7.52%; and other minority ethnic groups (Cham, Dao, Tay, Muong) make up 0.07% (People's Committee of Kien Giang Province, 2019). There is even a community of Khmer people in the area around the university. The population in the surrounding districts also have diverse cultural backgrounds. The minority ethnic groups make up from 12.57% to 17.8% of the total population of those districts. In addition, the development of students' IC in the research site is essential because the university states in its quality policies that it "expands mutually beneficial cooperation relationships with agencies, businesses, employers, domestic and international strategic partners in the field of education and scientific research, as well as creates opportunities for learners to successfully integrate in the international environment" (KG University - Quality Policies, 2021, p. 1).

On the university's campus, there are 70 international students from Indonesia, Laos, and Cambodia. They are sharing the residential hall with local students. The university has certain relations with many foreign organizations and institutions in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Netherlands, Hungary, Thailand, Denmark, the United States, the Philippines, Australia, and Ghana, to name a few. Some cultural exchange activities have been organized in the university such as celebrating Khmer New Year Holidays, organizing cultural camp with Thai teachers, etc. Founded in 2014, the university has graduated 3,200 students and is training 5,699 students studying 22 majors at the undergraduate level. The English Language Education program is one of the most important majors and attracts many students to the university. The Faculty of Foreign Languages, with 17 staff, is in charge of training students enrolled in the English Language Education program and teaching general English for students of all majors in the university. It has produced 420 graduates and is teaching 690 English-major students. With such a multicultural context, the university could be the best representative to be the research site for exploring IC integration.

3.4 Sample selection

To find the answers to the research questions, the current study employed purposeful sampling (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) to select only EFL teachers who were engaged in teaching IC related courses in the English Language Education program and matched the study's requirements. Three key criteria were used to choose the participants: (1) having taught EFL in the research site for at least five years; (2) having taught courses with potential content for IC implementation; and (3) providing permission for interviews and class observations. The researcher approached the potential participants by seeing the faculty members' information on the faculty website, seeing the list of course teachers (to know who taught IC related courses and the courses with potential IC content), and talking to the

potential participants. In order to guarantee that the participants differed in several aspects, including age, gender, ethnicity, and overseas experiences, the maximal variation strategy was applied (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

While determining the number of participants in the current study, the researcher took the sample size in previous research in the field into consideration and followed Kvale's (2007) recommendations. The majority of related research (e.g., Ho, 2011; T. L. Nguyen, 2013; Ruiz & Spínola, 2019; Thi, 2019; Vo, 2017) involve 6-15 participants in the qualitative phase. Kvale also suggested that 15 ± 10 participants are typically included in qualitative research. Therefore, eight teachers from the Faculty of Foreign Languages who matched the participation requirements above were chosen to be the teacher participants in the study. After informing the participants of the study's goal, the researcher had them sign informed consent forms.

3.5 Participants

With the criteria for sample selection mentioned above, eight teachers of the Faculty of Foreign Languages in the university (including two curriculum designers) were chosen to be the participants for the interviews about teachers' perspectives and practices with IC integration. The two curriculum designers were the ones who designed the EFL curriculum framework and designed some course outlines in the curriculum. They were also the faculty leaders who chose the textbooks (published by prestige publication houses) for teaching language skills and endorsed other course books compiled by teachers.

Among these eight teacher participants, one teacher has taught the course American and British Culture, which is a huge source of cultivating IC, while the other seven teachers have

taught courses with potential content for IC implementation. Moreover, 3 of the 8 participants got long-term professional training in foreign countries, while the other five have not had any overseas experiences or have traveled abroad for less than a week. Furthermore, 2 of the 8 participants are the curriculum designers of the English Language Education program who participated in additional interviews on designers' perspectives apart from the teacher interviews mentioned above. All participants, three male teachers and five female teachers, voluntarily participated in the study. They are all Kinh people (people from the majority group in Vietnam), have a doctorate or Master of Arts (MA) in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), and have ages from 28 to 46 years old. Each participant was given a pseudonym, and only their pseudonyms were used when the researcher presented the findings of the research. Table 1 provides demographic information about the participants.

Table 1 Demographic information about the participants

Participant pseudonym	Age	Gender	Teaching experience
Bach	46	Male	24 years
Tung	39	Male	14 years
Phuong	31	Female	10 years
Nhai	44	Female	20 years
Sen	32	Female	8 years
Duong	32	Male	7 years
Hue	28	Female	6 years
Trang	30	Female	8 years

The most experienced teacher participant taking part in the study is Bach, 46 years old. He is an EFL teacher and also a curriculum designer of the English Language Program. He obtained a doctorate in Linguistics and has been teaching English for 24 years. He has taught many English major courses, such as Scientific Research Methodology, Teaching Methodology, Phonetics and Morphology, Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing.

The second teacher joining as a participant is Tung, 39 years old. He is an EFL teacher and a curriculum designer of the English Language Program. He has 14 years of teaching

experience and earned an MA in English Language Teaching. He has taught many courses for English major students, such as Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Translation, Interpretation, Theory of Translation, Introduction to English Language, Semantics and Syntax, and Phonology.

Phuong, the third teacher participant, is a 31-year-old EFL teacher. She obtained her MA in English Language Teaching and has had 10 years of teaching experience. She has taught many courses, including Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Grammar, Translation for Environmental Studies, Theory of Translation, Scientific Research Methodology, American and British Literature, American and British Culture, and Phonetics and Morphology.

The fourth teacher participant, Nhai, 44 years old, is another experienced EFL teacher. She earned an MA in English Language Teaching and has 20 years of teaching experience. She usually teaches courses such as Listening, Reading, Writing, Grammar, Theory of Translation, Translation: Tourism and Travel, Translation of Office Correspondence, Technical Translation, Phonetics and Morphology, and Semantics and Syntax.

Sen, the fifth teacher participant, is 32 years old. She holds an MA in English Language Teaching and has been teaching English for 8 years. She has taught some courses on language skills such as Listening, Speaking, and Reading.

The study's sixth teacher participant is Duong, 32 years old. He obtained his MA in English Language Teaching and has had 7 years of teaching experience. He usually teaches the Listening, Writing, Grammar, and Phonology courses.

The seventh teacher participant, Hue, 28 years old, is the youngest among the eight teacher participants. She obtained her MA in English Language Teaching and has been teaching English for 6 years. The courses she has taught include Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Grammar.

The eighth teacher participant is Trang, 30 years old. She has an MA in English Language Teaching and has been an EFL teacher for 8 years. She has taught some language skills courses such as Listening, Speaking, and Reading.

3.6 Data collection methods and procedures

To triangulate data collection and analysis, the study employed documentary review, class observations, and interviews with curriculum designers and teachers to help collect rich data and offer an overall view of IC inclusion in the EFL program. The utilization of multiple data collection methods can guarantee triangulation and bolster the study's trustworthiness (Gibbs, 2007). The documentary review provided the main source of information about IC inclusion in the curriculum; the interviews supplied in-depth understandings of teachers' practices and experiences with IC; and the class observations strengthened the validity of the conclusions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 2 guided the data collection. The methods of data collection are described in Table 2.

Table 2 Methods of data collection in the study

Research questions	Data collection methods	Participants
1. How is IC rationalized by curriculum designers and addressed in the EFL curriculum?	Interviews Documentary review	2 curriculum designers/teachers
2. How do EFL teachers perceive and implement IC in practice?	Interviews Class observations	All 8 teachers All 8 teachers
3. From teachers' perspectives, what factors facilitate or hinder the integration of IC into EFL teaching practices?	Interview	All 8 teachers

For Research Question 1, specifically, in order to determine how IC is included in the course outlines and curricular framework for the university's Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English Language Program, which has been in place since 2019, the researcher used documentary review and interviews with curriculum designers. Out of the 70 course outlines in the English

Language Program, 48 were selected for analysis since they are part of the English-taught professional educational knowledge courses. Other general education courses which are offered in Vietnamese and are taught to students in all majors were not chosen for analysis. In accordance with the conceptual framework, this study examined these materials to determine how the IC components—knowledge, attitudes, abilities, and awareness—were expressed in the curriculum documents. Examining the materials provided a “primary source of data” for this research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 57), and helped contrast the IC potential contents in the course outlines and IC instruction in the teacher participants’ IC practices.

Furthermore, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with two curriculum designers as part of this study to explore their understanding of the integration of IC contents into the EFL curriculum. In this study, interviews are ideal since they enable the researcher to better comprehend the viewpoints and experiences of the participants (Kvale, 2007). The researcher employed the semi-structured interview as it “facilitates a strong element of discovery” (Gillham, 2005, p. 72), and allows the researcher greater flexibility in rearranging the questions, changing their wording, or asking for clarifications as needed (Berg, 2009). The main interview questions included “What is your understanding of including IC in the EFL program?”; “What kinds of content regarding IC have you considered crucial to be integrated when planning the curriculum? And why?”; and “To what extent have IC contents been addressed in the EFL curriculum?” The time and place for each interview were negotiated with each participant. The interviews were conducted individually in Vietnamese, the native language of the participants. With the participants’ consent, each interview was audio recorded and lasted roughly one hour.

For Research Question 2, the researcher opted for class observations and semi-structured interviews with eight teachers (including two curriculum designers) who are the best representatives for the study. The first research method, semi-structured interviews, helped the researcher establish close relationships with the participants and gain profound understanding of teachers' perspectives of IC and their IC teaching. The core interview questions focused on how teachers perceived and implemented IC in their classrooms, mainly “How do you perceive the integration of IC in EFL teaching?”, and “What aspects of IC have you focused on in teaching and why?”

Concurrently with the interviews, the researcher conducted class observations to triangulate data regarding IC integration and to have a closer look at IC teaching in reality. The most suitable method was direct classroom observation since it gave the researcher a clearer picture of the circumstances and allowed her to compare the participants' statements from the interviews with their actual behavior in the classroom (Patton, 2002). In accordance with the observation protocol, the researcher performed “non-participant observation” (Harbon & Shen, 2010, p. 277) and recorded descriptive field notes at each observation. The class observation protocol, which was modified from Cohen et al. (2007) and Creswell (2018), helped with recording what was observed in each class. It mostly concerned whether or not the teacher participants addressed the IC content and which IC components were covered. (See Appendix B for the detailed class observation protocol.) A total of 8 class observations were done, 50 minutes each, and took place at the normal scheduled classes during 4 months in the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. The lessons for observation was chosen on the basis of consultations with the teacher participants. The observation of realtime classes may accurately reflect the real situation of IC teaching and learning practices.

In Research Question 3, semi-structured interviews were administered to the eight teacher participants mentioned above. The interview protocol was made in connection with influential factors of the integration of IC. In particular, the interview questions included “What are the factors that facilitate IC teaching, and how?”, and “What are the factors that hinder IC teaching, and how?”

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted as soon as each interview, observation, or review was completed. To examine the data from the curriculum documents, interviews, and observations, the researcher used thematic analysis, which is defined as an approach for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting the themes within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Thanks to thematic analysis, the researcher can clearly grasp what is being explored, including what kind of data are being coded, what questions are being addressed, and how the codes relate to one another (Gibbs, 2007). According to Mackison et al. (2019), this approach can also be applied to the textual content of a single document or a collection of documents. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested, theme analysis should be a fundamental method for qualitative analysis, since it requires foundational skills that are applicable to a wide range of qualitative research kinds. The current study’s data analysis procedure adhered to Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis approach, which consists of familiarizing with the data, creating preliminary codes, looking for themes, evaluating themes, defining and labeling themes, and writing the report.

To analyze the curricular materials, the researcher studied them and highlighted the passages that mentioned IC inclusion. Then, initial codes for all highlighted information were created using the conceptual framework's five IC components and a comprehensive review of the

literature as a reference. Throughout the analysis process, further codes might be created and the pre-established coding scheme might be altered. Finding themes from the codes, reviewing them, defining and naming the themes, and writing a report were the next stages of the analysis. In order to get a general idea of which IC aspects were emphasized and how much and how IC contents were addressed, the findings of the curriculum analysis were compared with those from the interviews and field notes from class observations.

After being translated into English and read through, the interview data were coded using concept-driven and data-driven coding techniques with the aid of NVivo (Gibbs, 2007). Concept-driven coding entailed creating codes based on the conceptual framework (i.e., the five IC components), while data-driven coding involved creating codes based on the data (i.e., the responses of the participants) rather than depending upon pre-existing concepts (Gibbs, 2007). Deductive data analysis was utilized in this study to categorize important codes from the conceptual framework, while inductive data analysis was also employed to extract novel concepts from participant responses (Merriam, 2009). The interview data were analyzed question by question, looking for codes both inside and between the questions. The codes were then collapsed into themes that have definitions and names. The researcher then used word processing software to (a) select similarly coded texts, (b) review and compare them across various interviews to look for repetition to saturate the themes, and (c) cross-check the emerging themes while preserving the diversity of themes among the respondents (Maxwell, 2013). Afterwards, the themes were then condensed into a manageable collection in order to facilitate the creation of an understandable report on the findings of the interviews.

To analyze the classroom observation field notes, the researcher thoroughly read and comprehended all descriptive notes before formulating initial ideas about the coding categories and the connections between them. Next, the concept-driven coding strategy was used to code the notes based on the observation protocol. Additional unique or unexpected codes that supported IC integration procedures were also added through the data-driven coding approach,. Accordingly, data were analyzed deductively with the codes from the observation protocol, and inductively with the additional codes. Subsequently, similar codes were categorized and scrutinized for conceptual overlaps to construct broad themes. For the purpose of accurately reflecting IC teaching and learning activities, the themes of various observations were contrasted. Afterwards, the themes were analyzed and narrowed down by choosing the most prevalent themes and themes with the strongest supporting data to create a report on teachers' IC practices. The findings from classroom observations were compared with the outcomes from the interviews and documentary review to identify the similarities and differences.

3.8 Trustworthiness

In addition to testing validation using a validation checklist developed by Maxwell (2013), a number of strategies were used to guarantee the reliability and validity of the data collection and analysis methods. To ensure that the data and interpretations were as accurate as possible, proofreading and pilot interviews were done beforehand. After discussing the interview protocol with her supervisors, the researcher performed pilot interviews with two EFL teachers who were not part of the official interview process. After that, the interview questions were changed to make sure the wording was understandable and straightforward in light of the discussions with supervisors and pilot interviewees.

Moreover, the researcher had to avoid researcher bias and paid attention to researcher reflexivity. For avoiding researcher bias, a thread that could lead to invalid conclusions in qualitative analysis, she considered unexpected ideas and experiences rather than focusing on the information that fit her preconceptions (Maxwell, 2013). Regarding researcher reflexivity, the fact that the researcher is part of the world she is studying, she had to balance her insider and outsider roles in the data collection and analysis processes. The research site is where the researcher has been working, which brought the current study some benefits and limitations. On the one hand, her insider positioning could provide the accessibility towards potential research participants and curriculum documents. On the other hand, as an EFL teacher at the research site, her personal experiences and assumptions could influence the participants' responses as well as the data collection and analysis processes (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher had to understand those influences and describe how they affected the trustworthiness of the interpretations she made from the interviews and observations (Maxwell, 2013). She balanced the insider and outsider roles in the data collection and analysis by avoiding leading questions during interviews and conducting nonparticipant observations instead of participant observations.

The reliability of the data collection and analysis methods was guaranteed by the application of a tactic known as “respondent validation”. In order to prevent bias and misunderstandings of the things that the participants said and performed, feedback from them was necessary during the data interpretation process (Maxwell, 2013). Specifically, the employed triangulation strategies may mitigate the possibility of systematic biases. Data from document analyses, teacher interviews, and class observations were triangulated to determine the relationships among them, cross-check them against the research questions, and guarantee the reliability of data collection and analysis methods (Gibbs, 2007).

3.9 Ethical considerations

The formal data collection process began after the Education University of Hong Kong's Human Research Ethics Committee approved the proposal for ethical review. Participants were approached and introduced to the study. They received the research information sheets and consent forms in person. Individual interviews and class observations were carried out at the convenience of the participants and with permission from the university administration.

Participation was on a voluntary basis, and participants were guaranteed their confidentiality and the freedom to decline or withdraw from the activity at any time. Before the interviews and class observations, each participant received a participant's personal details form, research information, and consent form. The main purpose of collecting personal information was to facilitate the data analysis processes. Each of the participants received a pseudonym, and only their pseudonyms were used when the researcher presented the study's findings. Every piece of information gathered from the observations and interviews was safely archived. The interview recordings and transcripts were stored in the researcher's laptop that was protected by the password. Signed consent forms, printed transcripts, and field notes were held in a secured drawer. After the study is completed, all the documents that contained the participants' personal information will be destroyed.

3.10 Chapter summary

This chapter described the research methodology used in the current study. The study employed the qualitative case study approach to help explore research participants' perspectives of and practices with IC and to explore a contemporary and real-life context through profound description and analysis. A university in Vietnam was chosen as the

research site for the current study because of its ethnically diverse student population and the necessity of IC in daily communication in the campus. This study employed purposeful sampling and set criteria and recruited eight EFL teachers to be the study participants. Multiple data collection methods were used to ensure the triangulation and enhance the trustworthiness of the study. The study employed thematic analysis to give the researcher a clear understanding of what was being investigated.

In addition to testing validation using a validation checklist developed by Maxwell (2013), the study examined researcher reflexivity, researcher bias, and “respondent validation” in order to guarantee the reliability of the data collecting and analyzing methods. The study also paid a paramount consideration to ethical issues. Following the approval of the application for ethical review, the official data collection procedure was carried out. Participants received guarantees about their privacy and the freedom to decline and withdraw from the activity. Their participation was entirely optional, and all information gathered from the observations and interviews was safely kept. After the study was over, all of the materials that contained the participants' personal information were deleted.

Chapter 4: The inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings regarding IC inclusion in the EFL curriculum. Specifically, it presents how IC is rationalized by curriculum designers and subsequently is addressed in EFL curriculum documents. The findings are drawn from interviews with two curriculum designers and from a documentary review.

The first part of this chapter focuses on the curriculum designers' perspectives of the importance of IC and IC integration as well as their perspectives of the IC components to be integrated into the curriculum. The second part presents the findings from the documentary review of the curriculum framework and the course outlines in the curriculum of the English Language Program. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

This chapter addresses Research Question 1: How is IC rationalized by curriculum designers and addressed in the EFL curriculum?

4.2 How IC is rationalized by curriculum designers

To understand how curriculum designers rationalized IC, the researcher conducted interviews with two designers of the EFL curriculum who are EFL teachers and leaders of the Faculty of Foreign Languages. The interviews focused on the curriculum designers' perspectives of the importance of IC and IC integration into the curriculum of the university.

The conceptual framework developed from Byram's (2009) IC model, as presented in Chapter 2, guided the analysis of the current study. This study addressed the first part of Research Question 1 (how IC is rationalized by curriculum designers) by adhering to the five components in the IC model (namely, cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness) when collecting and analyzing data from interviews with the curriculum designers.

Findings from the interviews showed the two curriculum designers had positive perspectives of IC and embedding IC in the curriculum framework. The curriculum designers confirmed IC integration in the university's EFL curriculum is of vital importance to help English-major students use the language correctly and communicate effectively with people from other countries and cultures. They indicated teachers could teach IC explicitly in some culture-related courses and could also exploit potential IC content from the teaching materials for other courses (e.g., Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing).

IC is always essential for English-major students. In the teaching curriculum for English-major students, there are several courses about cultures of many countries, especially English-speaking countries. In addition to these culture-related courses, the teaching materials chosen for other courses in the curriculum (e.g., the courses for language skills, such as Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) do include IC contents either in an explicit way or implicit one. And how these contents are used to develop students' IC depends on each teacher. ... Teachers may introduce students to the cultures of English-speaking countries as well as enhance students' IC from exploiting the contents, including cultural differences that may lead to misunderstandings or communication breakdowns. (Interview with Bach - English translation)

Similarly, in his interview, Tung emphasized the significance of IC and IC implementation in the teaching curriculum of the English Language Program of the university:

The inclusion of IC in the curriculum of the English Language Program is really necessary. When students learn a language, they need to learn the culture of the people who speak that language in order to use the language correctly in every context. By contrast, learning a language without understanding the target culture will cause a mismatch or even conflicts in communication. (English translation)

However, the curriculum designers claimed there were no requirements for including IC, assessing IC, or setting IC objectives in the course outlines in the EFL curriculum of the university. They also found it quite hard to integrate IC into the curriculum; thus, they included IC by referring to other universities' curricula. To them, the inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum was a low priority. A mismatch between the curriculum designers' perspectives and their actions was obvious. They held positive perspectives of IC inclusion. However, with no formal and clear regulations for IC inclusion, they did not design the curriculum framework by themselves in the sense of incorporating IC directly. Instead, they considered and followed other universities' curriculum frameworks and included IC according to what they felt was appropriate.

When my colleagues and I designed the curriculum framework for the English Language Program, we were aware of the importance of including IC in the curriculum. We searched for related information and used the curriculum frameworks of some other universities as a reference. However, there were no formal and clear regulations for IC inclusion. We were not required to set any objectives or expected outcomes in terms of IC. It was very hard to embed IC into the curriculum. Therefore, we included IC by

feeling and on the basis of considering other universities' curricula. (Interview with Tung - English translation)

From the curriculum designers' perspectives, all five components of IC - cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness - should be highlighted in the university's curriculum. However, they considered cultural attitudes the most important component to be developed among students. Bach stated that positive cultural attitudes would enable students to respect the differences between cultures and prevent them from evaluating others' cultures from the view of their own culture. He confirmed in his interview that the right attitudes towards cultures would form students' suitable behaviors for interacting with people from other countries or cultures.

I think the most important element of IC to be developed among students is the cultural attitudes. With the right attitudes, students will have right behaviors. They will respect cultural differences and will not use their own culture as the basis to evaluate the culture of another country or language. In other words, the right cultural attitudes will help students behave correctly with people from other countries or cultures. (Interview with Bach - English translation)

Sharing the same opinion with Bach, Tung emphasized, "I find that the cultural attitudes are among the most vital factors that teachers need to train for students through IC implementation". He acknowledged the inseparable role of cultural knowledge, saying, "I think that cultural knowledge is important, too".

Another IC component the curriculum designers emphasized was critical cultural awareness which was defined as the ability to critically evaluate the practices of their own and other cultures or countries. As the curriculum designers noted, critical cultural awareness would help students realize what cultural differences were good to learn and practice, and which ones were inappropriate to avoid.

Critical cultural awareness can help students select the good aspects to learn from many cultural differences and practice them in their own cultures. Critical thinking can help them realize the inappropriate aspects from other cultures and minimize or avoid using them. (Interview with Bach - English translation)

In addition, skills of interpreting and relating along with skills of discovery and interaction were highly valued. These skills, as Tung explained, could help students understand and relate the cultural knowledge they learned to their own culture, as well as interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in real situations.

The skills of interpreting and relating are very necessary because they can help students understand and relate the cultural knowledge they learned to their own culture and know how to use it appropriately. In addition, the skills of discovery and interaction help students interact effectively with people from different cultures. Without the skills of discovery and interaction, students only keep the knowledge they learned for their own acquisition rather than use it effectively in real-life communications. (Interview with Tung - English translation)

Tung believed all IC components were important but emphasized those two in particular. He stated, “Skills of discovery and interaction and skills of interpreting and relating will facilitate

the acquisition of cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, and critical cultural awareness, and therefore all five components of IC should be focused.”

To evaluate the inclusion of IC in the curriculum, both curriculum designers thought that it was hard to measure the extent of IC inclusion in the EFL curriculum because IC was not clearly addressed. Bach admitted that they intentionally addressed IC in only one course in the curriculum while IC potential contents were accidentally mentioned in the teaching materials of some other courses.

The curriculum does not involve IC very clearly. When we designed the curriculum, we addressed IC only through the course American and British Culture. However, the teaching materials for the other courses accidentally included some potential contents for IC implementation. IC was not mentioned explicitly in most of the courses in the curriculum. (Interview with Bach - English translation)

Despite acknowledging the importance of IC inclusion in the curriculum, Tung revealed the level of IC inclusion was at a low level. He confirmed, “The extent of IC inclusion in the curriculum is unclear and hard to measure. ... I think the level of IC inclusion in the curriculum is low”. This evaluation matched the curriculum designers’ explanation, presented above, as they made the EFL curriculum framework by considering and following other universities’ curriculum frameworks.

From the curriculum designers’ expression, they both only sought to include cultural content in several courses, although some was implicitly added in the teaching materials. They stressed they intentionally introduced IC in American and British Culture, which directly addresses IC, while IC was included unintentionally in other courses, such as Reading,

Listening, Speaking, and Writing, through potential cultural content. It was apparent that the EFL curriculum placed more focus on American and British Cultures while the students were most likely to interact with people from various cultural backgrounds, especially those from the neighboring countries or ethnic groups.

For those courses that are not culture related, Tung and Bach chose the coursebooks with a focus on language rather than for the purpose of IC development. But since native English speakers wrote those books, they either explicitly or implicitly included some cultural content about English-speaking countries that teachers could use to enhance students' IC. The curriculum designers emphasized that when teachers exploited these cultural issues, they could implement IC in their teaching. Clearly, IC was not well imbedded in the curriculum but just included accidentally in the teaching materials, and the curriculum designers tended to place the role of integrating IC on course teachers, which Bach confirmed.

When designing the curriculum, we integrated IC purposefully in the course American and British Culture, which is entirely about the cultures of English-speaking countries. However, we also included IC unintentionally in some language skills courses (such as Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing). For these courses, we chose the coursebooks according to the language purpose, not the IC purpose. Yet most of the teaching materials included culture-related content, such as manner of dressing, communication style, and the way to drive in the streets. ... These materials were about native English speakers or English-speaking countries, so they included, in an explicit or implicit way, certain cultural issues. ... If teachers can exploit these cultural issues, they can still have very profound IC implementation in their teaching. Otherwise, they can just introduce these cultural issues or native speakers' customs and practices to their students. (Interview with Bach - English translation)

I think the teaching materials that are being used for teaching language skills include some culture-related content. The coursebooks for some courses, such as Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing, were written by foreign authors; therefore, they do include potential IC content. (Interview with Tung - English translation)

The curriculum designers also noted teachers could discuss IC content with faculty leaders. Tung stressed, “Teachers can suggest changing the curriculum and course outlines in terms of embedding more IC contents”. The statement suggested that the curriculum designers did not consider themselves to be the main drivers of change in IC inclusion. Rather, it appeared that they were delegating the task to teachers, which could impede the development of proactive curricula. From the curriculum designers’ comments, it can be seen that they were reluctant to proactively take responsibility in modifying the curriculum framework in terms of IC inclusion, and they might do it after the teachers make suggestions on the issue.

It can be seen that the factors that influenced the curriculum designers included the curriculum designers’ awareness, the curriculum designers’ ability, and IC requirements and instructions. The curriculum designers were aware of the inclusion of IC and open to changing the curriculum but had limited awareness of their roles in including IC. Remarkably, with limited ability in including IC, they used other universities’ curricula as a reference and only focused on American and British cultures when designing the EFL curriculum. The curriculum designers’ reliance on the other universities’ curriculum frameworks shows their lacks of confidence and effort in designing the EFL curriculum. In addition, the lack of requirements and instructions for including IC in the EFL curriculum also had a great influence on the curriculum designers’ perspectives and actions in embedding IC into the EFL curriculum.

4.3 How IC is addressed in the EFL curriculum

To know how IC is addressed in the EFL curriculum of the university, the researcher employed a documentary review. She analyzed and critically evaluated the curriculum framework and 48 course outlines in the curriculum of the English Language Program because they were the documents that shaped the program's teaching and learning activities. This curriculum review provided evidence of the presence of IC in the EFL curriculum of the university.

As guided by the conceptual framework, the current study included an analysis of the program's curriculum framework and course outlines. The goal was to identify potential places for students' IC development in terms of cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness.

4.3.1 The inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum framework

The curriculum framework for the university's English Language Program was designed based on the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English that were governed by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (2004). The EFL curriculum framework is 40 pages long and first describes general objectives and specific objectives. Four general objectives describe what students can achieve overall after finishing the program. The specific objectives identify what students are expected to achieve after graduation in five regards: three specific objectives of knowledge, 10 specific objectives of skills, seven specific objectives of attitudes, eight specific objectives of job positions, and two specific objectives of foreign language and computer skills. The curriculum framework

also sets the learning outcomes for students in terms of knowledge, skills, and ability of self-esteem and self-responsibility. Then, it gives detailed information on the courses in the curriculum, including the course name, course code, and number of credit points.

The curriculum review showed the English Language Program curriculum framework contained the courses American and British Culture and American and British Literature. With those courses, it followed the training objectives of the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English in two ways. The English Language Program curriculum framework provided “learners with broad knowledge of the English language, British and American culture, societies and literature” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, p. 1). And it equipped “students with active learning skills for self-study in order to continue to enhance knowledge and practical language skills, initially developing critical thinking and scientific research capacity about issues of language, literature or culture-civilization of English-speaking countries” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, p. 1). It was clear that in the curriculum framework, the target cultures were perceived as just American and British Cultures; therefore more emphasis was made on American and British Cultures while the students need to interact with people from many countries they might work in. Students’ IC and understanding might have been limited by this restricted concentration on Anglophone cultures, which failed to sufficiently educate them for the broad global setting.

However, as the curriculum designers noted through their interviews, the curriculum review reflected that the curriculum framework of the English Language Program included IC but not adequately, and it did not give any guidelines for teachers to follow regarding teaching IC. The specific objectives about knowledge and attitudes and the program learning outcomes about knowledge included IC development. The general objectives and other places in the

specific objectives and the learning outcomes of the program did not mention IC. The curriculum framework mentions four IC components: cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction. The fifth, critical cultural awareness, was not highlighted. This is an alarming omission because without the development of critical cultural awareness, students cannot critically analyze different cultures and modify their preconceptions or prejudices.

One specific objective about knowledge of the curriculum framework mentioned, “Graduates of the English Language Program will be provided with general knowledge ... and culture, literature and civilization of English-speaking countries, especially Britain and the United States” (KG University - the curriculum framework, 2019, p. 2). Of the five components of IC, cultural knowledge was highlighted in the curriculum with the aim of making EFL students knowledgeable about various cultures and societies to achieve an effectiveness in intercultural interaction as Byram (2009) recommended. However, the focus on Anglophone cultures again raised concerns about how the curriculum designers perceive the target cultures. The focus on English-speaking nations could lead to a skewed understanding of global cultures and limit students’ engagement with non-Western viewpoints.

IC was also noted within the curriculum framework in one of the specific objectives about attitudes: “Graduates of the English Language Program will have an awareness to respect the values of cultures and society” (KG University - the curriculum framework, 2019, p. 2). It was proved that cultural attitudes, an important IC component per Byram (2009), were included in the curriculum to help students become open towards the values of self and others. However, the framework did not specify how these attitudes were to be developed or evaluated, leaving a gap in the actual application of IC development. Without clear guidelines, this objective might not be adequately addressed in teaching practices.

In addition, one of the program learning outcomes about knowledge within the curriculum framework clarified, “Graduates of the English Language Program will be able to understand and apply ... basic knowledge about culture, literature and civilization of English-speaking countries, especially Britain and the United States, at a basic level” (KG University - the curriculum framework, 2019, p. 3). As required in the program learning outcomes, students were expected to develop the other two IC components, skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction, as they were assumed to be able to understand cultural events of other cultures and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real-time interaction (Byram, 2009). The “basic level” at which these abilities were described, however, raised concerns regarding the breadth of intercultural competency being developed. Students needed to possess a more advanced degree of competence, including critical cultural awareness, in order to participate in cross-cultural interactions in a successful manner. However, it could be seen from the above analysis of the university’s curriculum framework that the development of students’ critical cultural awareness, an important element of IC, as suggested by Byram (2012), Fantini (2012), Liddicoat (2002), and Schulz (2007), was not mentioned in the curriculum framework of the English Language Program.

4.3.2 The inclusion of IC in the course outlines of the EFL curriculum

The course outlines for the English Language Program were collected from the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the university. The courses were organized into two sections: general educational knowledge and professional educational knowledge. Within the EFL curriculum, 48 of the 70 course outlines were chosen for analysis because they belong to the courses on professional educational knowledge that are conducted in English. The remaining course outlines were not chosen because they belong to general educational knowledge taught for all majors and are conducted in Vietnamese. Each course outline consisted of (a) the objectives

of the course (in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the self-esteem and self-responsibility), (b) the main contents of all the chapters in the course, (c) the allocation of teaching periods for each chapter, (d) facility conditions required for teaching the course, (e) course requirements, (f) testing and assessment methods, and (g) a list of coursebooks and reference books.

The course outlines chosen for analysis are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 List of course titles and codes

No	Course codes	Course titles
1	F06001	Listening 1A
2	F06002	Reading 1A
3	F06003	Speaking 1A
4	F06031	Grammar 1
5	F06005	Practical Pronunciation in English
6	F06032	Grammar 2
7	F06007	Speaking 1B
8	F06008	Writing 1
9	F06009	Listening 1B
10	F06010	Reading 1B
11	F06012	Grammar 3
12	F06013	Writing 2
13	F06014	Speaking 2A

No	Course codes	Course titles
14	F06015	Listening 2A
15	F06016	Reading 2A
16	F06017	Speaking 2B
17	F06018	Writing 3
18	F06019	Listening 2B
19	F06020	Reading 2B
20	F06022	Speaking 3A
21	F06023	Listening 3A
22	F06024	Reading 3A
23	F06021	Writing 4
24	F07005	Theory of Translation
25	F07016	American and British Culture
26	F07008	Syntax and Semantics
27	F06025	Speaking 3B
28	F06026	Listening 3B
29	F06027	Reading 3B
30	F07009	Translation
31	F07010	Interpretation
32	F07015	American and British Literature
33	F07004	International English Language Tests
34	F27001	Research Methodology
35	F06028	Listening 4A

No	Course codes	Course titles
36	F06029	Speaking 4A
37	F06030	Reading 4A
38	F27004	Introduction to Linguistics
39	F07007	Phonology and Morphology
40	F27020	Interpretation: Travel and Tourism
41	F27021	Translation in Tourism and Travel
42	F27006	Translation in Tourism and Travel
43	F27007	Translation of Technical Issues
44	F07001	Teaching Methodology
45	F26006	Speaking 4B
46	F26005	Reading 4B
47	F07120	Extracurricular Activities
48	F27008	Translation of Office Issues

The course outlines' extent of IC inclusion were rated as high, average, or low. Setting the extents of IC inclusion as high, average, or low levels directly connected to the percentage of the compulsory culture-related courses in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English. According to the national curriculum frameworks of English (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004), 9 out of 120 credits in the curriculum framework of EFL are compulsory culture-related courses, which is 7.5%. The extents of IC inclusion in this study are built off that percentage, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 The way to set the extents of IC inclusion

The extents of IC inclusion	The percentages of credit points of the IC included in course outlines
Low level	0 – 3.74%
Average level	3.75 – 11.24%
High level	11.25% and above

As with the courses, the extent of IC inclusion in a range around 7.5% of the class time in each period was considered an average level. A low level of IC inclusion was set from 0% to 3.74% (half of 7.5%). Similarly, 7.5% plus its half (i.e., 11.25%) and above was set as a high level of IC inclusion.

The documentary review indicated that the curriculum designers introduced IC explicitly in 5 courses (10 credit points) out of 121 credit points of the whole curriculum, equivalent to 8.3%. It could be inferred from the analysis of the documents that IC was addressed at an average level in the course outlines of the EFL curriculum, relatively higher than what the curriculum designers estimated. However, this degree of IC inclusion, while appearing satisfactory, still demonstrated a superficial engagement with IC, with an emphasis on cultural knowledge rather than a thorough integration of intercultural skills. The five courses that mentioned IC were American and British Culture, Translation, American and British

Literature, Reading 1A, and Theory of Translation. Two of these course outlines (i.e., American and British Culture and Translation) mentioned IC in both the course objectives and contents. The outline for American and British Literature included IC in the course objectives. And two of them, Reading 1A and Theory of Translation, embedded IC in the contents of the lessons. Table 5 shows the IC components included in the course outlines, the position where IC was included, and the extent to which IC was included in the course outlines.

Table 5 The IC components included in the course outlines

	American and British Culture	Translation	American and British Literature	Reading 1A	Theory of Translation
Cultural knowledge	X	X	X	X	X
Cultural attitudes	X	X		X	
Skills of interpreting and relating	X	X			X
Skills of discovery and interaction	X				
Critical cultural awareness	X				
The position where IC was included	course objectives and contents	course objectives and contents	course objectives	contents	contents
The extent to which IC was included	all five chapters	1 out of 8 chapters	-	2 out of 5 chapters	1 out of 8 chapters

It was clear that among the five courses that included IC, only one, American and British Culture, highlighted all IC components (cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, critical cultural awareness, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction), while the other four courses mainly stressed cultural knowledge and sometimes cultural attitudes. This implied a fragmented approach to IC integration, giving priority to some components over others, which would lead to an imbalanced development of students' IC. The findings of the current study had a commonality with Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak's (2015) viewpoints that EFL curriculum documents in 14 countries and territories (i.e., Brazil, Croatia, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, Hong Kong, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Singapore, Sweden, and the Czech Republic) placed more emphasis on cultural knowledge and cultural attitudes towards foreign cultures instead of developing the skills needed for effective communication. The findings were also reflected in Dlaske's (2000) conclusion in his research in the United Kingdom that EFL curriculum documents created few opportunities for students to raise their critical cultural awareness.

While cultural knowledge is heavily emphasized, a more critical view shows that cultural awareness and skills were not as well-represented, indicating the need for a more integrated approach to IC in the curriculum. The following part analyzes the inclusion of the IC components in the five courses mentioned in Table 5.

Cultural knowledge

Cultural knowledge was addressed the most explicitly in all five courses above-mentioned. In the course American and British Culture, the course objectives highlighted cultural knowledge. As described in those objectives, the course American and British Culture equips students with general features about politics, economics, society, festivals, education, and

beliefs of the United Kingdom and the United States, which enables them to become knowledgeable about how social groups function and what is involved in intercultural communication (Byram, 2009). According to the American and British Culture course objectives (2019):

The course presents characteristics of the country and people of the UK and the US and compares to find out the common and unique features between the countries. It also introduces the political system of the UK and the US, economic and social characteristics of the UK and the US, beliefs and festivals in the UK and the US, and education system of the UK and the US. (p. 1)

Similarly, the course outline of American and British Literature mentioned cultural knowledge in the course objectives: “The course helps students improve understanding of cultural features hidden in literary works” (KG University - Course outline - American and British Literature, 2019, p. 1). However, the contents of the chapters in the course did not mention IC; therefore, teachers would face greater challenges as the IC contents were not available.

Additionally, in the course outline of Reading 1A (2019), cultural knowledge was presented in the contents of one reading comprehension passage in Unit 2 - Reading 1 (“How do Colors Make Us Think and Feel?”) and one reading comprehension passage in Unit 3 - Reading 1 (“Being Polite from Culture to Culture”). The passage “How do Colors Make Us Think and Feel?” (pp. 26–28) mentioned that apart from some colors that have universal meanings, many colors have different meanings in different cultures, and that learning about the meanings of colors in different cultures may help people broaden their understandings of the world. From the reading passage and the reading comprehension exercises, students might

learn that in the United States, white represents goodness and purity and is the color of a bride's wedding dress, but in China and Japan, white refers to death. In Vietnam and other Asian countries, yellow is associated with royalty, but in European countries, the color associated with royalty is purple.

The development of cultural knowledge was also found explicitly in Unit 3 in the first reading passage, "Being Polite from Culture to Culture" (pp. 47–48), which showed polite gestures and behaviors are not the same everywhere. The content of the reading indicated some gestures and behaviors are polite in one country and rude in another. For instance, the reading passage showed students some unique cultural features and cultural differences, such as in Argentina, if someone is invited to a dinner party, the person should come later than the time of invitation, while being on time for dinner is extremely important in Germany. If someone in China gives a friend a gift, the friend should wait until the person has left before opening it, which is different from the United States' practice. People in Latin America and the Middle East like to stand closer than an arm's length while talking, whereas in other cultures people should keep a greater distance. People in the United States prefer to shake hands firmly for a short time, and people make eye contact in different ways in different cultures. This content was designed to help students become knowledgeable about politeness in many different cultures and improve their cultural knowledge to enhance the effectiveness of their intercultural interaction (Byram, 2009).

Moreover, the course outline of Theory of Translation showed the contents of the textbook's sixth chapter, "Translation and Culture," addressed cultural knowledge. The chapter provided students with some features of cultures, such as language and culture in translation, culture transposition, translating names, and language borrowings. Dealing with cultural features in translation, the content of Chapter 6 provided some examples of taboos and value differences

Vietnamese people should avoid in the British culture, including greeting people with a kiss (English kiss only close friends and relatives), talking loudly or staring at anyone in public, speaking with a mouth full of food, and asking personal or intimate questions (such as, “How much money do you earn?” or “Why aren't you married?”; (Bixby & McVeigh, 2010, pp. 31-32). These contents could help students become knowledgeable about many cultural features related to intercultural interaction or, in other words, develop their cultural knowledge.

Furthermore, cultural knowledge was mentioned in the course objectives in the course outline of Translation. The course objectives emphasized, “By the end of the course, students will be able to translate texts from English into Vietnamese and vice versa while ensuring the suitability of cultural features of the source language and the target language” (KG University - Course Outline - Translation, 2019, p. 2). The course instructed students to pay attention to the cultural features of the source language and the target language, or cultural knowledge, to have an effective translation.

Cultural attitudes

Cultural attitudes were introduced in the course objectives of the course outline of American and British Culture. As presented in that course outline, the course aimed to help students appreciate different cultures and arouse students’ openness towards the values of other people’s cultures and their own cultures. It had something in common with what Byram (2009) described about cultural attitudes that EFL students need training in. According to the American and British Culture course outline (2019):

Students will be able to recognize the importance of the course in developing languages and research skills. They will be willing to search for resources to practice and improve

knowledge, respect the cultural values and appreciate the beauty of different cultures.

(p. 2)

In the course outline of Reading 1A (2009), cultural attitudes existed in the contents of Reading 1 “Being Polite from Culture to Culture” in Unit 3 “What does It Mean to Be Polite?” The contents of the reading passage and comprehension exercises showed many cases in which polite behaviors are not the same everywhere. They could help students become curious, open, and respectful to the polite actions and behaviors in other cultures that were totally different from their cultures, or the cases could modify disbeliefs about other cultures and enhance students’ cultural attitudes. The passage also conveyed a message: “If you show that you understand cultural differences and politeness, people feel comfortable and respected” (Bixby & McVeigh, 2010, p. 46). Byram (2009) proved students could be trained in their cultural attitudes, an important IC component, to become open towards the values of self and others.

In addition, a translating exercise in Chapter 6, “Vietnamese Culture”, in the course outline of Translation, could be suitable for developing students’ cultural attitudes. The lesson content that compared lifestyles and the ways of showing affection between the Vietnamese culture and British culture implied it would help develop students’ cultural attitudes through making them modify their beliefs about people from foreign countries and about their own country.

Skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction

Students’ skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction could be developed from the contents of five chapters in the course American and British Culture. The five chapters are (a) “General Features: The People - The Land”, (b) “The Political -

Economic Systems”, (c) “Religions and Celebrations”, (d) “Educational Systems”, and (e) Recreation” (KG University - Course Outline - American and British Culture, 2019, pp. 2-3). This content was designed for students to acquire new knowledge, interpret what they learned about the cultures of the United States and the United Kingdom, and relate it to their own cultures. As presented in the course outline, students in this course read the materials in each chapter and get insights into the issues related to the culture and society of the United Kingdom and the United States. They are required to present details about the characteristics of the United Kingdom and the United States and the people of both countries, and to compare them as well as relate them to those of Vietnam. The activities reflect Byram’s (2009) descriptions that learners with skills of interpreting and relating could interpret cultural issues or events from a culture, and then explain and relate them to the ones from their own culture. Moreover, one of the objectives in the course outline - students “will be willing to search for resources to practice and improve knowledge, respect the cultural values and appreciate the beauty of different cultures” (KG University - Course Outline - American and British Culture, 2019, p. 2) - should help form skills of discovery and interaction. The objective of training students’ willingness to search for and learn new knowledge from further resources was mentioned in Byram’s (2009) conclusion on the characteristics of learners with skills of discovery and interaction.

In addition, a translating exercise in Chapter 6, “Vietnamese Culture”, listed in the course outline of Translation was designed for developing students’ skills of interpreting and relating. The content, which compared lifestyles and ways of showing affection between the Vietnamese culture and British culture, could enable students to interpret these cultural issues from British culture and explain and relate them to the cultural issues from their own culture to enhance their skills of interpreting and relating.

Skills of interpreting and relating were also developed from the contents of Chapter 6 of the coursebook for Theory of Translation. Chapter 6 showed the same words passed from one culture to another obtain different meanings, ranging from slightly to radically different. The textbook also mentioned some practices exist in one culture but not in others; therefore, a translator has to “step in the cultures of both the source language and the target language to make an interpretation” (Trinh, 2019, p. 30). The content in the chapter showed “for every translated sentence, the translator must be able to decide on the importance of its cultural context, what the phrase really means ... and convey that meaning in a way which makes sense in the target language but in the context of the target culture” (Trinh, 2019, p. 30). This idea implies students must understand a cultural issue from the source language and relate it to that of the target language to translate it suitably in the target culture, which would enable students to enhance their skills of interpreting and relating.

Critical cultural awareness

The course objectives in the course outline of American and British Culture were found to highlight students’ critical cultural awareness. The objectives stated, “The course presents characteristics of the country and people of the UK and the US and compares them to find out the common and unique features between the countries” (KG University - Course outline - American and British Culture, 2019, p. 1). As presented in the course outline, students presented and compared common and unique features between the countries, which trained their critical evaluation of the practices of other cultures or countries and their own based on explicit perspectives. The course objectives thus fitted what Byram (2009) explained about how learners’ critical cultural awareness is formed.

The contents in American and British Culture were also designed for enabling students to critically evaluate the practices of other countries and those of their own countries through introducing the main topics, namely, general features about the people and the land of the United States and the United Kingdom, their political and economic systems, religions and celebrations, educational systems, and recreation. Critically evaluating the cultures and practices of the other countries and those of their own countries could make students form their critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2009).

It is evident from the aforementioned analysis that the course outlines for all five courses emphasized learning about the cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries. This emphasis was a reflection of the old-fashioned method of teaching cultures, which valued factual knowledge above more in-depth cross-cultural interaction. Three of the five courses dealt with cultural attitudes, showing that attitudes were acknowledged as being important in cross-cultural communication, but the limited scope urged a more thorough integration across the curriculum. Some course outlines included skills for interpreting and relating whose extent and depth varied, showing a potential inconsistency in how these skills are taught and used in practice. Skills of interaction and discovery were only covered in one course, and other courses did not give as much attention to these skills, which could leave students with gaps in their understanding of how to communicate across cultural boundaries. The dearth of critical cultural awareness in the curriculum also suggested a need for more attention on developing students' ability to critically analyze and reflect on cultural differences and similarities.

In addition, the remainder of the course outlines in the curriculum framework of the English Language Program did not mention IC. In these course outlines, great emphasis was placed on developing students' language skills and knowledge rather than developing their IC. These

limitations underscore that the IC should be treated with a more thorough and integrated approach which requires more guidelines and systemic changes.

4.4 Chapter summary

The current study revealed that according to the curriculum designers' perspectives of IC integration, there was a limited inclusion of IC development in the EFL curriculum framework. The curriculum designers were aware of IC inclusion and open to changes regarding IC integration, and they placed the decisive role on teachers in IC implementation. They claimed integrating IC into the curriculum was quite hard due to a lack of clear regulations and requirements. They were also reluctant to take responsibility for including IC in the curriculum and placed the onus and commitment to course teachers.

As for the inclusion of IC in the curriculum documents, the findings identified that IC was embedded in the curriculum framework but inadequately. IC teaching was visible in some specific objectives and learning outcomes of the curriculum framework. The analysis of the course outlines of the EFL curriculum indicated IC was included in a few of them. Among the 48 course outlines, five addressed IC, while the remainder of the course outlines placed more emphasis on language teaching rather than IC development.

Based on the above analysis, with the mismatch between the curriculum designers' perspectives and their actions in embedding IC contents into the curriculum documents, it is worth noting the inclusion of IC was complicated, according to curriculum designers' perspectives and the contents of the curriculum. Those difficulties might have certain influences on how EFL teachers (including curriculum designers) implement IC in their classes.

Chapter 5: Teachers' perspectives of and teaching practices with IC

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings of EFL teachers' perspectives of IC inclusion and their IC teaching in practice. Specifically, it presents how teachers perceive IC inclusion and how they implement IC in their classroom practices. The findings are drawn from direct class observations and semi-structured interviews with eight teachers (including two curriculum designers who are also involved in teaching).

To address the research question “How do EFL teachers perceive and implement IC in practice?”, the first part of this chapter focuses on how EFL teachers perceive IC. The second part of the chapter involves how they implement IC in practice. The chapter closes with a chapter summary.

5.2 Teachers' perspectives of IC inclusion

To help the researcher gain profound understanding of teachers' perspectives of IC inclusion into their respective EFL courses, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview questions focused on how teachers perceive the integration of IC and the IC components developed in EFL teaching. In addition, the researcher observed the interviewees' classes to better comprehend the reality of IC teaching and learning practices and triangulate data regarding IC implementation (Gibbs, 2007).

The conceptual framework based on the five IC components of Byram (2009) led to the construction of the interview protocol to govern the data collection and analysis. The

interview questions mainly addressed how teachers perceived the integration of IC in EFL teaching and what IC components their teaching focused on. Additionally, the class observation protocol mainly concentrated on whether the teachers taught the IC contents and what components of IC they taught. (See Appendix A for the detailed interview protocol and Appendix B for the class observation protocol.) The conceptual framework developed from Byram's (2009) IC model helped with analyzing teachers' perspectives of and practices with IC implementation on the basis of five IC components (cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness).

Findings from the interviews revealed the majority of participants thought IC inclusion was crucial in EFL teaching. Of the eight EFL teachers who participated in the interviews, six expressed support for IC inclusion; one participant held ambiguous perspectives, and one participant held negative perspectives. The participants highlighted cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Table 6 indicates teacher participants' perspectives of IC integration and the IC components highlighted.

Table 6 Teacher participants' perspectives of IC integration and the IC components highlighted

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Teacher participants</i>	<i>Teachers' perspectives of IC integration</i>	<i>IC components they focused on</i>
Group 1	Bach	positive	cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge
	Nhai		cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge
	Sen		cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge
	Phuong		cultural knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction
	Duong		cultural knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, critical cultural awareness
	Trang		cultural attitudes
Group 2	Hue	ambiguous	-
Group 3	Tung	negative	-

The six participants in the first group expressed positive perspectives about IC integration and confirmed the integration of IC into EFL teaching was crucial and helpful for students, especially for English majors. Bach, Nhai, and Sen emphasized the value of IC integration and had some similar ideas in highlighting the development of students' cultural attitudes and cultural knowledge. Bach (male, 46 years old, 24 years of teaching experience, teaching the

courses Research Methodology, Teaching Methodology, Phonology and Morphology, Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) highlighted the value of IC inclusion in helping students understand the importance of cultures of many countries in the world, behave suitably in intercultural communication, and become sensitive to cultures. As both an EFL teacher and a curriculum designer, Bach held positive perspectives about IC integration. He stressed IC integration could help students learn about cultures more rapidly and avoid communication breakdowns. He explained that with IC integration, students could learn about the cultures of various nations, which enabled them to appreciate the value of cultures, develop cultural sensitivity, and act appropriately wherever they go. His ideas resembled the conclusion in Samovar et al.'s (2012) research and Tran and Duong's (2015b) study concerning the importance of IC integration in EFL teaching.

In addition to learning languages, English-major students need to know the customs and practices of English-speaking countries. The inclusion of IC in teaching is really good for English-major students because it can help students avoid communication breakdowns. ... IC implementation can provide students with information about cultures of many countries, especially English-speaking countries. It helps them aware of the importance of cultures and become sensitive to cultures and behave suitably in any places they visit. ... IC integration can help students learn about different cultures more quickly and prevent them from doing behaviors that are inappropriate to the cultures of the countries they are visiting or working in. (Interview with Bach – English translation)

In his interview, Bach stressed it was vital to train students' cultural attitudes to enhance their curiosity and openness towards values of self and others, and they would show readiness to modify beliefs about other cultures or about their own culture (Byram, 2009). Bach explained

he trained his students' cultural attitudes so when students were exposed to other people's perspectives and evaluated a cultural phenomenon, they could have an awareness and respectfulness of cultural differences (Byram, 2009). He also urged teachers to create some intercultural contexts to make students aware of cultural differences and avoid causing the situations that make other people embarrassed.

Cultural attitudes are important. To help students avoid stereotypes in evaluating unfamiliar cultures, we need to create some culture-related situations to help students form an awareness of respecting the other people's cultures and accept cultural differences. Students need to be taught to avoid causing embarrassing situations or communicating in ways or behaviors that may be inappropriate to the people they communicate with. (Interview with Bach – English translation)

Bach also claimed that whenever possible, he provided his students with cultural knowledge that made them comprehend how social groups function as well as what is involved in intercultural interaction in their country and in other countries (Byram, 2009). Bach shed light upon the value of cultural knowledge, especially cultural differences. He stressed students should be knowledgeable about differences between their cultures and the other people's cultures to avoid misunderstandings or miscommunication.

It is essential for teachers to focus on the cultural knowledge and especially cultural differences. Students should realize the cultural differences between their cultures and the other people's cultures, especially their own and those of their target language. As EFL teachers, we need to introduce the behaviors or words or situations that may cause misunderstandings or communication breakdowns so students can avoid them. We need to make the sensitive problems clear so that our students can avoid making mistakes

when they communicate with people from other countries. (Interview with Bach – English translation)

Nhai (female, 44 years old, 20 years of teaching experience, teaching the courses Listening, Reading, Writing, Grammar, Translation Theory, Translation in Tourism and Travel, Translation of Office Issues, Translation for Technical Issues, Phonology and Morphology, and Semantics and Syntax) shared the same ideas with Bach. She emphasized IC implementation could provide students with cultural knowledge and arouse their needs for learning other countries' cultures (Samovar et al., 2012). Nhai also showed that cultural knowledge would be necessary for students' engagement in their future careers and help them mingle within the global community (Gorjian & Aghvami, 2017).

The implementation of IC can provide students with cultural knowledge of many countries in the world, especially the cultures of English-speaking countries. This will make students become aware of cultural differences and arouse their need to master other countries' cultures so they can negotiate cultural differences in communicating with people in those foreign countries. In addition, if students want to be a global citizen, they need to have knowledge about many different cultures. In my teaching, I often remind my students that their opportunities to work abroad are very high, so they have to master much knowledge about cultures and people of other countries. Learning cultural knowledge will be good for their work and study. (Interview with Nhai – English translation)

Nhai also expressed that IC integration was crucial in fostering students' cultural attitudes to respect other cultures. Her opinion echoed Hejazi et al. (2015) and Tran and Duong's (2015b) ideas that IC was a must-have skill to help students avoid prejudice against unfamiliar

cultures and show their respect for other cultures so they can communicate effectively in cross-cultural environments. In addition, Nhai indicated in her interview that comparing cultures was one benefit of the integration of IC into EFL teaching. She noted the IC inclusion gave students a chance to compare the target culture and their own culture. From that comparison, students might modify their viewpoints and become more open when communicating with people from other cultural backgrounds or enhance their own cultural attitudes. Her ideas aligned with what Byram et al. (2002) and Roberts et al. (2001) mentioned regarding the crucial role of IC integration for raising intercultural speakers' cultural attitudes in real interactions. Emphasizing the importance of developing students' cultural attitudes, Nhai claimed the cultural attitudes motivated students to master target cultural knowledge and skills. Her opinion also highlighted Byram et al.'s (2002) conclusions that cultural attitudes were considered the foundation of IC.

In my opinion, the integration of IC into EFL teaching is quite beneficial. When teaching a foreign language, I think teachers need to train students' attitudes so they respect different cultures and languages, and thus respect the people of these cultures. Through IC activities, teachers may ask students to make comparisons between the cultures of other countries and their own cultures. Therefore, IC inclusion helps students widen their viewpoints, accept cultural differences, and communicate well when they work abroad in the future. Among the IC components, I have a strong emphasis on cultural attitudes. Their attitudes will determine whether students respect the target language and its culture or not. Their attitudes will affect whether or not students are willing to learn something new. People say that knowing a new language means having more intelligence. Therefore, to develop in any aspects, one should have right attitudes. Only when students have positive attitudes towards the cultures of other

people do they want to learn cultural knowledge and skills. (Interview with Nhai – English translation)

In relation to Nhai's viewpoints, it is necessary to explain why students need to respect other cultures and to compare their cultures with other people's cultures. The necessity to compare cultures and respect other cultures has been emphasized in extant literature and the situation in Vietnam and in the university. As Tran and Duong (2015b) stated, since Vietnam had open-door policies and mingled with other countries in the globalization process, people from a country have been exposed to more chances to travel, work, or study in other countries. The need for mutual understanding and respect has been increasingly highlighted in the interconnected world and resulting multicultural environments (Gao & Lai, 2018; Starkey, 2018; Tran & Duong, 2015a). Moreover, owing to the internationalization of higher education, foreign language learners need to become competent intercultural communicators in the globalized world (Tran & Duong, 2015b). Seventy international students are studying across the university; therefore, local students need to be equipped with an inclusive sense of attitudes so international students can interact with them and develop a sense of belonging to the university (Roberts et al., 2001; Xiao & Petraki, 2007). Under this circumstance, English language learners in Vietnam, in general, and in the university, in particular, need to be trained to show their respect to other cultures, and not to stigmatize other cultures or evaluate other cultures from a stereotypical perspective. In addition, comparing the other countries' cultures and their own will also help students strengthen their understanding of cultural diversity and differences so they better communicate in cross-cultural environments (Tran & Duong, 2015b). While respect and understanding amongst people are obviously necessary, it is also critical to avoid the possible dangers of superficial approaches to cross-cultural comparison. It is important to support students in their profound engagement with cultural

contexts and in understanding the sociopolitical elements that shape cross-cultural relationships.

Sharing the same concerns as Bach and Nhai, Sen (female, 32 years old, 8 years of teaching experience, teaching Listening, Speaking, and Reading courses) pinpointed the benefits of IC implementation in helping students mingle with the multicultural environment in the wake of the increased population mobility (Munezane, 2019). Sen specified that in her teaching, she also paid attention to developing students' cultural knowledge through exploring the cultural features in other countries, such as the ways people eat, dress, behave, and exchange gifts. Her comments agreed with Byram's (2009) remarks that cultural knowledge provides people with knowledge of social groups and their practices and helps people understand communication conventions as well as know the events and other symbols that are markers of other people's national identity.

In my point of view, integrating IC into EFL teaching is very necessary. When we teach a language, it is important for us to train students' IC. It will help students mingle with people of a new culture when they have a chance to travel, study, or work in a foreign country or even in a new area with a new cultural background in their own country. I have highlighted cultural knowledge during the implementation of IC. I think cultural knowledge is the core. Students need to know cultural knowledge to mingle with a new culture. In my lessons, I often provide students with necessary cultural knowledge about cultures, customs, and practices so students may know what other cultures look like. For instance, I introduce them to cultural knowledge about the way to offer gifts, table manners, costumes, and appropriate gestures in many cultures so they can communicate and behave suitably with people of a new culture. (Interview with Sen – English translation)

Moreover, Sen acknowledged the importance of enhancing students' cultural attitudes. She emphasized that open and positive cultural attitudes enabled students to be more cautious about criticizing other cultures from the view of their own cultures and to avoid prejudices against other people's cultures. Sen's ideas reflected Byram et al.'s (2002) remarks that with positive cultural attitudes, intercultural speakers could modify their stereotypes and evaluate other people's values and beliefs from an equitable and inclusive view.

I usually pay attention to forming students' cultural attitudes because open attitudes will bring them positive views when judging everything related to other people's cultures. The attitudes will make them cautious in evaluating or criticizing the other cultures and pay more attention to the contexts and cultural background of other people. With these attitudes, students will feel that they must not make judgments from the viewpoints of their own cultures to criticize or have prejudices with other cultures. Thus, they will have suitable behaviors in communication. (Interview with Sen – English translation)

Another teacher participant in the group with a positive perspective of IC implementation is Phuong (female, 31 years old, 10 years of teaching experience, teaching the courses Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Grammar, Translation for Environmental Studies, Theory of Translation, Research Methodology, American and British Literature, American and British Culture, and Phonology and Morphology). She highlighted that training students' IC is crucial because IC will help EFL students work well in a multicultural environment in the future.

I find it essential to integrate IC into teaching practices, especially for English-major students who will use English frequently in their working environment in the future. It will be more likely for them to work in a multicultural environment, so I think IC

implementation is important for EFL students. (Interview with Phuong – English translation)

Having a slightly different perspective from Bach, Nhai, and Sen about the importance of IC components, Phuong believed that during her implementation of IC, she tended to develop her students' skills of discovery and interaction, capability of acquiring new cultural knowledge, of operating knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real-time interactions (Byram, 2009). She mentioned skills of discovery and interaction would give students an ability to self-study and self-develop while acquiring more cultural information and cultural differences. She emphasized that with skills of discovery and interaction, students would better overcome the challenges in cultural differences when communicating with other people. She supported Byram's (2009) ideas that students with skills of discovery and interaction are able to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices as well as operate knowledge and attitudes.

I try to train students' skills of discovery and interaction so they can be able to search for more cultural information and learn more cultural differences from people of many different cultural backgrounds. I always bring my students a sense of self-study and develop their IC. They need to accept the challenges in communicating with people from various cultures. When they are aware of that, they will try to learn more and deal with the difficulties of cultural differences. (Interview with Phuong – English translation)

In addition, like Bach, Nhai, and Sen, Phuong placed more focus on teaching cultural knowledge. Her perspectives corresponded to Bach's ideas in which cultural differences should be strongly emphasized in teaching and learning. She stated, "Whenever possible, I

implement IC in my lessons. I focus on developing my students' cultural knowledge regarding cultural differences in communication".

The fifth teacher participant is Duong (male, 32 years old, 7 years of teaching experience, teaching Listening, Writing, Grammar, and Practical Pronunciation in English courses) who also remarked that teachers' instruction of IC is needed to prepare students to be knowledgeable about the cultural features of many English-speaking countries - achieved cultural knowledge - to conduct effective interaction with foreigners (Byram, 2009). His ideas were like Samovar et al.'s (2012) conclusion that the incorporation of IC in the English language curricula could provide students with the knowledge of intercultural communication and help them bridge the gap of cultural differences.

I find that IC implementation in EFL teaching is very beneficial and important.

Students learn English to communicate with foreigners. When they live, work, or communicate with foreigners, they need to know the cultural knowledge of the target countries so they behave appropriately. In fact, in the future, when students have opportunities to study abroad, they need to master the cultural features of English-speaking countries. (Interview with Duong – English translation)

Regarding the importance of IC components, Duong's opinions were different from the other participants holding positive perspectives of IC implementation. He highlighted the importance of developing students' critical cultural awareness, which was defined as critical evaluation of the practices of their own and other cultures or countries based on explicit perspectives (Byram, 2009). Duong demonstrated that he paid attention to improving students' critical cultural awareness to help them critically evaluate other people's cultures and learn from those cultures (Byram, 2009). Empirical research (e.g., Byram, 2012; Fantini,

2012; Liddicoat, 2002; Schulz, 2007) also highlighted the idea that critical cultural awareness is a fundamental element in developing people's cross-cultural competence. Duong also proposed some ideas to further develop students' critical cultural awareness. He suggested providing them more insights related to IC and inspiring them to explore new cultures. His ideas followed Fantini's (2012) idea that critical cultural awareness is developed during the process of the acquisition of cultural knowledge, positive cultural attitudes, and skills; and at the same time critical awareness, in turn, enhances the development of knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

I find it quite essential to stress the critical cultural awareness. It enables students to have a suitable evaluation of other people's cultures. It also helps them select the good aspects to learn from other cultures and avoid unsuitable things. To highlight the critical cultural awareness, teachers should offer students profound understandings about cross-cultural and intercultural competence so students can apply this awareness creatively within their communication. Especially, when students are keen on exploring and acquiring something about various cultures, they will better develop their critical cultural awareness. (Interview with Duong – English translation)

Furthermore, Duong shared the same perspectives as Phuong in focusing on developing students' skills of discovery and interaction. He believed those skills could strengthen students' interest in exploring new cultures and improving their IC on their own. He stated that when students could discover new cultures and interact with people from other cultures, their interest in learning about cultures would increase.

Skills of discovery and interaction are important because they will help students develop their IC. With the skills of discovery and interaction, students are capable of

acquiring new cultural knowledge, and they will be more interested in learning cultural issues and then better develop their IC. (Interview with Duong – English translation)

Although Nhai and Duong's ideas were similar to what Bach expressed to some extent, Nhai and Duong's ideas were slightly different from Bach's because they implied that the students would benefit from IC if they had a chance to communicate with foreigners and study abroad. Regarding the chances of interacting with foreigners and studying in a foreign country, historical records proved Vietnamese students had some opportunities of interacting with foreigners and studying overseas in student exchange programs and short trainings offered by their universities and the Ministry of Education and Training (Vietnamnet Press, 2022). According to the Ministry of Education and Training (2022), Vietnam has approximately 500 affiliate programs with more than 30 countries, and some 190,000 Vietnamese students are studying abroad in total. Statistics from the Open Doors Annual Report of the Institute of International Education revealed that Vietnam is ranked fifth worldwide in the number of international students studying in the United States in 2022 (Vietnamnet Press, 2022). At the same time, 21,000 foreign students are studying at various levels of Vietnamese educational institutions (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022). Every year, Vietnam receives thousands of international students and teachers to participate in exchange programs (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022). Additionally, the Department of International Cooperation (Vietnamese Education, 2020) reported that in the period 2016-2021, Vietnam had 155 educational institutions that received and trained more than 45,000 foreign students from 102 countries and territories. Foreign students studying in Vietnam are mainly at the university level and for short courses and they are mainly from Laos, Cambodian, China, Korea, Japan, the United States, and Europe (Vietnamese Education, 2020).

In addition, the number of foreign workers coming to Vietnam has been increasing. According to the latest statistics of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs (Laborer Press, 2021), 101,550 foreign workers were working in Vietnam in 2021. They came from 110 countries and territories, mostly from China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Europe, and the United States. These foreign workers are mainly concentrated in big cities or localities with large projects with many foreign contractors, such as Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Bac Giang, and Long An (Laborer Press, 2021).

In the university where the current research took place, some students and graduates of the English Language Program have obtained opportunities for studying and training in foreign countries. For instance, 20 students went to Israel, Indonesia, Thailand, and Denmark in student exchange programs and short training programs (KG University, 2020). Students and graduates of the English Language Program were also offered opportunities of 2-month internship programs in the United States and Thailand. Such population mobility creates the opportunities for cross-cultural English language communication in and out of Vietnam, and thus justifies the importance of grasping relevant cultures as highlighted by Corbett (2003) and Plough (2016).

The sixth teacher participant of the first group also recognized the mutual benefits between culture acquisition and language learning. Trang (female, 30 years old, 8 years of teaching experience, teaching Listening, Speaking, and Reading courses), in addition to confirming her positive perspective of IC integration, believed the integration of IC into EFL teaching would facilitate students' language acquisition. The idea echoed Li's (2017) and Gorjian and Aghvami's (2017) conclusions concerning the positive influence of culture teaching on students' language proficiency. Trang confirmed students would learn the target language better if they could understand the cultural features related to the language.

I have positive perspectives of IC teaching. Learning a language is inseparable from learning its culture. If students can understand cultures, especially communicating cultures, they will acquire the language better in comparison to learning a language mechanically without understanding its culture. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

In addition to reinforcing the above opinions of Bach, Nhai, and Sen that open attitudes inspire students to learn new knowledge and improve IC, Trang gave the reasons she put more emphasis on cultural attitudes compared with other IC components. She stated that cultural knowledge can be learned from many sources, but open cultural attitudes make students willing to discover and learn new things. Her ideas corresponded to Byram's (2009) conclusion that cultural attitudes make one become willing to discover other people's experiences.

In my teaching, I pay more attention to cultural attitudes. As we know, to understand the people of a country, students have to learn the culture of that country. If they have positive attitudes, they will be open to new things and be willing to learn about new cultures. So, teachers need to train students' attitudes first. I think training cultural attitudes is more important than any other IC elements. Cultural knowledge can be learned from many sources. But the open cultural attitudes will make students want to discover and learn forever. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

Hue (female, 28 years old, 6 years of teaching experience, teaching Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Grammar courses) belonged to the second participant group. This group member had ambiguous perspectives of IC inclusion in EFL teaching. Hue thought it was not necessary to teach IC because her students did not aim to live or study abroad and

would not use IC, which was totally different from Nhai, Phuong, Duong, and Bach's positions, as mentioned above. She pointed out in her interview that teachers' perspectives of IC implementation should be positive only when their students need to live in a foreign country and use IC. As Hue argued, her students did not have many chances to go abroad, and thus they tended to learn English to interact at a basic level with foreigners in their own country. Therefore, she thought IC integration was not crucial in EFL teaching, and she should devote more class time for teaching the language. Hue's perspectives were similar to what Ho (2011) presented in his research results - teachers treated culture as a subordinate priority in language teaching and learning.

I have ambiguous opinions for IC integration. I think teachers should only integrate IC into teaching when their students really need to use that IC knowledge in a foreign country or a multicultural context. Here, my students tend to learn English to be able to communicate at an average level with foreigners. I don't think IC is very necessary. If my students need to live or study abroad, I should have positive perspectives of IC implementation. (Interview with Hue – English translation)

In a similar vein, Tung, from the point of view as an EFL teacher, made up the third participant group, the one which held negative perspectives of IC integration in EFL teaching, although he had positive opinions towards IC integration as a curriculum designer. Tung (male, 39 years old, 14 years of teaching experience, teaching the courses Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Translation, Interpretation, Theory of Translation, Introduction to English Language, Semantics and Syntax, and Practical Pronunciation in English) indicated that language knowledge was far more important to students, so language knowledge and skills, rather than IC, should be the focus. He prioritized language knowledge and skills as the foundation for learning IC. Tung stated students really need to master

language knowledge and skills first, and then use them as a basis to develop IC (Estaji & Rahimi, 2018). He also noted it was hard to measure IC integration, and the lacks of teacher training in IC teaching as well as intercultural communication environments in Vietnam discouraged the implementation of IC.

I think I don't have positive perceptions of the inclusion of IC. I don't pay much attention to IC, and I think my students don't either. ... In my teaching, I just focus on language knowledge and skills. I think that to develop communicative competence, the basic language knowledge students should have is grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Then they need to develop their language skills to communicate and practice these skills in intercultural situations. Only when students develop language knowledge and skills can they develop IC. The coursebooks I use contain IC elements, but it's hard to measure IC integration. In addition, there is no communication environment in Vietnam, and most students focus on language knowledge and skills rather than effective communication, so I just emphasize teaching the language. I have great emphasis on the four language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - and some other linguistic knowledge to help students use the language. I haven't received formal training in IC teaching. And I don't think of IC implementation.

(Interview with Tung – English translation)

According to the findings of the interviews, among the eight teacher participants, six participants stated they had positive perspectives of IC inclusion; one participant held ambiguous opinions, and one participant held negative opinions. The six who held positive perspectives of IC inclusion found it essential to integrate IC into EFL teaching. They stated the inclusion of IC could introduce students to the cultures of many countries, help students become sensitive to foreign cultures, and avoid inappropriate behaviors as well as

communication breakdowns when they communicate with foreigners or study abroad in the future. They also pinpointed that IC integration into EFL teaching would facilitate students' language acquisition, comparisons and understanding of different cultures, and thus it would modify students' stereotypes about other cultures. The teacher participants of the first group highlighted 4 out of 5 components of IC (i.e., cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness) as important IC components to develop for their students.

However, the teacher participant who had ambiguous perspectives of IC inclusion in EFL teaching thought it was not necessary to teach IC because her students did not aim to live or study abroad. The teacher participant who held negative perspectives of IC inclusion argued that language knowledge and skills rather than IC should be the focus because language knowledge was far more important to students. He also noted that the lack of intercultural communication environments in Vietnam was a big hindrance to IC implementation. The teachers with ambiguous and negative perspectives of IC inclusion did not highlight the importance of any IC components in their interviews.

5.3 Teachers' practices with IC

To understand how teachers implement IC in their classes, the researcher conducted a total of eight class observations. In each class observation, one teacher was observed for one 50-minute period. The class observations were conducted to help the researcher personally see IC teaching in practice and triangulate data regarding IC implementation.

The conceptual framework developed from Byram's (2009) IC model, which was presented in Chapter 3, provided the guidelines for the class observation protocols to govern the data

collection and analysis. The researcher used it to help analyze teachers' practices with IC implementation on the basis of the framework's five IC components.

Data from class observations indicated the IC components teachers developed in their classroom practices were not exactly the same as the teachers' perceptions that they expressed in the interviews. For the first group of participants, the findings from the class observations showed the IC implementation of 5 out of 6 teacher participants basically matched their perspectives of IC inclusion. The IC integration recorded from the class observation for the remaining teacher from that group did not meet her perspectives of IC inclusion she shared in the interview. The IC practice of the teacher participant in the third group who held negative perspectives of IC inclusion also agreed with the perceptions he stated in the interview. However, the IC implementation by the teacher participant in the second group who had ambiguous perspectives of IC inclusion was more than what she said in the interviews. The IC components actually developed in the classrooms depended on the potential IC contents in the teaching materials, as mentioned by the teacher participants. Table 7 indicates teacher participants' IC implementation in relation to their perspectives about IC implementation.

Table 7 Teachers' IC implementation in relation to their perspectives about IC

implementation

Categories	Teachers	Teachers' perspectives of IC expressed in the interviews		Teachers' practices with IC recorded through the class observations
		<i>Teachers' perspectives of IC</i>	<i>IC components' focus</i>	<i>IC components' focus</i>
Group 1 (positive perspectives)	Nhai	positive	cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge	cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes
	Phuong		cultural knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction	cultural knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction
	Sen		cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge	cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating
	Duong		cultural knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, critical cultural awareness	cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, cultural attitudes
	Bach		cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge	cultural knowledge
	Trang		cultural attitudes	no
Group 2 (ambiguous perspectives)	Hue	ambiguous	no	cultural knowledge
Group 3 (negative perspectives)	Tung	negative	no	no

Data from class observations of the first group (teachers who held positive perspectives of IC implementation) showed that Nhai and Phuong developed the same IC components as those they perceived. Nhai taught British-American Culture and developed students' cultural attitudes and cultural knowledge, as she reported in the interviews. In her teaching period, Nhai introduced British religions and celebrations to her students. Through group presentations, she asked her students to compare and contrast Vietnamese religions and British religions in addition to presenting some main points about British religions. Furthermore, for introducing celebrations in Britain, Nhai let a group of students play the roles of a Vietnamese student and two British students learning details about the Vu Lan Festival in Vietnam and Easter Day in Britain.

In the play, the British students asked the Vietnamese student about the Vu Lan Festival, and the Vietnamese student asked the British students about Easter Day. Some photos related to these two celebrations were shown on the screen behind them when they were acting. Through the group presentation and role play activities, the first IC component developed for students was cultural knowledge. The students received some basic information about religions in Britain and in Vietnam as well as the differences between them. Additionally, the comparison of cultures gave students opportunities to modify their viewpoints and become more open when communicating with people from other cultural backgrounds. In other words, students enhanced their cultural attitudes. Compared to the interview data, there is consistency in what Nhai perceived and what she did in her teaching practices with IC. That is, in her interview, she said she perceived IC implementation as positive and considered cultural attitudes and cultural knowledge the important IC components, and the class observation proved it because she developed these two IC components in her teaching.

Similarly, Phuong's Speaking lesson was about language, and when she introduced to her students the terms "standard communication" and "nonstandard communication", she had some IC integration. When talking about nonstandard communication, she mentioned many visitors often used body language in foreign countries because of their inability to speak the language. Phuong developed students' cultural knowledge through reminding her students of some cultural differences about the meanings of gestures and behaviors in many countries (e.g., eating habits in Vietnam and Japan; hand gestures in Vietnam and the United States). She also assigned homework in which she told the students to conduct an online search of the meanings of different gestures and behaviors in different cultures and upload them on the link she already gave the class. With this activity, Phuong implemented IC at an average level and through it could train her students to acquire new cultural features or develop their skills of discovery and interaction, an important IC component worth training, as she mentioned in the interview. It was obvious that in her teaching period, Phuong developed her students' cultural knowledge and skills of discovery and interaction, the same as what she mentioned she perceived in the interview. Even with Phuong's best attempts, her implementation of IC in the lesson seemed a little superficial. Despite the good intentions, she could not help her students enough opportunity to critically or reflectively consider intercultural differences, which could have limited the depth of their IC development.

Class observations in Sen's, Duong's, and Bach's classes showed the IC components developed were slightly different from what the teachers reported in the interviews. In Sen's Reading lesson, she introduced IC through the content of a reading text about how colors affect the way people feel. The text was about the meanings of colors in many countries and how people in those countries choose suitable colors in different contexts. Through the reading, students could learn the meanings of colors in many countries or develop their

cultural knowledge, the IC component that Sen mentioned in the interview. In the post reading activity, Sen asked her students to give some examples of colors with special meanings in their own culture in Vietnam on some special occasions (e.g., weddings, birthdays, funerals, or holidays). This activity was a good chance for students to relate the cultural feature to that of their own culture to develop their skills of interpreting and relating. In her lesson, Sen could develop two IC components - cultural knowledge and skills of interpreting and relating - for her students. She expressed in the interview that she usually focused on developing students' cultural knowledge and cultural attitudes.

Duong taught a reading text about being polite from culture to culture and developed students' IC through a video in the warm-up activity, an exercise in the reading stage, and a role-play activity in the post-reading stage. The warm-up activity stood out. In it, he showed a short video about different meanings of hand gestures in five countries, and then asked his students to put + (for “polite gesture”) or – (for “impolite gesture”) for the five countries. This was a great way to implement IC because his students could develop their cultural knowledge about politeness in many countries, especially about gestures having different meanings in different countries. In addition, in the while-reading stage, when correcting an exercise of true/false statements about “some gestures are polite in one country and rude in another” (Bixby & McVeigh, 2010, p. 47), he helped students realize the differences between the way to wave to someone in Vietnam and how to wave in the United States. From that, students could relate the cultural point to their own culture and become more curious and open towards other cultures, and develop their cultural attitudes and skills of interpreting and relating. In another true/false statement about receiving gifts, he asked the students to find the information in the reading text to compare the proper time to open gifts in the United States and in China. In another place, he reminded the students of the information in the reading that

in Argentina, people should come after the stated arrival time, while they should arrive on time in Germany. This activity could develop students' cultural knowledge about polite behaviors in many cultures.

Duong also had a role play activity in the post-reading stage to develop students' IC. He asked a group of students to act and show the polite ways to greet a friend, receive a gift, and say goodbye in Vietnamese culture. With this activity, the students had a chance to relate to their culture and develop their skills of interpreting and relating. Through his lesson, Duong developed many IC components in his students (e.g., cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, and skills of interpreting and relating), which was slightly different from what he expressed in the interview (i.e., cultural knowledge, critical cultural awareness, and skills of discovery and interaction). Many IC components were successfully covered in Duong's class; however, students' critical thinking could be further developed by adding more reflective activities.

Bach taught Phonology and Morphology, and in the lesson about morphemes, he developed students' cultural knowledge by comparing the ways to form morphemes in Vietnamese and English. After his students compared them, they concluded that morphemes are formed differently in Vietnamese and English. Bach clarified that Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language in which one word is one morpheme, while English is a multisyllabic language in which one word may consist of more than one morpheme. In his lesson, Bach did not have any activities for developing students' cultural attitudes in addition to cultural knowledge as he mentioned in the interview. His focus on morphemes emphasized a particular linguistic feature but could not show a deep interaction with cross-cultural concerns. Without cultural attitudes-related activities, there was no chance to link language proficiency with cross-cultural awareness. He explained that there were no explicit IC contents in the lesson, but with his best, he could only develop students' cultural knowledge.

The class observations of Nhai, Phuong, Sen, Duong, and Bach showed a consistency between teachers' stated perspectives and their practices with IC in everyday classrooms. That is, these teacher participants perceived IC implementation as positive, and they tried to implement as many IC components as possible in practice. In comparison to the fidelity of implementation of the curriculum, it can be seen that in these cases, the adherence criterium was applied. These participants did not ignore the IC content in the textbooks; instead, they based on the potential IC content to implement IC. In some participants' classes, the IC components demonstrated were slightly different from what the teachers reported in the interviews. This happened because the IC components developed during the IC integration in each teaching period greatly depended upon the potential IC contents in the lessons. Thus, the teaching period observed might not cover all the IC components that teachers thought should be developed.

While teachers adhered to the curriculum and textbook content, the depth of IC integration varied considerably. This variation was frequently associated with teachers' familiarity with IC concepts and their ability to creatively integrate IC into diverse lesson plans. Trang's class (Speaking course – chapter 2) was also observed, but Trang did not implement IC in this teaching period. She reported she could not find any places to integrate IC in the courses she taught in the whole semester. However, deeper analysis of the other chapters in the Speaking course book she taught showed that there was a potential IC content in the Speaking course book that teachers might exploit for IC integration although the course outline of the Speaking course did not mention IC contents. Chapter 5 in the course book introduced a speaking skill called “strategies to avoid answering questions without being impolite” (Freire & Jones, 2011, p. 32), the IC content appeared in a practice exercise involving a question about age which is normal in the Vietnamese culture but is impolite in Western cultures. The

teacher could definitely explore that cultural issue to show students the differences between their culture and the target culture and raise students' awareness of avoiding questions that are considered impolite in other cultures. It can be seen that the participant responsiveness criterium in the fidelity of implementation of the curriculum was applied in this case. That is to say, when the teacher participant had a low engagement by and involvement in the activities and content of the textbook, she could not find the potential place to integrate IC into the lesson.

Trang's explanation aligns with her ideas in the interviews in which she reported her implementation of IC mainly depended on the availability of IC contents in the coursebooks. She revealed that she addressed IC only when the IC activities were available in the lessons in the coursebook. Otherwise, she was not proactive in IC implementation and did not devote time to IC implementation in her teaching. It is apparent that to have an efficacy of IC integration, teachers need to proactively engage and be sharp in finding potential places for IC integration. From what Trang reported, Trang's integration of IC mostly depends on the availability of IC-relevant teaching contents offered in the textbooks. When the textbooks contain no explicit content related to IC, teachers do not know how to identify potential IC content or find relevant additional materials to integrate IC in the teaching periods. The findings are in accordance with Ho's (2011) and T. L. Nguyen's (2013) explanations that IC instruction is accidental and topic dependent; that is, teachers mostly follow the IC activities in the coursebooks rather than being proactive in finding supplementary materials or designing additional activities for IC instruction.

Teachers' dependence on the availability of IC-relevant teaching content within the textbooks implies a lack of professional training on IC implementation among teachers (Sercu, 2006).

Extant researchers' conclusions supported those findings of limited professional training

(e.g., Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Lázár, 2007; Sercu et al., 2005; Vo, 2017). The current study's findings also echoed Chau and Truong's (2019) and Vo's (2017) conclusions concerning a mismatch between EFL teachers' perceptions of IC implementation and their IC instruction in practice. These researchers indicated a gap exists between EFL teachers' perceptions of IC integration and their practical implementation of IC. Teachers' lack of formal training on IC implementation is also mentioned by Tung in Section 5.2 (about teachers' perspectives of IC inclusion) and will be further described in the next chapter.

Hue, from Group 2, who held ambiguous perspectives of IC implementation, showed a slight inconsistency between what she mentioned in her interview and the ways she acted in classroom practice with IC. Although Hue held ambiguous perspectives of IC implementation, she displayed fairly good IC implementation during the class observation of the course American and British Culture. In her lesson, Hue supplied her students with an overview of British politics. She asked questions and elicited students' answers about the British constitutional framework and regional government. She also asked students to work in groups and complete the information about British Parliament, and she discussed the answers to the questions about regional government and the national assembly. In her lesson, Hue developed students' cultural knowledge while she taught British politics as presented in the lesson contents. The case reinforced the fidelity of implementation of the curriculum; that is, the teacher participant adhered to the coursebook content and delivered the content as what were designed in the coursebook.

However, what Hue did with IC in the class was not enough compared with the potential IC contents in the American and British Culture course. As presented in the analysis of the course outlines in Chapter 4, this course was a huge source of potential IC contents for teachers to employ in their classes. As a teacher of British and American Culture, a course

designed to maximize the inclusion of IC, Hue should have developed more IC components for her students in addition to cultural knowledge to meet the standards of the course.

Tung was in the third group (teachers who had negative perspectives of IC implementation). His class (Speaking course) was observed, and in this teaching period, Tung did not implement IC. Sharing the same opinion with Trang, Tung reported he could not find any places to integrate IC in the courses he taught. However, in the semester that the class observations took place, Tung also taught the course Translation that contained culture-related contents, as analyzed in Chapter 4 about the inclusion of IC in the course outlines of the EFL curriculum. However, he refused to implement IC in that class for the observation, showing that he did not adhere to the coursebook content, an important criterium of the fidelity of implementation of the curriculum. He expressed that his students' language proficiency was too low to integrate IC, and he was not confident in implementing IC and needed more training on IC instruction. Tung's explanations align with the ideas he stated in the interview: he had a negative perspective of IC integration and, thus, low IC implementation.

5.4 Chapter summary

Based on the teachers' perspectives of IC inclusion in EFL teaching, the eight teacher participants were divided into three groups: the teachers with positive perspectives, the ones with ambiguous perspectives, and the ones with negative perspectives. Six teacher participants were in Group 1. These teachers held positive perspectives of IC inclusion and found it essential to integrate IC into EFL teaching. They stressed IC integration could help students learn about cultures more rapidly and become knowledgeable about differences between their cultures and other people's cultures. Then, the students would be able to mingle

with the global community, conduct effective interaction with foreigners, and avoid prejudices against other people's cultures. The class observations of 5 out of 6 teachers in the first group of participants showed that the IC components developed in the classroom teaching practices were slightly different from what the teacher participants expressed in the interviews. The difference was because IC contents included in the lessons in the teaching period observed might not cover all the IC components teachers thought should be developed. One teacher in the first group did not implement any IC during the class observation because there was no explicit content related to IC available in the textbooks. This case reinforced that the integration of IC mostly depends on the textbooks offering IC-relevant teaching content.

The teacher belonging to Group 2, teacher participants who had ambiguous perspectives of IC inclusion in EFL teaching, thought teaching IC was unnecessary because the students did not aim to live or study abroad. Her comments in the interview also showed she did not highlight the importance of any IC components. However, the implementation of IC recorded while observing her class indicated that when she taught a culture-related course, she had more IC integration than she perceived. However, the IC components she developed for her students recorded in class observation were less than expected based on the course outline standards.

The teacher from the third group of teacher participants, those who held negative perspectives of IC inclusion, argued that language knowledge and skills should be focused on rather than IC because language knowledge was far more important to students. He also noted the lack of intercultural communication environments in Vietnam was a big hindrance to IC implementation. He reported he did not develop any IC components in his class. He chose not to implement IC during the class observation even though one of the courses he

taught contained potential IC content. He explained that his students did not have enough language proficiency to acquire IC, and he needed more training on IC instruction to become confident in IC integration.



Chapter 6: Influential factors to the integration of IC

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the teacher participants' perspectives of the influential factors of the integration of IC. Specifically, it presents their views of influential factors as facilitators of or hindrances to the implementation of IC. The findings are drawn from semi-structured interviews with eight teachers (including two curriculum designers).

In response to Research Question 3 ("From teachers' perspectives, what factors facilitate or hinder the integration of IC into EFL teaching practices?"), this chapter focuses on EFL teachers' responses regarding the factors that facilitated or inhibited the implementation of IC. The chapter closes with a chapter summary.

6.2 The influential factors to the integration of IC

The conceptual framework with multilayered influential factors of IC implementation provided the guidelines for this portion of the data collection and analysis. This study used the conceptual framework to systematically analyze the facilitating and hindering factors of IC implementation experienced by teachers across the macro, meso, and micro levels. In this study, the facilitating and inhibiting factors at the macro level are defined as the ones that can be decided by the national factors (i.e., the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, the Vietnamese government) and international factors. The meso level involves the factors whose solutions can be found by the university and Faculty of Foreign Languages. The influential factors at the micro level are related to individuals, that is, teachers and students.

6.2.1 The influential factors to the integration of IC at the macro level

Through their semi-structured interviews, teacher participants reported several influential factors of IC teaching at the macro level. These involved the lack of IC requirements in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English, the insufficient class time for IC incorporation, and the lack of teacher training on IC integration. The factor related to IC requirements in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English is listed at the macro level because the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam and the Vietnamese government determine that curriculum framework. The time allotted for IC incorporation is in inverse proportion to the time for teaching language content, the objectives of which are set in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English, and thus it is also regulated as a macro-level factor. The teacher training on IC integration is analyzed at the macro level because its solutions are decided by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, the Vietnamese government, and international factors. These factors collectively highlighted a systemic issue within the educational framework that undermined the effectiveness of IC implementation in the EFL curriculum.

- ***The lack of IC requirements in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English***

As presented in Chapter 4, the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English regulate the EFL curriculum framework of the university; therefore, the lack of IC requirements at the national level has a great influence on the extent of IC inclusion in the EFL curriculum framework of the university as well as on the IC teaching practices. In their interviews, Trang and Phuong revealed the lack of IC requirements in the

Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English was a hindrance to IC inclusion in EFL teaching. Trang pointed out that in the national level of curriculum framework, apart from the requirements of the presence of some IC-related courses (e.g., British Culture, American Culture, and British-American Literature), the framework contains no clear requirements regarding the extent of IC to be taught, how much time to allocate for IC implementation, or what IC objectives students are to achieve. The lacks of policy requirements and clear guidelines indicated a large educational neglect of integrating IC skills into the curriculum. The minimal and superficial treatment of IC in the curriculum indicated a misalignment between the educational policy and the demands of global integration process.

The Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English only requires some courses that are related to IC such as British Culture, American Culture, and British-American Literature. IC is not mentioned in the remaining courses. The IC objectives, the extent of IC, and the time for IC teaching are not regulated formally in the national curriculum framework of English. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

Phuong also shared similar ideas with Trang about the lack of IC requirements in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English. As a result, teachers have tended to prioritize teaching the language knowledge and skills whose objectives are clearly set, and they have considered IC instruction a subordinate priority. The curriculum's failure to include mandatory IC objectives led to the fact that intercultural skills, fundamental to students' success in a globalized environment, were systemically undervalued. Phuong also stressed that without containing explicitly set IC objectives, the teaching curriculum would limit teachers' systematic integration of IC (Osman, 2015).

Teachers' ability to include IC was limited by the need to adhere to predetermined language

content, which reflected a strict curricular structure that did not facilitate the integration of IC.

In each period, teachers need to make sure they finish teaching the main contents in the lesson and achieve the language objectives set for that period as required in the course outlines. No IC objectives are set, so I don't devote much effort to IC activities, but I try to transmit to the students the language contents to meet the language objectives. Therefore, it can be seen that the teaching curriculum without IC objectives would discourage teachers' integration of IC. (Interview with Phuong – English translation)

- ***Insufficient class time for IC teaching***

Two teacher participants considered limited class time for IC implementation a hindering factor for IC integration. Nhai and Tung revealed the lack of class time and heavy workload were big barriers for IC teaching. This time constraint underscored a crucial difficulty in striking a balance between the demands of the curriculum and the need to develop students' IC. They stated their workloads on language content was too heavy to reserve time for IC teaching. They also felt much pressure from other work and did not have time for designing IC activities.

I really want to integrate IC in my teaching. However, because I don't have much time, I can't have much IC integration in my classes. I must make sure I have enough time for teaching the main contents in the lessons. If I implement IC too much in a teaching period, I will not have time for teaching enough of the language contents. (Interview with Nhai - English translation)

Teachers don't have enough time for IC teaching. The knowledge contents that we need to transmit to students in each period are rather heavy. Apart from teaching, we also have much pressure from other academic-related work. Therefore, we sometimes ignore IC contents in our teaching practices because we don't have enough time for preparing the activities for IC integration. (Interview with Tung – English translation)

Notably, as those teacher participants pointed out, the language objectives rather than IC requirements or IC objectives were set in the curriculum. The emphasis on linguistic content over IC drew attention to a basic mismatch between the competencies required for successful communication and the design of curricula. Therefore, teachers have had to devote more class time for teaching the language knowledge and skills, and they have used less class time for IC instruction. Phuong stated that although teachers want to have more IC integration in a teaching period, class time does not permit teachers to do so.

It is certain that class time is a constraint for the integration of IC in EFL teaching. Time does not permit teachers to have much IC integration in a teaching period even when teachers want to do so. In each period, teachers need to make sure they finish teaching the main contents in the lesson and achieve the language objectives set for that period as required in the course outline. In reality, when I think I need to implement some IC content in my teaching, I will use limited time to address that IC issue. No IC objectives are set, so I reserve limited time for IC and use more time for the contents and the language objectives. (Interview with Phuong – English translation)

- ***Lack of teacher training on IC implementation***

In regard to teacher training on IC implementation, Tung and Hue reported a lack of teacher training on IC integration was a big constraint for IC teaching. The lack of opportunities for focused professional development indicated a serious deficiency in teacher training and support for successful IC instruction. Tung said teachers received training only on language teaching, and they had no formal training on IC teaching. He stated most teachers had to learn how to integrate IC by themselves. His report was in accordance with Sercu's (2006) research findings that EFL teachers' profiles about culture teaching did not meet the expectations as interculturally competent teachers.

I haven't gotten any formal training on IC integration and am not very confident in integrating IC, which is a real constraint in IC teaching. Teachers really need more training so they can implement IC in the classrooms. I have been training on teaching language knowledge and skills only. As for how to implement IC in EFL teaching, most teachers just self-study and find a method for themselves. (Interview with Tung – English translation)

In the same vein, Hue pointed out teachers' limited professional training on IC teaching was a big hindrance that led to teachers' ignorance of IC implementation in their teaching. This circumstance highlighted a more general problem with insufficient systems of support for professional development in the fields essential to contemporary teaching methods. She also confirmed that teacher training, if any, might not be effective because the training sessions were usually in the forms of lectures in big, crowded halls rather than practical IC teaching activities.

Without teacher training on IC instruction, we hardly implement IC in our teaching.

There may be a few workshops EFL teachers can attend and learn about IC integration.

However, the training is not effective. It is usually carried out in crowded halls. People just share or talk about their general experiences rather than having practical IC activities. (Interview with Hue – English translation)

6.2.2 The influential factors to the integration of IC at the meso level

The influential factors of IC integration at the meso level were listed as the low relevance of IC in the university's teaching curriculum framework, the available teaching materials related to IC for some courses, the limited opportunities for cross-cultural communication, the language proficiency-focused assessment system, the large class size and inadequate teaching facilities. The EFL curriculum framework of the university is listed at the meso level because it is designed by the Faculty of Foreign Languages and the university approves it on the basis of following the requirements of the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English. Other factors related to the teaching materials, intercultural environment, assessment system, class size, and teaching facilities are also decided by the Faculty of Foreign Languages and the university, and thus belong to meso-level influential factors.

- ***The low relevance of IC in teaching curriculum framework of the university***

The course outlines were developed as prescribed by the curriculum framework of the university, and teachers relied on the course outlines when designing their lessons. Therefore, if the curriculum framework of the university mentioned IC aspects or required IC inclusion, IC would be well addressed in the course outlines and in the teaching materials. Accordingly,

teachers would have more opportunities to integrate IC in their lessons because, as presented in the previous chapter, teachers were more likely to implement IC when the IC activities were available in the teaching materials.

Regarding the EFL curriculum framework of the university, Duong and Hue emphasized it was a hindering factor of the integration of IC. This lack of attention on IC is a reflection of a systemic undervaluation of IC in the university framework, undermining the larger educational objectives of preparing students for a globalized world. They clarified that the curriculum framework of the university neither placed emphasis on IC nor contained any programs for students to experience real interactions with foreigners. The lack of formal requirements for IC underscored a critical gap in curriculum design, resulting in a missed opportunity for fostering IC. In the interview, Duong claimed the EFL curriculum framework of the university did not highlight the importance of IC, and therefore teachers considered IC a subordinate aspect in their teaching.

The faculty and the university do not consider IC an important aspect to be required formally in the EFL teaching curriculum in our university. Therefore, the integration of IC is optional in EFL teaching, so teachers don't need to try to integrate IC.

Additionally, teachers haven't been acquainted with integrating IC into EFL teaching to develop students' IC. I think this is a hindering factor of IC teaching. (Interview with Duong – English translation)

In the same vein, Hue pointed out the EFL curriculum framework of the university did not contain any programs or courses that require students to interact with foreigners and improve their IC. This lack of IC engagement opportunities reflected a broader neglect of practical intercultural experiences which were crucial for the development of IC. The inability to

proactively create intercultural programs exposed a structural problem in the development of students' IC. As she affirmed in the interview, the curriculum that failed to have students build IC to a certain level was a constraint for IC teaching.

I find that the curriculum in our university does not include a program that asks students to have real experiences with foreigners. There are no courses in the curriculum that require students to talk with foreigners and show their teachers which IC components they have gained. There are some online courses offered to students of our university to integrate with students of other countries, but they all are created by the General Embassy of the U.S. in Vietnam. The faculty hasn't been proactive in creating any student exchange programs with foreign universities or companies. These shortcomings may hinder IC teaching. (Interview with Hue – English translation)

Duong and Hue's evaluations of the EFL curriculum framework corresponded to the curriculum designers' opinions in Chapter 4 that the EFL curriculum framework of the university did not place enough emphasis on IC. This mismatch between the curriculum design and the demands of a globalized learning environment is indicative of an educational system that undervalues IC. Teachers' evaluation of the presence of IC in the university curriculum framework made the findings of the current study different from other research.

- ***Available teaching materials related to IC for some courses***

The teacher participants reported that the availability of the coursebooks and teaching materials related to IC for some courses was one of the factors that positively influenced IC integration. Bach and Duong emphasized that the teaching materials for some language skill courses were a potential source to facilitate IC teaching. They confirmed the coursebooks for

teaching language skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking) were written by native English speakers and contained certain potential cultural contents from which teachers could extrapolate the cultural issues for IC implementation. They concluded that the coursebooks for these language skill courses were good sources of materials that facilitated IC implementation and could help students communicate effectively with people from other countries and cultures.. The availability of culturally appropriate materials indicated to a favorable resource that could enhance IC instruction.

The teaching materials that were written by English native speakers are a good facilitating factor of IC teaching as teachers can integrate IC through the lessons related to the cultures of some English-speaking countries. The coursebooks, especially the coursebooks on language skills we are using, contain some situations that happened not only in English-speaking countries but also in the countries that speak English as a second language or a foreign language. They are very good sources of materials from which we can explore cultural aspects to help students communicate well with people from many other countries. (Interview with Bach – English translation)

One of the factors that positively influences IC teaching is the coursebooks and teaching materials. The teaching materials, in addition to providing students with the language knowledge, need to contain IC contents so teachers can build on them and help students understand the real lives of the native speakers and acquire IC. (Interview with Duong – English translation)

The above viewpoints agreed with the evaluations by Tung, the curriculum designer, that the teaching materials written by native English speakers chosen for teaching language skill courses contained some potential places for IC integration and were a good source for

teachers to integrate IC. However, various teachers have different opinions about the potential IC contents in the teaching materials based on the courses they teach because those teaching materials are not available for all courses. For instance, Hue confirmed the teaching materials for some courses were not a facilitator for IC teaching. She mentioned that for some courses, the coursebooks that were designed by the teachers in the faculty did not contain many IC contents. Therefore, when the course teachers wanted to integrate IC, they had to seek supplementary materials on websites, but these materials were usually not formal and reliable. This discrepancy in the accessibility of resources highlighted a significant weakness in the continuous integration of IC throughout courses and emphasized the necessity for more thorough material preparation.

For some of the courses I taught, the coursebooks are not textbooks formally published by foreign authors but were designed by teachers of our faculty. IC contents are not well embedded in these coursebooks, which hinders teachers from implementing IC. To integrate IC, teachers need to find more materials, mainly on the web. There are many sources on the web, but most of them are not formal, reliable, or appropriate. Teachers need a formal book that covers all the English speakers' practices, customs, lifestyles, and cultures or one that reports stories about someone's real experiences in some foreign countries. (Interview with Hue – English translation)

- ***Limited opportunities for cross-cultural communication***

The communication environment at the university was considered a hindering factor for IC teaching as expressed by Trang and Nhai. The university's capacity to offer experiential learning opportunities that supplement classroom instruction is seriously lacking, as seen by the dearth of opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement. These participants

stated that after teachers' IC instruction, students needed a cross-cultural communication environment to practice the IC they had learned, but the communication environment in the university was not suitable for students to practice IC. Trang and Nhai claimed there were no native English teachers in the university, and the university did not make use of the presence of international students at the campus to create many conditions (such as clubs, extracurricular activities, platforms, or activities) for local students to mingle with the international students to practice their IC. The absence of planned chances for intercultural interaction highlighted a missed opportunity to develop IC through experiential learning.

We do not have any native English teachers in our university, which is a drawback in IC teaching. To develop students' IC, we need to have native English speakers who will bring cultural factors into our classrooms to help us teach IC in the most natural way.

(Interview with Trang – English translation)

One of the hindering factors of IC teaching is that students did not have many opportunities to mingle with international students at the university to practice IC.

Although there are some international students on the campus, the university has not organized many clubs for local and foreign students to interact with each other.

Sometimes the teachers of the faculty invite the foreign teachers to accompany them in some extracurricular activities, but the university and the faculty seldom organize platforms or activities to enhance the friendships among local and foreign students.

(Interview with Nhai – English translation)

In addition to considering the communication environment of the campus an inhibiting factor of developing students' IC, Bach confirmed that the presence of many international students on the campus did not mean there was a cross-cultural communication environment at the

university. He clarified that the international students in the university were mainly from Laos and Cambodia, and their cultural backgrounds were quite similar to local students' cultural backgrounds, as these neighboring countries also had Eastern cultures like Vietnam. He stressed that without an intercultural communication environment to practice IC, students are likely to have problems when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds.

I think the inhibiting factor of developing students' IC is the lack of a communication environment on campus for students to practice the IC we have taught them. There are only local people communicating with each other in our environment. Although we try to communicate with each other in English, the issues related to IC are very limited in our communication. Although there are some students from Laos and Cambodia studying in our university, their backgrounds are very similar to ours. These two neighboring countries also have Eastern cultures like we do. In addition, due to the influence of our mother tongue, we are acquainted with the ways to express ideas in the Vietnamese style. Therefore, with the lack of a communication environment, students get into trouble when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds although we have taught IC to them. (Interview with Bach – English translation)

- ***Language proficiency-focused assessment system***

According to the teacher participants, as written in the course outlines of the EFL curriculum at the university, the English language assessment mainly focused on assessing students' language knowledge and skills rather than IC. The assessment methods for many courses included tests and examinations in written or oral forms. Other courses required the submission of reflections, projects, or video clips for midterm and final examinations. For all

the assessment methods mentioned, the marking criteria involved only students' language proficiency while the assessment of students' IC was totally ignored. This alignment between evaluation criteria and learning goals highlighted a larger problem of emphasizing language competence above IC, which could impede students' overall growth. The language proficiency-focused assessment system in EFL teaching, therefore, was listed as an impeding factor for IC integration by the teacher participants.

Talking about the present assessment system, Bach and Trang claimed that the assessment system that puts more emphasis on students' language proficiency was one of the inhibiting factors of IC teaching. Bach argued that the traditional assessment system placed more emphasis on the language competence rather than IC, and it was difficult for teachers to design tests and examinations to assess students' IC. Therefore, teachers tended to ignore IC assessment.

The assessment system that places more focus on linguistic contents is certainly a hindrance of IC teaching. Almost all teachers do not pay attention to assessing IC. They have more emphasis on the language competence. In addition, if the course they teach is not related to culture, it will be hard for them to design a test or examination that assesses IC. (Interview with Bach – English translation)

Sharing the same idea, Trang claimed the lack of IC assessment in the course outlines would discourage teachers from integrating IC and decrease students' motivation to learn IC. Accordingly, teachers would have more focus on developing students' language competence rather than IC.

The traditional assessment way that ignores the IC aspect is a factor that makes teachers and students uninterested in IC integration. IC assessment is not obligated in most of the course outlines of the curriculum framework. Since IC assessment is not required, teachers do not devote much time and effort in teaching IC. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

- ***Big class size***

In English - major classes, there were usually around 40 students per class in the university, and Tung and Nhai indicated the big class size was one of the barriers for IC instruction. They clarified that large classes force teachers to spend much time setting up for communication situations or for other IC activities. Crowded classes with immovable tables and chairs in the university also caused many difficulties for IC instruction, which required much space to move and practice. The difficulty of managing large classes and offering individualized instruction in intercultural communication emphasized the demand for more supportive teaching environments that can enable successful IC teaching.

The big class size in our university is a real hindrance to IC teaching. The large number of students in a class discourages teachers in integrating IC. It will take a lot of time to ask students to move around and get into groups or play roles. In addition, in the big classes, we still use traditional rooms with immovable tables and chairs. The immovable tables and chairs prevented us from carrying out the role-play activities. It is hard to set up communication situations to integrate IC into the lessons. (Interview with Tung – English translation)

Crowded classes are a big hindering factor for IC teaching and practicing. It is very

hard to organize the IC activities if there are over 40 students in the class. Especially when we organize activities, the students are very noisy, and we can't manage many students well at the same time in a big class. (Interview with Nhai – English translation)

In contrast, Bach and Sen disagreed with Nhai and Tung. They considered the big class size a small problem in their IC implementation. Bach revealed he integrated IC into the lessons through lecturing and explaining the cultural issues; therefore, the class size did not influence his IC implementation. Similarly, Sen stated a large class was not an obstacle to her because she could implement IC by asking students to work in groups and discuss the issues related to culture.

I often integrate IC and other issues related to culture through lecturing or explaining. I rarely design an activity for implementing IC that is related to the students' physical states or is influenced by the class size. Therefore, in my view, the class size does not greatly influence the development of students' IC in my classes. (Interview with Bach – English translation)

As for the class size, I think a class with about 40 students is still acceptable for IC implementation. I usually divide the class into different groups and ask them to discuss or debate the issues related to culture as well as develop their IC. I can transmit all the information to the whole class without any trouble. (Interview with Sen – English translation)

In addition, Hue thought a large class was likely to contain diverse student composition and thus might be a facilitating factor for developing students' IC. This showed the complexity of influential factors from teachers' perspectives and made the findings of the present study

unique from other studies. Hue argued that in a large class, there were many students with different knowledge backgrounds and even different cultural backgrounds. If teachers could exploit this advantage, they would be able to help students negotiate conflicts, know how to respect differences, and learn from each other's backgrounds. Hue confirmed that if teachers could utilize the advantages of a big class, apart from developing students' language skills, they would certainly develop their students' soft skills and positive attitudes in acquiring a new culture.

To me, a big language class size is an advantage for IC instruction. In a big class, there will be many students. It means they will know different ranges of knowledge, and they may be from diverse cultural backgrounds. And thus the teachers can take advantage of the diversity to develop students' IC. If teachers are clever and skillful, they may help their students negotiate the disagreements or conflicts in their viewpoints, know the ways to respect each other, and learn from each other. As a result, they can develop their students' soft skills and modify their attitudes about acquiring a new culture in addition to teaching language skills. (Interview with Hue – English translation)

- ***Inadequate teaching facilities***

The inadequate teaching facilities at the university was listed as a constraint for IC instruction, as Duong and Trang stated. Through his interview, Duong explained the lack of lab rooms and internet accessibility in all the classrooms greatly prevented teachers from IC implementation. It should be noted that at the present, although the internet networks are accessible to nearly every household in Vietnam, people have to pay a relatively high price to get internet accessibility for their houses. The high cost means the university cannot afford internet accessibility in all the classrooms across the campus.

We don't have enough lab rooms and internet accessibility in all the classrooms on the campus, which is a really big constraint in IC teaching. Internet accessibility is an indispensable condition for teachers to show online videos or search for supplementary materials. Our students also need to access the internet to search for materials for completing the IC activities given by teachers. We also need more lab rooms with high-quality speakers so our students can hear the sounds of the video clips better, which would help students clearly understand the intercultural communicating contexts in the video clips. (Interview with Duong – English translation)

In addition, Trang clarified that the university was not well equipped with a gallery that displayed real models or products related to the cultures of many countries. She explained that when teachers want to integrate a cultural issue into the lesson, they do not have any real objects to use, and they must show what they found on the internet for their IC implementation. The lack of facilities for interactive and practical IC activities highlighted the need for improved infrastructure to support effective intercultural education.

We don't have any galleries or places to display the models or products that are related to the cultures of the other countries, especially cultures of the U.S. and the U.K. With the teaching facilities we have currently, when teachers want to integrate a cultural issue into the lesson, for example the culture about Halloween, they don't have any real objects to use. They must imitate what is shown on the internet to prepare for their IC implementation. I think they would integrate IC more effectively if they showed their students real objects or products from other cultures. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

6.2.3 The influential factors to the integration of IC at the micro level

Much attention was drawn to the influential factors of IC implementation at the micro level that involved teachers' awareness of integrating IC into EFL teaching, students' attitudes in acquiring IC, teachers' intercultural experience and competence, and teachers' utility of online resources. These factors were considered at the micro level because they were involved with individual teachers and students. Since each individual held different perspectives, the participants' opinions about each factor diverged, and many factors tended to be both an enabler and barrier to IC integration.

- ***Teachers' awareness of integrating IC into EFL teaching***

Phuong, Hue, and Trang shared some similar ideas in acknowledging that teachers' awareness of integrating IC into EFL teaching would positively influence IC teaching (Czura, 2016). Phuong showed her good awareness of IC integration and stressed that when teachers were aware of the importance of IC integration in EFL teaching, they would have the motivation and find the methods to integrate IC in their classes.

To me, the awareness of each teacher regarding integrating IC is the most important influential factor. I am always aware of integrating IC into my teaching, and I do it whenever possible. Only when teachers have such awareness do they have the motivation and find the methods to exploit IC in each lesson they teach. (Interview with Phuong – English translation)

Hue and Trang reinforced Phuong's ideas about emphasizing the pivotal role of EFL teachers' awareness in facilitating IC implementation. In addition, they believed that teachers should

be fully aware of the importance of IC integration in EFL teaching as well as teaching culture in foreign language classes.

To integrate IC in EFL teaching, the teachers themselves need to realize the importance of IC and IC integration in EFL teaching. With this awareness, each teacher will gain their IC knowledge through self-study and overseas experiences, then they will teach IC better and more extensively. (Interview with Hue – English translation)

One of the factors that facilitates IC teaching is teachers' understanding of the importance of culture in language. The teachers' attitudes towards IC are crucial in integrating IC and fostering IC teaching. Teachers with positive cultural attitudes will create more inner motivations for students to learn IC. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

- ***Students' attitudes in acquiring IC***

In addition to teachers' awareness of IC integration, students' positive attitudes to acquire IC and explore new things were considered one of the factors that facilitated the integration of IC. Meanwhile, students' lack of interest in IC learning was proved to be a barrier for IC teaching. As expressed by Duong, students' eagerness to learn IC was a crucial catalyst of IC teaching. He argued that students' openness and curiosity in learning IC would motivate teachers to implement IC.

Students' positive attitudes are a great facilitator of IC teaching. Whether teachers implement IC or not greatly depends upon students' attitudes. When students show curiosity and eagerness to learn new IC knowledge and explore new horizons of the

world, teachers will be more excited and motivated to help them explore and acquire the unique cultures of many countries and regions of the world. (Interview with Duong – English translation)

By contrast, Hue claimed students showed disinterest or negative attitudes towards the importance of IC. She pointed out that since students did not enthusiastically participate in the IC activities in class, teachers were discouraged, and their integration of IC was unsuccessful (T. L. Nguyen, 2013).

The effectiveness of IC integration must come from both the teachers and the students. Apart from the factor derived from teachers as I have mentioned, students' attitudes play an important role. Some students don't have open attitudes to acquire new things and are not ready to explore new knowledge. They show disinterest in acquiring information about new cultures and don't participate in the IC activities, making it difficult for teachers to implement IC in their teaching. It certainly discourages the teacher in integrating IC issues in that class. (Interview with Hue – English translation)

In addition, Duong, Tung, and Trang shared their concerns about students' low motivation in IC learning in relation to students' low language proficiency. Duong stated, "My students still face language barriers, so it's hard for me to integrate IC. They have a lot of pressure with learning the language knowledge. They cannot have much attention to IC development". Tung and Trang explained that students' low motivations in IC learning resulted from their low language competence (Tran & Seepho, 2014). They also revealed some students were uninterested in IC learning and only expected their teachers to help them master language competence rather than teaching them IC; as a result, minimal integration of IC was done in EFL teaching (Eken, 2015; T. L. Nguyen, 2013; Sercu, 2005; Vo, 2017; Zhou, 2011).

Moreover, they confirmed that teachers' efforts in IC instruction are useless if students do not have any motivation to learn IC and do not realize the role of IC.

I think the students' low motivation is a big barrier to the integration of IC into EFL teaching. My students don't have any motivation in their studying. Their language knowledge and communication skills are very low. They can't acquire IC. They just want me to teach them language knowledge and skills. These factors make them ignore IC. (Interview with Tung – English translation)

Students' negative attitudes towards IC and low motivations to learn IC are the core inhibitors of IC integration. If students are not aware of the importance of IC in learning a language, they don't have any motivation to improve their IC, and then teachers' efforts in teaching IC brings nothing. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

- ***Teachers' intercultural experience and competence***

Teachers' intercultural experience was considered one of the most crucial facilitating factors of IC teaching, as revealed by Tung who spent about 4 months in four foreign countries, and Trang who stayed in Australia for 2 months during her internship program of her MA study. They indicated that with extensive exposure to intercultural environments in foreign countries, teachers would know how to help their students communicate effectively in real contexts with foreigners. Furthermore, Tung and Trang revealed that intercultural experience would help teachers become more confident in IC teaching, and they could help students form right attitudes towards the ways to acquire new cultures and IC.

Teachers who have extensive intercultural experiences can bring these valuable experiences into their classroom teaching practices. Moreover, they can help students form right attitudes towards the ways to acquire some aspects of new cultures and IC. They need to help students integrate into new cultures in such a way that the students' cultures are not assimilated. From the teachers' experiences, students should, on the one hand, learn new things but, on the other hand, still retain their national identities.

(Interview with Tung – English translation)

It's apparent that the teachers' intercultural experience greatly facilitates IC teaching. When teachers have close contact with people in a foreign country, they can realize that there are many things they learned from books that are not the same as what they find in real life there. In fact, when I lived abroad, I realized that the native English speakers' everyday communication was not like what I had taught my students before. From these experiences, I think teachers should teach in such a way so that their students may be able to communicate in real contexts with foreigners rather than learning just to write grammatically correct sentences. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

Trang also reported that the overseas experiences she had when studying in a foreign country were quite useful for teaching IC in her classes. She used her practical IC experiences and knowledge about cultural differences to inspire her students to receive new things and learn more IC. As she taught, she showed pictures and video clips of real life in foreign countries to enhance their motivation to learn more IC knowledge. She also told her students stories related to real intercultural communication situations and shared the intercultural experiences she had. She stated this sharing could help her students behave appropriately if they were in similar intercultural contexts.

In my classes, I often showed my students pictures and video clips of real life in foreign countries where I used to live to arouse their need to learn more IC knowledge. They seemed to be motivated and eager to learn new things. Additionally, I explained to them that the nonequivalent translations of English idioms and Vietnamese idioms are due to the cultural differences between the two countries. Through that, I emphasized that to understand a language, they need to understand its culture. In addition, when I taught content that was related to cultures, I sometimes told my students some stories I had learned abroad and talked about the intercultural experiences I had. I also told them about some intercultural situations abroad and helped them understand how to behave appropriately in such situations. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

However, Sen and Hue, who had never been abroad, mentioned that teachers' limited intercultural experiences were remarkable hindrances in IC teaching. As they revealed, teachers who had not lived overseas would possess limited IC knowledge and experiences; therefore, they would feel unconfident and find it difficult to implement IC in their teaching (T. L. Nguyen, 2013; Zhou, 2011). They also argued that although teachers could explore and gain more IC from social networks to integrate IC in their classes, the IC content taken from social media may be unreliable or inappropriate.

IC teaching will be very difficult for teachers who have limited intercultural experience. Because they never experience life in a foreign country, they have limited IC knowledge to teach in their classes. Although teachers can learn IC from books, magazines, and videos to integrate IC, their IC implementation is not as lively as what is done by a teacher who has many intercultural experiences. (Interview with Sen – English translation)

A lack of intercultural experience will very much prevent teachers from IC teaching.

The intercultural experiences the teachers hear from their colleagues are not enough.

They need to experience real life in a foreign country to learn many new things and use them to improve their students' IC. I have heard many stories and overseas experiences from my colleagues, but I don't remember them very long. However, if teachers live abroad just once, they will be more confident, which helps them develop their IC teaching better than any other forms of training in IC integration. If I can experience life in a foreign country, I will learn many new things, and these experiences will engrave deeper in my memory. Then, I will feel more confident to teach IC to my students. In addition to that, if teachers have to implement IC in their lessons when they have limited real-life experiences abroad, they have to learn IC from social networks, which may be inexact, unreliable, or inappropriate. (Interview with Hue – English translation)

In addition, Hue emphasized that teachers' lack of IC was the most serious inhibiting factor to the implementation of IC. Comparing the teachers' lack of IC with the lack of class time for IC teaching, another impeding factor, Hue indicated that teachers' limited IC was the greater factor that hindered the integration of IC. Hue argued that even when teachers might reserve class time for IC teaching, if they were not interculturally competent enough to conduct IC instruction, then the IC integration could not happen.

To me, whether time affects IC teaching or not is not a problem. The main problem here is whether teachers have sufficient competence to teach IC. The division of class time for IC teaching is also important, but I think it is not a big problem. The more important factor is the teachers themselves. Whether teachers have enough IC knowledge to teach IC is more important. Let's say, teachers are supposed to have 10 periods for teaching

IC, but are they interculturally competent enough to integrate IC in those 10 periods? If teachers don't have enough IC knowledge to have much IC implementation, then the regulation of time for IC integration is meaningless. (Interview with Hue – English translation)

- *Teachers' utility of online resources*

The findings on this influential factor made the present study unique from the extant literature. According to a few teachers, another factor that facilitated the implementation of IC at the micro level was related to the utility of online resources. Through his interview, Duong revealed that with the accessibility of social networks all over the world, in general, and in Vietnam, in particular, teachers' utility of the online resources was a factor that fostered IC integration in EFL teaching. Duong expressed that with widespread online resources, he could find supplementary materials, such as pictures, photos, and video clips related to intercultural communication to show his students how to communicate effectively in intercultural environments.

With the availability of online resources and social networks, if teachers know how to exploit the online supplementary teaching materials, they become a wonderful facilitator for IC integration. I can find material sources to facilitate IC teaching. When the contents in the teaching materials of a certain course do not contain cultural issues or IC activities, I may search for pictures, photos, or videos related to the topic I am teaching and bring them to my class. I can also find and provide my students with some situations they should avoid in communication. These supplementary materials can help me explain and clarify the cultural issues, and thus the cultural issues will become engraved on the students' memory. (Interview with Duong – English translation)

In a similar vein, Trang indicated teachers' use of online teaching materials was a great influential factor for IC implementation. She clarified that the accessibility of online resources provided teachers with a rich source of information as well as a great motivation to search for supplementary materials for IC integration. Moreover, as she explained, the users of social networks were people from all over the world; therefore, teachers might have many opportunities to interact with people from various cultural backgrounds and discover more IC that might be helpful in IC integration.

Social networks have emerged recently, and teachers' utility of the online teaching resources is a great factor to facilitate IC teaching. The online resources are a rich source of information and one of the facilitating factors that helped teachers access the teaching materials for IC teaching. In addition, social networks attract a great deal of users all over the world, so it is a good opportunity for teachers to mingle, develop their IC, and teach IC better. Therefore, teachers' use of these resources is a great facilitator for IC teaching. (Interview with Trang – English translation)

Moreover, Nhai presented that she took advantage of the online resources to facilitate her IC teaching. She made good use of the online resources along with her relationships with foreign colleagues to design suitable activities to facilitate her IC teaching. As she reported, she looked for IC information from the internet for IC teaching and invited a foreign friend to be a guest speaker via Zoom in her classes to develop their IC.

With the availability of online resources, I can find much information from e-books, authentic magazines, photos, and videos for the implementation of IC. From these sources, I might understand the nature or the source of a certain cultural phenomenon so I could have an insightful explanation about it for my students. Moreover, I took

advantage of the social networks by having a foreigner as a guest speaker via Zoom in my classes. I found it is helpful in IC teaching and effective in improving students' IC. (Interview with Nhai – English translation)

However, some teacher participants did not consider the availability of online resources a facilitator for IC teaching. As Tung presented, when IC contents were not available in the coursebooks, he did not have time to search for the supplementary materials from the internet. He stated, “I sometimes ignore IC content in our teaching practices because I don't have enough time for preparing the activities for IC integration.” In addition, Hue explained her reasons for not utilizing the online resources were that the materials found online were not really formal, reliable and appropriate. She specified, “IC from social networks may be inexact, unreliable, or inappropriate”.

It is clear from the analysis of teacher participants' perspectives about the influential factors of IC implementation that they figured out the influential factors in all three levels (i.e., the macro level, the meso level, and the micro level). Among the many factors mentioned above, the teachers highlighted six main factors: (a) the intercultural communication environment on the campus, (b) the presence of IC in the curriculum framework of the university, (c) class time for IC, (d) teachers' awareness of IC integration, (e) students' attitudes in IC learning, and (f) teachers' intercultural experience and competence. That last factor is the most significant influential factor the teachers in the three groups (teachers with positive, ambiguous, and negative perspectives of IC implementation) highlighted. That teachers' intercultural experience and competence is the most pivotal factor that influences IC teaching could be inferred from the analysis of extant research (e.g., Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Lázár, 2007; T. L. Nguyen, 2013; Tran & Seepho, 2015; Zhou, 2011).

6.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the facilitating factors as well as the prohibiting factors to the integration of IC as perceived by the teacher participants across the macro level (national and international level), meso level (faculty and university level), and micro level (individual level).

The influential factors at the macro level involved the lack of IC requirements in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English, the insufficient class time for IC incorporation, and the lack of teacher training on IC integration.

Specifically, the teacher participants reported that the lack of IC requirements in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English limited teachers' integration of IC. Additionally, to some teacher participants, the workload on language contents was too heavy to reserve time for IC teaching. Moreover, that teachers got training only on language teaching rather than formal training on IC teaching was listed as a big constraint in IC teaching.

The influential factors of IC integration at the meso level indicated by the teacher participants were (a) the low relevance of IC in the teaching curriculum framework of the university, (b) the available teaching materials related to IC for some courses, (c) the limited opportunities for cross-cultural communication, (d) the language proficiency-focused assessment system, and (e) the large class sizes and inadequate teaching facilities. Specifically, the participants pointed out the curriculum framework of the university neither placed emphasis on IC nor contained any programs for real interaction with foreigners. The coursebooks for some courses were considered a potential source to facilitate IC teaching while others did not support IC integration. Additionally, the lack of native teachers on campus and failure to

create cross-cultural communication between local and international students proved to limit the communication environment at the university. The language proficiency-focused assessment system also discouraged teachers from integrating IC and decreased students' motivation to learn IC. Furthermore, the inadequate teaching facilities at the university made it hard for teachers to integrate IC. Big class size proved to be a facilitator to IC integration in terms of having diverse compositions of students as well as a hindrance for the organization of IC activities.

The influential factors of IC implementation at the micro level were related to (a) teachers' awareness of integrating IC into EFL teaching, (b) students' attitudes in acquiring IC, (c) teachers' intercultural experience and competence, and (d) teachers' utility of online resources. Teachers' awareness of integrating IC into EFL teaching was determined to be a great enabler, while teachers' unawareness was a barrier for IC teaching. In addition, students' open attitudes to acquire IC were a facilitator, but some students' low motivations in IC learning were a big inhibiting factor to the implementation of IC. Some teachers with extensive overseas experiences considered the intercultural experience a great facilitator, and those without overseas experiences claimed that limited intercultural experience was a remarkable hindrance in IC teaching. Moreover, some teachers made good use of the widespread online resources to find more supplementary materials and showed that teachers' utility of the online resources could better develop students' IC.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

With the purpose of examining the inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum and classroom practices, the current study sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of (a) how IC is rationalized by curriculum designers and addressed in EFL curriculum documents; (b) how teachers perceive and implement IC; and (c) what factors facilitate or hinder the integration of IC in EFL teaching and learning practices.

The discussions in this chapter are based on the findings of these three main issues and compare the findings among the issues. They also refer to the extant literature to indicate how the current findings echo that research and how they are unique and differ from existent research findings. In addition, the findings of the present study are contextualized through references to the EFL policies, EFL curricula, and IC development in the Vietnamese context in relation to global developments.

7.2 The inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum

In response to Research Question 1 (“How is IC rationalized by curriculum designers and addressed in the EFL curriculum?”), this study explored the curriculum designers’ perspectives of the importance of IC and IC integration as well as their perspectives of the IC components to be integrated into the curriculum. In addition, a documentary review of the curriculum framework and course outlines in the curriculum of the English Language Program in the case study university were also conducted. The findings indicated that although the curriculum designers were aware of the importance of integrating IC in the

English Language Program, they included IC inadequately in the EFL curriculum framework and put IC in only a few course outlines in the curriculum.

The findings on the curriculum designers' perspectives of IC and IC integration showed the novelty of the current study and made it different from prior research. The findings showed the curriculum designers were aware of the inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum. The two curriculum designers showed positive perspectives about embedding IC into the curriculum framework. They confirmed IC integration in the curriculum is crucial to help EFL students use the language correctly and communicate effectively with people from other cultures. The findings correspond to Samovar et al. (2012) and Gorjian and Aghvami (2017) who argued English language curricula integrating IC could help students bridge the gap of cultural differences and communicate more effectively.

The curriculum designers had the responsibility to design the EFL curriculum framework and some course outlines, and also assign and guide some EFL teachers to design the other course outlines. However, the curriculum designers were not sure about how to integrate IC into the curriculum, and they did not realize the importance of their role. The curriculum designers claimed there were no requirements and instructions for including IC, assessing IC, or setting IC objectives in the curriculum framework and in the course outlines. Therefore, they found it quite hard to integrate IC into the EFL curriculum framework, and they included IC by their feelings. This point indicated there was a lack of ad-hoc IC content for the English Language Program. This lack of systematic integration of IC indicated a serious weakness in curricular design and policy support.

To explore the guidance for and requirements of IC inclusion in the EFL curriculum, the present study also reviewed related official materials (e.g., the Vietnamese Higher Education

National Curriculum Frameworks of English, the National Education Policy on Foreign Language Education in Vietnam, the Education Law, and the Law for Higher Education). The analysis showed the Education Law (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019) and the Law for Higher Education (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2018) did not give any instructions or requirements for IC integration in EFL teaching. However, the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English, given by the Ministry of Education and Training (2004), mentioned culture teaching and learning in two objectives. Objective 1 states, “Providing learners with broad knowledge of the English language, British and American culture, societies and literature” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, p. 1). And Objective 4 specifies, “Equipping students with active learning skills for self-study in order to continue to enhance knowledge and practical language skills, initially developing critical thinking and scientific research capacity about issues of language, literature or culture-civilization of English-speaking countries” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, p. 1). There is a gap between the policy intentions and actionable instructions, as seen by the objectives’ general wording and lack of specifics about the integration of IC.

Accordingly, the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English require that three culture-related courses (i.e., British Culture, American Culture, and British-American Literature) must be compulsory in the EFL curriculum frameworks at a tertiary level. Furthermore, it contains an objective for Vietnamese learners to “study and work in an integrated, multilingual, and multicultural environment” (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2008, p. 1). Although the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English, which govern the design of the university’s EFL curriculum framework, require three culture-related courses and mention objectives related to culture, the guidelines do not include clear requirements and guidance on IC integration.

The current findings also showed that from the curriculum designers' perspectives all five components of IC (cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness) should be highlighted in the EFL curriculum. The curriculum designers believed all IC components were important because students' mastery of skills of discovery and interaction and skills of interpreting and relating would facilitate their acquisition of cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, and critical cultural awareness. Their opinions echo Fantini's (2009) conclusion that in EFL teaching, IC components should be addressed together because of their interrelatedness. Although their opinions are in line with established IC theory, these components are superficially and inconsistently implemented across the curriculum.

In spite of the curriculum designers' acknowledgement of the importance of the IC components, there was a contradiction between the curriculum designers' perspectives of IC inclusion and their practical inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum. When they evaluated the inclusion of IC in the curriculum, the curriculum designers acknowledged the level of IC inclusion was low, and stated they included IC in the EFL curriculum by referring to other universities' curricula. The present research showed its novelty in comparison to extant literature in Vietnam (i.e., Vo, 2017) in exploring the curriculum designers' perspectives in addition to those of EFL teachers, while Vo (2017) investigated only EFL teachers' perspectives of IC.

In particular, the curriculum designers also acknowledged that when they designed the course outlines and chose the coursebooks, they aimed for the language objectives rather than IC objectives. When they designed the curriculum, they purposefully addressed IC only through the course American and British Culture, while IC was accidentally included in the teaching materials for the other courses. This incidental approach to IC integration highlighted a

serious deficiency in the overall structure of the curriculum and pointed to a more widespread systemic problem with IC integration. It can be seen that at the time of designing the EFL curriculum framework, the curriculum designers were not fully aware of their role in including IC in the curriculum. This was a shortcoming for IC implementation because teachers' instruction of IC was proven to be driven by the curriculum (Gonen & Saglam, 2012). Byram (2008) had even stated, "If culture is to be integrated into the language learning process, it must be planned for as carefully and in as great detail as are the language elements" (p. 86). The curriculum designers' preference for linguistic targets over IC objectives showed a serious mismatch between curriculum design and pedagogical goals. However, the curriculum designers also showed their openness in modifying the EFL curriculum regarding IC inclusion. They noted that EFL teachers can propose suggestions to the faculty leaders to change the EFL curriculum framework and course outlines to provide more IC inclusion.

The curriculum designers emphasized teachers' decisive role in the integration of IC into EFL teaching. They confirmed the teaching materials chosen for language skills (e.g., Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) included some IC content, and teachers might apply the content in these coursebooks related to some cultural differences to help students avoid misunderstandings or communication breakdowns as well as enhance students' IC. The transfer of responsibility for IC integration to teachers, without providing clear guidelines or structural support, put an excessive burden on teachers and indicated a serious deficiency in the curriculum development.

From the curriculum designers' emphasis on teachers' duties - changing the curriculum for more IC inclusion and implementing IC through exploiting the implicit cultural issues in the coursebooks - it can be seen that the curriculum designers did not realize their responsibility

in including IC in the curriculum. They considered IC inclusion was the teachers' own responsibility and tended to place the onus on them. This important finding shows the uniqueness of the current study regarding curriculum designers' limited awareness of their roles in including IC within the curriculum.

The findings from the curriculum designers' perspectives are in accordance with those from the review of the EFL curriculum framework of the university. It reflected that IC was not adequately addressed in the EFL curriculum framework. Specifically, the requirements of IC teaching were included in only some specific objectives and aspects of the learning outcomes of the English Language Program. The requirements were not mentioned in the general objectives, specific objectives about skills, or other program learning outcomes (e.g., the learning outcomes about skills). The stated objectives of the National Education Policy on Foreign Language Education in Vietnam (2008) are to make foreign language learners in Vietnam able to “study and work in an integrated, multilingual, and multicultural environment” (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2008, p. 1). Compared to that, the value of IC instruction is not adequately highlighted to meet these expectations. This mismatch between curricular practice and policy aims draws attention to a structural problem with curriculum alignment and policy implementation.

As for the inclusion of IC in the course outlines, the findings revealed IC was embedded in a few of them. Among 48 course outlines in the EFL curriculum that were analyzed, five course outlines mentioned IC (i.e., American and British Culture, Translation, American and British Literature, Reading 1A, and Theory of Translation). Among these five course outlines, IC was dealt with comprehensively in only one course, while it was addressed sparingly in the other four courses. Only the course American and British Culture mentioned IC in the course objectives and contents of all chapters of the coursebooks as well as highlighted all IC

components. The other four courses mentioned IC in the course objectives and/or the contents of one or two chapters in the coursebooks and stressed only cultural knowledge and/or cultural attitudes. The remainder of the course outlines placed more emphasis on language teaching rather than providing a proper place for IC development. The findings were consistent with Ho's (2011) research in Vietnam, which indicated that the EFL teaching curriculum framework did not place significant emphasis on culture. However, the current study is different from Ho's in that Ho conducted only a curriculum review and did not explore the curriculum designers' perspectives of IC inclusion in the EFL curriculum.

7.3 Teachers' perspectives of and teaching practices with IC

To address Research Question 2 ("How do EFL teachers perceive and implement IC in practice?"), class observations and semi-structured interviews with eight EFL teachers (including two curriculum designers) were conducted to provide the researcher with profound understandings of EFL teachers' perspectives of IC and their implementation of IC teaching in their classes. The findings showed EFL teachers held various opinions about IC integration, and their IC integration in practice was nearly the same as what they perceived about IC inclusion.

As revealed from the interviews, the majority of teacher participants (6 of 8 teachers) believed IC incorporation was essential in the instruction of EFL; one teacher participant had mixed opinions, and one teacher had negative opinions towards IC implementation. The majority of the EFL teachers who participated in the interviews supported IC inclusion. The six EFL teachers who held positive perspectives of IC integration stressed it could (a) help students learn about cultures more rapidly, (b) avoid communication breakdowns, (c) become knowledgeable about the cultural features of many countries to achieve effective interaction,

and (d) enable them to mingle within a multicultural environment. The findings also revealed EFL teachers highly valued IC integration in enhancing students' attitudes about respecting other cultures. The findings resemble the conclusions in extant research in the global context (e.g., Byram et al., 2002; Gorjian & Aghvami, 2017; Hejazi et al., 2015; Li, 2017; Roberts et al., 2001) and in Vietnam (i.e., Tran & Duong, 2015b) concerning the importance of IC integration in EFL teaching.

However, as the findings revealed, one teacher participant held ambiguous opinions, and one teacher participant held negative opinions about the inclusion of IC in EFL teaching. The teacher holding an ambiguous perspective stated IC integration was not required in her courses' outlines, and she was not confident to give IC instruction. Additionally, her students were not proficient in language use and did not aim to live or study abroad where they would use IC. Therefore, she thought IC integration was not necessary in EFL teaching, and she should devote more class time for teaching the language. Her perspectives were similar to what Ho (2011), L. Nguyen et al. (2016) and P. T. Tran (2020) presented from their research conducted in Vietnam: EFL teachers treated culture as a subordinate priority in language teaching and learning. This illustrated the necessity of modifying the curriculum to more effectively incorporate IC as a primary part rather than a supplementary element.

The teacher participant who held a negative perspective of IC integration in EFL teaching argued the lack of formal training on IC teaching and of environments for intercultural communication in Vietnam discouraged the implementation of IC. He particularly noted that because of the students' low language proficiency, the emphasis should be placed on enhancing students' language competence rather than IC (Estaji & Rahimi, 2018). Otherwise, the integration of IC would bring the students more difficulties and discourage them in learning (Karabinar & Guler, 2013). Similar findings were disclosed in Tran and Dang's

(2014) research in the Vietnamese context. This viewpoint, however, can ignore IC's value to improve language acquisition by encouraging more meaningful interaction and communication. The findings are at odds with those presented by a participant in P. T. Tran's (2020) research in Vietnam who stated teachers' limited IC teaching is not due to students' low language level. The real reason is IC integration and assessment are not compulsory in the curriculum. Therefore, this participant explains a cultural element only if it is useful for developing students' language acquisition and confidence. This divergence indicated a critical need for regular support and training to close the gap between the benefits of IC in theory and its actual application. Without explicit requirements and support structures, IC integration would remain inconsistent and dependent on individual teacher efforts.

The two teacher participants who held ambiguous and negative perspectives of IC integration showed some similar and different ideas. They had the same opinion that EFL students have not achieved language proficiency and should develop language competence, as well as more formal training on IC teaching is needed so EFL teachers can be confident in IC instruction. However, their opinions differ regarding the necessity and feasibility of IC integration. From the perspective of the participant with ambiguous opinions, IC integration is not necessary because her students do not aim to live or study abroad to use IC. The one who held negative perspectives of IC integration thought IC implementation is not feasible because of students' limited language acquisition and the lack of environments for intercultural communication. This highlights a deeper issue: more evidence is required of how IC may be successfully integrated within the current limitations. The absence of formal structures or evidence could cause teachers' resistance to or incapacity to use IC successfully.

It is clear from the findings on teachers' perspectives that a majority of EFL teacher participants (6 out of 8 teachers) held positive attitudes towards IC inclusion. The findings

are reflected in extant literature in the global context (e.g., Munezane, 2019; Plough, 2016) and in the Vietnamese context (e.g., Vo, 2017). However, the findings on teachers' perspectives of IC integration in the current study show a uniqueness in comparison to extant literature in Vietnam. Unlike Vo's (2017) research findings showing a contradiction between EFL teachers' positive perspectives and their limited teaching practices with IC, the current study analyzed teacher participants' divergent perspectives of IC integration and revealed some consistency between teachers' perspectives and their IC teaching practices.

Additionally, the findings indicated that the teachers with positive perspectives of IC inclusion emphasized attitudes, knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical awareness, which are crucial IC components for EFL students to acquire. That these EFL teachers do not highly value the skills of interpreting and relating are slightly different findings from Fantini's (2009) showing that in EFL teaching, one IC component should be addressed with other IC components because of their interrelatedness. Additionally, the findings also partly differ from Huynh et al.'s (2024) research that showed EFL university students in Vietnam perceive cultural attitudes the highest and cultural knowledge and skills the lowest among the five IC components. The teachers' ideas of the importance of each of the IC components are slightly different from some curriculum designers' opinions. While the curriculum designers believed that all IC components should be highlighted in IC implementation because of their interrelatedness (Fantini, 2009), the teacher participants put more focus on cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness rather than skills of interpreting and relating. To explain the difference, the teachers stated they had limited class time for IC integration, so they developed the most obvious components and the ones that were easy to be drawn from the lesson contents. They found it hard to develop the skills of interpreting and relating, and

thought those skills were also enhanced through the development of attitudes and knowledge. This divergence emphasized the need for more thorough resource development and teacher training that covers all IC components holistically. Teachers should be trained to address all IC components rather than concentrating on the easiest-to-access components.

Moreover, the findings disclosed that the IC components teachers developed in their teaching classroom practices, seen through class observations, slightly differed from the ones teacher participants reported in their interviews. In particular, findings from the class observations of the first group (i.e., teachers who held positive perspectives of IC implementation) showed two participants developed the same IC components as what they perceived, and three participants developed slightly different IC components from what they reported in the interviews. The reason for the difference is the lessons observed may not have contained all the IC components the teacher participants discussed in the interviews. The other teacher in the first group did not implement IC in her teaching period as she could not find any places to integrate IC in that lesson. Meanwhile, the participant from the second group held ambiguous perspectives of IC implementation but had fairly good IC implementation recorded during the class observation because the lesson she taught supported it. This echoes Dai's (2011), L. Nguyen et al.'s (2016) and Zhou's (2011) conclusions that IC integration greatly relies on the IC contents available in the textbooks. The teacher from the third group of teacher participants (i.e., teachers with negative perspectives of IC inclusion) did not implement IC in his teaching period although the teaching materials of one of the courses he taught had IC contents. He explained that language competence rather than IC deserved more focus. These observations implied that real-world application of IC was heavily influenced by practical limitations like lesson topic and material availability. More flexible and supportive materials were required to enable IC integration in a variety of teaching contexts.

Two cases showed an inconsistency between what the participants stated about IC inclusion in their interviews and what they did in classroom practices with IC. In the first case, the teacher participant holding positive perspectives of IC integration did not implement IC in her teaching period as she could not find any places to integrate IC in any of the material she taught. As she explained, integrating IC seems to be hard and abstract, and thus she is not proactive in finding more materials and integrating IC in a planned and prepared manner (P. T. Tran, 2020). Her situation indicates the impediments the frontline teachers face, such as the lack of teacher training on IC instruction and the lack of supportive materials for IC implementation. The impediments hinder teachers' integration of IC even when they want to do it (Vo, 2017). These difficulties drew attention to the need for more organized professional development and resources that might help teachers successfully integrate IC. As for the second case, the participant held ambiguous perspectives of IC implementation. However, she had fairly good IC implementation recorded during the class observation because the course she taught was American and British Culture, whose contents provide much support for IC integration. The reasons for the inconsistency between her perspective and her teaching practices can be explained: the IC developed in class greatly depends on the contents of the lesson (Dai, 2011; L. Nguyen et al., 2016; Zhou, 2011). That is why once the IC contents are available in the coursebooks, even a teacher with ambiguous attitudes could conduct IC implementation. This case highlighted the ways in which curriculum content could facilitate or impede the integration of IC, indicating that curriculum designers should incorporate more IC-focused elements into a wider range of topics than only those with overtly cultural content.

Concerning IC in the educational system at the tertiary level in Vietnam, EFL teachers point out the absence of IC contents in the coursebooks and teaching manuals (P. T. Tran, 2020). As

mentioned in P. T. Tran's (2020) study, the EFL coursebooks and teaching materials are in alignment with the language-oriented curriculum which does not highlight IC. In addition, there are no instructions and requirements for addressing IC and assessing IC in the teaching syllabus. Therefore, IC integration is mostly involved with teacher-centered and textbook-based teaching approaches. Otherwise, teachers must explore potential IC content included in each lesson and design activities or adapt tasks or find supplementary materials to conduct IC implementation. Meanwhile, many EFL teachers lack theoretical knowledge and practical skills in designing IC-focused teaching materials and assessing students' IC. As a result, teachers explained the cultural aspects only with the purpose of clarifying the use of language in the lessons. The findings revealed by P. T. Tran (2020) also reflect the current situation at the university that reinforces the dependence of IC development upon the lesson contents. These findings indicated a systemic problem of IC ignorance in the curriculum and instructional materials, highlighting the critical need for curriculum reform and the creation of thorough IC guidelines and resources.

The findings on EFL teachers' perspectives of and practices with IC showed teachers have divergent perspectives of IC integration, and their practices with IC are mostly the same as what they perceived. The exception was two cases in which teachers' IC integration is affected by the availability of IC contents in the coursebooks. The findings in the current study are different from Ho's (2011) that revealed EFL teachers believed language teaching is more important than culture teaching, and their beliefs greatly influence their culture teaching practices. In addition, Ho's study explored EFL teachers' perceptions of culture teaching in terms of teachers' definitions of culture, awareness of the relationship between language and culture, and beliefs about culture teaching, while the present study unearthed EFL teachers' perspectives of the implementation of IC.

7.4 Influential factors to the integration of IC

To answer Research Question 3 (“From teachers’ perspectives, what factors facilitate or hinder the integration of IC into EFL teaching practices?”), the study employed semi-structured interviews with eight teacher participants to uncover the influential factors of the integration of IC. Those factors were analyzed across the macro, meso, and micro levels.

The findings showed the influential factors of IC implementation at the macro level involved the lack of IC requirements in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English, the limited class time allotted for IC integration, and inadequate teacher training for IC integration. The present study’s findings reflected empirical research (e.g., Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Zhou, 2011) showing EFL teachers acknowledged the vital role of the curriculum in increasing IC integration. The teachers indicated the lack of IC requirements in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English was a barrier to IC inclusion in EFL teaching. Findings showed the lack of explicit guidelines for the scope, timing, and objectives for IC implementation in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English prevented EFL teachers from teaching IC.

In fact, as presented above, the objectives for culture teaching and learning have been mentioned in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English given by the Ministry of Education and Training since 2004. However, the terms used in the objectives of those frameworks are “culture”, “language”, “literature”, “societies”, or “culture-civilization” rather than “intercultural competence”. This semantic distinction could make it difficult to understand the precise objectives of IC, which would make its implementation less clear and prioritized. As a result, EFL teachers do not recognize the IC

objectives required in the national frameworks. Moreover, apart from allocating culture to three compulsory and separate IC-related courses, the national frameworks did not include any guidelines for the extent, time, or instruction methods for teachers to incorporate IC into language teaching in every course (Ho, 2011), which fit the teacher participants' evaluations.

Another major obstacle to IC instruction revealed in the findings was a lack of class time for it. The findings revealed the workload on teaching the language contents and other academic-related tasks was too heavy for EFL teachers to reserve time for IC instruction. The research findings echo empirical research in the international context (e.g., Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Karabinar & Guler, 2013; Sercu, 2005; Zhou, 2011) about the shortage of class time as a hindrance of IC integration. Compared with extant research in the Vietnamese context, the findings of the current study correspond to Hong (2008), T. L. Nguyen (2013), P. T. Tran (2020), and Vo's (2017) conclusions that due to the heavy language contents, teachers reserved more time for teaching the language and had limited class time for IC instruction, which hindered EFL teachers in Vietnam from integrating IC into EFL teaching.

It should be noted that English teaching in Vietnam has been shown to make EFL teachers engage with heavy workloads (Phuong, 2017), and teachers must teach the language contents in a limited class time (T. T. Tran, 2013). Notably, Trinh and Mai (2018) claimed the limited amount of class time causes stress for EFL teachers in Vietnamese universities as they have to manage the teaching workload to suit the time limitation. This is true in the context of the current study's university. For many courses in the curriculum, for instance grammar courses and language skill courses which allow 30 teaching periods for each course, the language contents are rather heavy with from five to nine chapters and two tests. One period is 50 minutes long. Approximately three to five periods are spent teaching each chapter, and the amount of time is sufficient for teachers to transmit the language contents. They feel it is hard

to reserve time for IC activities. Limited class time for teaching language competence is also the case in China, another non-English-speaking Asian country (Jun & Liangrong, 2011), and even in an English-speaking country like the United States, where double class time for writing instruction is suggested (Applebee & Langer, 2006).

An additional significant barrier to IC teaching was identified as inadequate teacher training in IC integration. The findings revealed EFL teachers received training only in teaching languages rather than in official IC instruction; therefore, they were unable to implement IC effectively. The findings echo what Gonen and Saglam (2012), Lázár (2007), and Sercu et al. (2005) found regarding the lack of teacher training in IC implementation as a hindering factor of IC teaching. They also have a commonality with Sercu's (2006) research findings: EFL teachers' profiles about culture teaching have not yet met the expectations of being "interculturally competent teachers". The lack of proper emphasis on intercultural factors in teacher education programs might be the cause of the inadequacy of teacher IC training. This influential factor is popular in the Vietnamese context as Vo's (2017) research with 108 participants from six universities in Vietnam also disclosed teachers' lack of training on IC integration impeded EFL teachers' IC practices.

Trinh and Mai's (2018) conclusion reflected that EFL teachers in Vietnam do not receive sufficient assistance in terms of teacher training from the Ministry of Education and Training or universities in Vietnam. As Trinh and Mai emphasized, EFL teachers in Vietnamese universities seldom have occasions to enhance their teaching practices. Teachers want more opportunities for improving their teaching methods to meet the needs in the globalized world, such as establishing a multicultural communication environment and receiving teacher professional training. In the context of the current study's university site, attending conferences, seminars, workshops, or short trainings for professional development in general

and for IC integration in particular is not always free for EFL teachers. The university initially offered limited financial support for teachers to attend these. Instead, teachers have had to pay for the registration fee, travel, accommodations, and other related expenses. Therefore, EFL teachers usually find the IC teaching strategies by themselves, which is an obstacle in implementing IC in their language classrooms.

Moreover, the findings showed that the influential factors of IC integration at the meso level include the (a) limited inclusion of IC in the university's teaching curriculum framework, (b) availability of teaching materials for some courses, (c) lack of a cross-cultural communication environment, (d) language proficiency-focused assessment system, (e) big class size, and (f) inadequate teaching facilities. In particular, as shown in the findings, EFL teachers claimed the university's curriculum framework neither laid a strong priority on IC nor offered any opportunities for students to connect with foreigners in real life (Gonen & Saglam, 2012; P. T. Tran, 2020; Zhou, 2011). They reported the curriculum in the university did not include any programs or courses that required students to have real experiences with foreigners. The teachers and curriculum designers agreed the curriculum framework of the university did not emphasize IC.

Some EFL teachers thought the teaching materials for some courses written by native English speakers were useful resources from which teachers could extract the cultural issues for IC implementation. The coursebooks being used for teaching language skills contain some intercultural situations that could enable EFL teachers to explore the real lives of native English speakers and help students understand them. The teachers and the curriculum designers agreed that the teaching materials chosen for teaching language skill courses contained some potential places for IC integration. Their opinions disagreed with the extant literature in Vietnam (i.e., P. T. Tran, 2020; Vo, 2017) that reveals the inadequacy of teaching

resources related to IC is a fundamental challenge in IC integration. The difference between P. T. Tran's (2020) and Vo's (2017) research findings and the present study's findings may be derived from the different choices of teaching materials in different research sites. In addition, the participants in P. T. Tran's and Vo's research were at different universities in different areas in Vietnam, and the teaching materials they used might not contain much IC content that could facilitate the integration of IC. That is why teacher participants in these studies had different viewpoints towards this influential factor.

However, some other participants thought the teaching materials for some other courses were not formal or reliable and did not contain much IC content to support IC instruction. The findings echo T. L. Nguyen's (2013) conclusion that the current EFL teaching materials in Vietnamese universities do not meet the requirement of IC implementation in EFL teaching. The challenging problem derived from teaching materials can also be inferred from Trinh and Mai's (2018) identification of the problematic instructional materials written by universities and institutions. Trinh and Mai revealed that the contents in the coursebooks are extracted from a variety of sources to meet the needs of the curriculum and the students. The materials in these assembled books without definite sources for references are out of date and inappropriate, and they include few IC-related contents or activities to facilitate IC implementation.

In addition, the findings exposed the dearth of native teachers on campus and the failure to create many communication opportunities for students to practice their IC were remarkable barriers to teaching IC at the university. The teachers stated that with a lack of native English speakers on campus, teachers could not bring cultural factors into EFL classrooms to help students develop IC in the most natural way. In fact, Vietnamese students have hardly any opportunities to interact with native English teachers and engage in multicultural

communication (Trinh & Mai, 2018). Since the establishment of the university, fewer than 10 foreign teachers have taught at the campus, and they came from Ghana, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand rather than from English-speaking countries. Based on the analysis of Smakova and Paulsrud's (2020) conclusions, it can be inferred that lacking intercultural environments on this campus hindered the implementation of IC.

Moreover, the teachers mentioned that the university did not make use of the presence of international students at the campus to organize many clubs for local and foreign students to interact with each other and practice their IC. Some teachers also noted the international students were from Laos and Cambodia, Eastern cultures like Vietnam. Thus, the presence of many international students on the campus did not mean there was a cross-cultural communication environment at the university. The findings share some similarities with Vo's (2017) research findings that the lack of native speakers and limited intercultural communication environments in many Vietnamese universities hinder the development of students' IC.

Furthermore, the traditional assessment system focusing more on language abilities than IC was shown to hinder teachers from integrating IC and reduce students' enthusiasm to acquire IC. The findings indicated IC assessment is not obligated in most course outlines of the curriculum framework; therefore, teachers have not devoted much time and effort in teaching IC. They meet only students' needs to pass their language tests. The findings echoed Zhou's (2011) research findings on the ignorance regarding IC in the assessment system. EFL teachers claimed they did not know how to assess students' IC, and it would be extremely difficult for them to design a test or examination that assesses it. As a result, almost all teachers do not pay attention to assessing IC. The findings are supported by Gu's (2016) and Smakova and Paulsrud's (2020) results concerning EFL teachers' lack of experience and

knowledge in assessing students' IC. Considered in the Vietnamese context, the research findings have something in common with Ho's (2011), T. L. Nguyen's (2013), and P. T. Tran's (2020) findings on the constraints of IC teaching concerning the assessment system in EFL teaching in Vietnamese universities.

Large class sizes were considered both a facilitator and a barrier to IC incorporation. The findings indicated large classes with lots of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds could help students negotiate conflicts and learn from each other's cultural backgrounds to develop their IC (Newton & Shearn, 2010). To manage many students in a large class and organize an IC activity, the teachers in the university expressed that they asked their students to work in groups and nominated group representatives to present their ideas to the whole class. However, as presented in the findings, teachers said it was challenging to manage a large number of students while setting up and conducting communication activities that integrate IC in congested classes (Eken, 2015). Moreover, large classes in traditional rooms with immovable tables and chairs inhibited teachers from carrying out some role-play activities or setting up communication situations to integrate IC into the lessons. In fact, large class size is a common problem in the Vietnamese tertiary level where up to 70 students are in a class (Ngoc et al., 2012; Nguyen et al., 2015; T. T. Tran, 2013). The findings correspond with T. L. Nguyen's (2013) research findings that the large classes may prevent teachers from integrating IC into their EFL teaching in Vietnam.

Additionally, the findings stressed another notable limitation for IC instruction was the university's inadequate teaching facilities, such as lab rooms, internet connectivity, and a gallery displaying real items related to cultures of other countries. The teachers complained the university neither provided access to the internet network to search for materials nor had lab rooms and galleries that displayed real models or products related to cultures of many

countries, which prevented teachers from integrating IC. It should be noticed that inadequate teaching facilities are a common problem in Vietnamese universities - not all classrooms are equipped with computers, televisions, loudspeakers, and Wi-Fi access (Trinh & Mai, 2018). The findings regarding inadequate teaching facilities at the university support those presented in L. T. H. Nguyen's (2021) research in Vietnam concerning EFL teachers' dissatisfactions with the teaching facilities at their universities. The findings are also inferred from Liaw's (2006) conclusion that the problems with the facilities were a big obstacle to EFL teachers and students in China during the integration of IC.

The key influencing elements of IC implementation at the micro level, as revealed in the findings, included teachers' awareness of incorporating IC into EFL instruction, students' attitudes in learning IC, and teachers' intercultural experience and competence. The pivotal enabler in improving IC teaching was teachers' awareness of including IC into EFL instruction to help students mediate between their own culture and their target language's culture. The findings showed the teacher participants who held positive and ambiguous perspectives of IC inclusion affirmed that when teachers were aware of the important role of IC integration in EFL teaching, they would be motivated to find ways to exploit IC in each lesson they teach and improve their IC knowledge to teach IC more effectively as well as create more inner motivations for students to learn IC. The findings were in accordance with Czura (2016), Byram et al. (2002) and L. Nguyen et al. (2016) who argued that EFL teachers must be aware of the importance of IC inclusion to assume their new role in foreign language education today, that is, the role of intercultural mediators. To fulfil this new role, teachers must become competent intercultural communicators, and be able to act as guides to help students mediate between their own culture and their target language's culture (Byram et al., 2002). The findings are also in accordance with P. T. Tran's (2020) conclusion that teachers'

awareness of the importance of IC teaching, along with their understanding of the culture-language relationship, will enable them to find the potential cultural issues to integrate in each lesson. Meanwhile, the teacher participant with negative perspectives of IC integration neither showed his interest in IC integration nor mentioned teachers' awareness as a facilitator for IC integration. The same problem is indicated from P. T. Tran's (2020) research concerning EFL teachers' lack of awareness of IC teaching in both their pedagogical beliefs and classroom practices.

In addition, the findings revealed students' eagerness to acquire IC and explore new cultures were factors that facilitated the integration of IC, while students' low interest for studying IC significantly hampered IC implementation in EFL classes. Some teachers explained that students' openness and curiosity in learning IC would motivate teachers to implement IC. In contrast, other participants stated when students showed disinterest or negative attitudes towards the importance of IC and did not enthusiastically participate in the IC activities in their classes, teachers were discouraged, and their integration of IC was unsuccessful. That students' disinterest in IC learning is a hindering factor of IC implementation aligns with empirical research findings in the global context (e.g., Eken, 2015; Sercu, 2005; Zhou, 2011) and the Vietnamese context (T. L. Nguyen., 2013; Tran & Seepho, 2014; Vo, 2017).

The research findings showed the teachers with extensive intercultural experience considered that valuable experience one of the most important factors that enabled IC teaching. They indicated extensive exposure to intercultural environments in foreign countries helped teachers become more confident in IC teaching, brought valuable experience into their classroom teaching practices, and helped their students form right attitudes as well as communicate effectively in real contexts with foreigners. The findings agree with existing worldwide research results (e.g., Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Lázár, 2007; Zhou, 2011) and in

Vietnam (T. L. Nguyen., 2013; Tran & Seepho, 2015) on the value of teachers' intercultural experience in the integration of IC. The findings also indicated that EFL teachers without overseas experiences showed a lack of confidence and faced many difficulties in implementing IC in their EFL teaching.

In fact, not all EFL teachers in Vietnam are middle-class and can afford overseas learning experiences. They might gain limited IC knowledge and experiences from IC contents taken from social media, but that may be unreliable or inappropriate. Therefore, they would not feel confident and would find it difficult to implement IC in their teaching. The findings echoed T. L. Nguyen's (2013) research findings in Vietnam and Zhou's (2011) in China. Both emphasized remarkable hindrances from teachers' limited intercultural experience in IC integration. However, the findings contradicted international viewpoints (e.g., Sowden, 2007) that teachers can form their intercultural perspectives without overseas experiences, and therefore EFL teachers do not necessarily depend on their overseas experiences to teach IC.

Furthermore, the findings reported that teachers' utility of internet resources was noted as another important aspect that enabled the implementation of IC. The teachers stressed they might develop their students' IC if they made effective use of the abundance of web resources and discovered more supplemental materials such as images, photos, and video clips relevant to intercultural communication. It was shown that with the accessibility of online resources, teachers could explain and clarify the cultural issues, and thus the cultural issues would be engraved in the students' memory. These findings were shared by international literature (i.e., Chen, 2012) on teachers' utility of social networks and online resources, and Le et al. (2022) involving Vietnamese teachers' acknowledgement of the value of using social networking sites in EFL teaching. In contrast, some teachers did not make use of internet resources for IC instruction because they did not have time to search for supplementary materials and prepare

for IC activities. Also, they were afraid the information found from the internet is not formal and reliable.

Taken together, the influential factors at the macro, meso, and micro levels interplay with each other and influence IC teaching. The Vietnamese educational system is hierarchical and has three levels in which the Ministry of Education and Training holds the highest authority. The tertiary institutions are allied to the second level, and the classrooms involving teachers and students are associated with the lowest level (Trinh & Mai, 2018). The educational guidelines are issued by the Ministry of Education and Training, then the institutions abide by the guiding principles, and teachers and students apply the educational guidelines (Trinh & Mai, 2018). Since most IC teaching and learning processes are experienced and understood by teachers and students, their feedback to the universities and the feedback from the universities sent to the Ministry of Education and Training would form a three-way interaction. The separation of the influential factors into three levels, the point that made the current study unique and different from prior research, can help directly point out the people or level of authority involved in solving the barriers to and fostering the facilitators in IC integration. Therefore, the influential factors interplayed in a multilayered structure would enhance the inclusion of IC in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English and EFL curriculum frameworks at universities as well as foster the effectiveness of IC instruction in classroom practices.

7.5 Chapter summary

The findings on the curriculum designers' perspectives, the new findings that made the current study different from prior research, were focused and compared with those from other research in terms of their perspectives of IC integration as well as of the IC components to be

integrated into the curriculum. As for the inclusion of IC in the curriculum, the findings from documentary review of the curriculum framework and the course outlines in the EFL curriculum were also stated and contrasted with other related studies. In addition, more comparisons were made to indicate the nature of IC inclusion, such as the extent of IC inclusion in the curriculum framework thought by the curriculum designers versus the extent actually embedded, and the IC inclusion in the curriculum documents from documentary review versus the curriculum designers' evaluation. In addition, the findings were discussed in relation to the EFL policies and curricula in the Vietnamese and global contexts.

The chapter also discussed the findings on how EFL teachers perceived IC implementation and how they implemented IC in practice. The findings related to the first and second research questions and the findings of different instruments of data collection were compared with one another to show the nature of the integration of IC in EFL teaching practices. The comparisons included teachers' perspectives versus the curriculum designers' perspectives of IC implementation, and teachers' perspectives of IC implementation discussed in the interviews versus their practical implementation of IC through class observations. Moreover, the findings of the current study were contrasted with those from related studies to show how they are similar to and different from empirical research.

In the next part on the influential factors of the integration of IC, the chapter analyzed and discussed the factors that facilitate or hinder the integration of IC in EFL teaching and learning practices as perceived by the teacher participants. The findings reflecting divergent perspectives from the teacher participants were discussed in comparison with extant literature and the intercultural competence development in the Vietnamese and global contexts. The separation of the influential factors into three levels pointing out the authority who solved the problems made the current study unique and different from prior research.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study findings and presents the implications for practice for language education policymakers, universities, the faculties involved in EFL teaching programs, EFL curriculum designers and material developers, and EFL teachers. The chapter also states the limitations of the study and provides some recommendations for future research in the field of IC development. The chapter is closed with a conclusion.

8.2 Summary of the findings

8.2.1 How IC is rationalized by curriculum designers and addressed in the EFL curriculum

To address the Research Question 1, “How is IC rationalized by curriculum designers and addressed in the EFL curriculum?”, the current study focuses on discovering the curriculum designers’ perspectives of the importance of IC integration of the IC components to be integrated into the curriculum. Additionally, it reviews the curriculum framework of the English Language Program and the course outlines in the curriculum. Findings from the interviews showed the two curriculum designers held positive perspectives of embedding IC within the curriculum framework, and they highlighted the significance of IC and IC implementation in the EFL teaching curriculum. However, the curriculum designers found it quite hard to integrate IC into the curriculum because there were no requirements or instructions for including IC in the course outlines and in the EFL curriculum. Therefore, they included IC by referring to other universities’ EFL curricula.

Regarding the IC components to be integrated into the curriculum, the curriculum designers thought all five components of IC (i.e., cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness) should be highlighted in the curriculum. Although they considered cultural attitudes the most crucial component that should be developed for EFL students, they believed the other four IC components were also important because skills of discovery and interaction and skills of interpreting and relating will facilitate the acquisition of cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, and critical cultural awareness.

When evaluating the inclusion of IC in the curriculum, despite acknowledging the importance of its inclusion, the curriculum designers revealed that the level of IC inclusion in the curriculum is at a low level. As they expressed, they intentionally introduced IC only in the course American and British Culture. Meanwhile, IC was included unintentionally in other courses (especially in language skill courses, such as Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing) because the coursebooks chosen for these courses were written by native English speakers and thus implicitly included some potential cultural contents for IC instruction.

As for how IC is addressed in the EFL curriculum, the review of the curriculum framework of the English Language Program and the course outlines in the curriculum provided evidence for the presence of IC in the curriculum. The curriculum review showed IC was not adequately included in the EFL curriculum framework. IC was addressed in some aspects of the specific objectives and some aspects of the learning outcomes of the English Language Program, but it was not mentioned in the general objectives and other places in the specific objectives and the learning outcomes of the program.

Regarding the inclusion of IC in the course outlines of the EFL curriculum, the analysis of the documentary review reflected that 5 out of 48 course outlines of the EFL curriculum mentioned IC, which was at an average level. Of these five course outlines, two mentioned IC in both the course objectives and contents, one included IC in the course objectives, and two of them embedded IC in the contents of the lessons. It can be seen that IC was introduced explicitly in the course American and British Culture, where all IC components were highlighted, while most of the other four courses mostly stressed cultural knowledge. IC was not present in the remainder of the course outlines in the curriculum framework. Instead, great emphasis was made on the development of language skills and knowledge.

8.2.2 Teachers' perspectives of and teaching practices with IC

To address Research Question 2, “How do EFL teachers perceive and implement IC in practice?”, the findings focus on how EFL teachers perceive IC and how they implement IC in practice. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and class observations were conducted to provide insightful understanding of teachers' perspectives of IC inclusion in their EFL courses and the reality of IC teaching and learning practices.

Regarding teachers' perspectives of the implementation of IC in EFL teaching, the findings from the interviews revealed that among the eight teacher participants, six participants stated they had positive perspectives of IC inclusion; one participant held ambiguous perspectives, and one held negative perspectives of IC implementation. Six teacher participants who held positive perspectives of IC inclusion found it essential to integrate IC into EFL teaching. They stated the inclusion of IC could introduce students to the cultures of many countries and help students become sensitive to foreign cultures. Also, students could avoid inappropriate behaviors as well as communication breakdowns when they communicate with foreigners or

study abroad in the future. The teacher participants also pinpointed that integrating IC into EFL teaching would facilitate students' language acquisition, help students compare different cultures, and thus modify students' stereotypes about other cultures. However, there were two teacher participants holding ambiguous or negative perspectives of IC inclusion in EFL teaching. The teacher participant with an ambiguous perspective thought it was not necessary to teach IC because her students did not aim to live or study abroad. The teacher participant with a negative perspective argued that language knowledge and skills rather than IC should be the focus because language knowledge was far more important to students. He also noted the lack of intercultural communication environments in Vietnam was a big hindrance for IC implementation.

Regarding the IC contents being included in their IC teaching, the teacher participants highlighted cultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness rather than skills of relating and interpreting. The teacher participants stressed that an important component of IC that should be taught to students was cultural attitudes. They claimed the cultural attitudes motivate students to master target cultural knowledge and skills as well as modify their stereotypes, and students evaluate other people's values and beliefs from an inclusive view. The teachers also highlighted the value of cultural knowledge because it would be necessary for students' engagement in their future careers and help them mingle within the global community. They stressed students should be knowledgeable about differences between their cultures and the other people's cultures to avoid misunderstandings or miscommunication. Skills of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness were listed among the IC components that should be developed for students during IC implementation. Teachers mentioned that skills of discovery and interaction would give students an ability to self-study and self-develop through acquiring

more cultural knowledge, and help them overcome the challenges in cultural differences when communicating with other interlocutors. In addition, they expressed that teachers should also improve students' critical cultural awareness to help them critically evaluate the others' cultures and learn from those cultures.

Regarding teachers' practices with IC, data from class observations indicated that the IC components developed in their classroom practices were not exactly the same as what the teacher participants perceived, as expressed in the interviews. The reason was the IC components developed during the IC integration in each teaching period greatly depended upon the potential IC contents in the lessons, and thus the teaching period observed might not cover all the IC components that teachers expected it would.

8.2.3 Influential factors to the integration of IC

In response to Research Question 3 ("From teachers' perspectives, what factors facilitate or hinder the integration of IC into EFL teaching practices?"), the current study indicates the influential factors are facilitators or hindrances of the implementation of IC as the EFL teachers perceived them. The influential factors of IC implementation were analyzed and presented across the macro, meso, and micro levels.

The influential factors at the macro level involved the lack of IC requirements in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English, limited class time for IC incorporation, and inadequate teacher training on IC integration. Specifically, the teacher participants expressed that the absence of requirements about IC integration in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English was seen as a barrier to IC inclusion in EFL instruction. The teacher participants emphasized that the lack

of explicit guidelines on the extent, duration, and objectives of IC in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English hinders teachers' ability to include IC in their teaching. Furthermore, a significant obstacle to IC teaching, according to a few teacher participants, was a shortage of class time for IC instruction. The teachers complained that they could not reserve class time to teach IC because of their overwhelming workload with language contents. They were under a great amount of strain from other tasks and did not have enough time for planning IC activities. Furthermore, one major barrier to IC instruction was identified as a lack of training on IC integration for EFL teachers. The teacher participants said they were unable to teach IC effectively because they did not receive formal training in IC instruction like they did in language teaching.

The influential factors of IC integration at the meso level indicated by the teacher participants were related to the EFL teaching curriculum framework of the university, the teaching materials, the communication environment, the assessment system, the class size, and teaching facilities. First, the EFL curriculum framework of the university was identified as a barrier to the integration of IC since it neither prioritized IC nor included any courses that allowed students to connect with foreigners in a genuine way. The teaching materials, the next influential factor, were considered a facilitating factor for IC implementation in some language skills courses while they did not support IC teaching in other courses. Furthermore, the lack of any cross-cultural communication environments in the university was seen as impeding the teaching of IC due to the dearth of native English teachers on campus and the inability to establish many opportunities for local students to interact with international students to practice IC. Moreover, the traditional evaluation method, which prioritized language skills over IC, deterred EFL teachers from incorporating IC and lowered students' enthusiasm to learn IC. Large class sizes were thought to be both a facilitator and a barrier to

IC integration. According to some teacher participants, attending a large class with a diverse student population from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds can enable students to negotiate cultural conflicts and show respect for one another. Nonetheless, to other teachers, packed classrooms also posed a challenge to IC implementation, making it difficult for teachers to organize activities or create opportunities for communication. One notable restriction on IC instruction was the university's poor teaching facilities, which included a dearth of labs, internet access, and an exhibit with actual artifacts connected to many different countries' cultures.

The influential factors of IC implementation at the micro level were related to teachers' awareness of integrating IC into EFL teaching, students' attitudes and motivations in acquiring IC, and teachers' intercultural experiences and competence. It was found that one of the biggest enablers to improving IC teaching was teachers' awareness on including IC in their EFL instruction. The teacher participants confirmed that if EFL teachers had a full awareness of the important role of IC integration in EFL teaching, they would try their best to incorporate IC in each lesson they teach as well as improve their IC knowledge through self-study and overseas experiences. Furthermore, the students' attitudes to acquire IC and explore new things were thought to be one of the elements that promoted IC integration. With their curiosity and eagerness in learning IC, students can enthusiastically participate in the IC activities in their classes, which would motivate teachers to implement IC. Nonetheless, a few teacher participants indicated that one major barrier to the development of IC in EFL teaching was the students' insufficient motivation in IC learning.

EFL teachers with a great deal of cross-cultural experience regarded their experience as one of the most important enabling elements of IC teaching, while those without any international experiences stated that the lack of cross-cultural experience was a major barrier to their IC

teaching. Another influential factor of IC integration was the teachers' use of internet resources. The findings demonstrated that teachers would better foster their students' IC if they could make use of the abundance of online resources and find more supplementary materials related to intercultural communication.

8.3 Implications for practice

8.3.1 Implications for language education policymakers

As presented in the previous part, the findings of the current study reinforced the conclusions of Gonen and Saglam (2012) and Zhou (2011) that EFL teachers' practices of IC were usually guided by the teaching curriculum, and the teachers need support from the curricula and teaching materials for IC integration. In addition, the findings also indicated a limited inclusion of IC development in the EFL curriculum framework and a mismatch between the curriculum designers' perspectives and their actions in embedding IC contents into the curriculum documents. The reason given by the curriculum designers was that they found integrating IC into the curriculum quite hard due to a lack of clear regulations and requirements. Remarkably, some EFL teachers in the study considered IC less important than language competence and ignored IC instruction because IC integration was not required in the EFL teaching curriculum.

Therefore, the language education policymakers of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam should consider revising the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English regarding IC inclusion. They may revise the policies in the sense that IC integration is considered compulsory in the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English. The revision of the policies will certainly result in a

significant change in IC integration. That is, every university would mention IC requirements in their EFL teaching curriculum frameworks and course outlines, especially in the objectives, contents, and learning outcomes. New policies would make EFL teachers and students pay more attention to IC teaching and learning.

Moreover, language education policymakers of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam may need to regulate some compulsory courses in the teacher preparation program to enhance the teaching methodology in terms of IC integration for future teachers of English. The study makes a contribution by emphasizing how important it is for teacher preparation programs to include formal courses on IC integration. As Czura (2016) suggested, the teacher preparation programs have to provide the pre-service teachers with the teaching methodology on IC integration. Additionally, through the pre-service teacher training, future teachers should be equipped to be knowledgeable of other cultures to be able to develop students' IC (Czura, 2016). Therefore, more formal courses on the methods of integrating IC (i.e., Teaching IC or Teaching Cross Culture) should be considered to be added to the teacher training program for pre-service teachers. If future teachers of English could learn how to integrate IC into EFL teaching in some formal courses in their study programs, they would have more experience in IC teaching and would implement IC better in their future teaching.

8.3.2 Implications for universities

The improvement of the intercultural environment for students to practice IC has been proved to be an integral part of enhancing the effectiveness of IC teaching (Jon, 2013; Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020; Vo, 2017). When students use English in real contexts with foreigners, they can practice the IC they have learned and might realize they need to gain more IC knowledge and skills. Therefore, the universities that include the training of EFL students may want to

pay more attention to building intercultural communication environments to facilitate students' practice of IC knowledge and skills. Furthermore, as the teacher participants expressed in the findings, students need some chances to study with foreign teachers in some courses related to IC and language skills and to increase their motivation in learning IC. Therefore, it is imperative that universities invite more foreign teachers and volunteers to work at university campuses through teacher exchange programs and international cooperation programs. The foreign teachers should teach some courses that involve potential IC contents, such as Speaking, Listening, Reading, and American and British Culture, to better promote students' IC. In addition, the universities should take full use of the international teachers and students to improve the current communication environments on campus. They should organize some cultural exchange programs, English-speaking clubs, and English-speaking zones for local and international students to mingle and learn from each other, especially related to culture. If the environment is improved, more meaningful interactions will bring students a great deal of practical intercultural experience and make them more motivated in IC acquisition.

Furthermore, it has been proved that that the quality of teaching facility affects the effectiveness of IC inclusion (Chen, 2012). In fact, the teacher participants confirmed the availability of the Wi-Fi network and a gallery of real objects from foreign countries would significantly improve teachers' integration of IC. To foster IC integration, universities should ensure their internet network is available in all classrooms on the campus to help the teachers and students get closer to the outside world. Internet accessibility will enable teachers and students to access necessary materials, such as videos clips, photos, and articles, during IC activities. If the classrooms are not equipped with a Wi-Fi network, teachers will find it hard to carry out the IC activities that can only be done online. Furthermore, universities should

consider building a gallery to display culture-related objects from foreign countries. The gallery can display real products or models related to cultures of many foreign countries, such as a picture, a magazine, a Halloween mask, a wedding invitation card, or some money. Students can visit this display room to experience real items from other countries and understand more about their cultures.

In regard to enhancing teachers' overseas experiences for IC teaching, universities may need to cooperate with many foreign universities or institutions and have more teacher exchange programs to create a great deal of opportunities for teachers to experience real life abroad. The opportunities to live abroad with extensive international exposure would be the most effective way for EFL teachers to widen their knowledge and gain more real-life experiences to facilitate their IC teaching (Lázár, 2007; Zhou, 2011).

8.3.3 Implications for the faculties involved in EFL teaching programs

Concerning the testing and assessment formats, it is high time to escape the examination-oriented educational system that places more emphasis on language competence to give teachers more opportunities to integrate IC in EFL teaching (T. L. Nguyen, 2013; Zhou, 2011). The faculty leaders could ask the course outline designers to redesign the testing contents and assessment criteria regarding placing more emphasis on IC. In addition, EFL teachers should be allowed more freedom in choosing the appropriate testing formats and methods for final examinations in particular situations to facilitate IC integration. That is, when written tests are not suitable in some cases, teachers should be given more academic freedom to permit their students to submit other types of products (e.g., reflections or video clips) rather than having to conduct written tests that are fixed in the course outlines.

Another issue that should be taken into consideration is enhancing teachers' overseas experiences and teacher training on IC teaching. As suggested by the teacher participants, the faculties should organize some short trainings, workshops, and conferences EFL teachers could attend and learn more about IC integration. Experts in IC integration and teachers who have lived abroad should be invited to these conferences to share their IC, IC teaching materials, and methodology in IC teaching. In these conferences, teachers may discuss the practical intercultural communication situations and share ways to negotiate cultural differences to have effective intercultural communication. They can also share material sources for IC implementation and observe each other's classes to discuss and suggest the best methods to teach IC. The training methods should be made more effective by using a variety of experiential techniques and practical activities. What teachers acquire from the experts and their colleagues will help them understand certain cultural points and have thorough explanations for their students. Such opportunities would be the best way for novice teachers to improve their IC and learn the methods to teach IC from experts and their senior colleagues.

8.3.4 Implications for EFL curriculum designers and material developers

The teaching curriculum framework with IC inclusion has been highlighted as a decisive factor to enhance IC integration in EFL teaching (Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Zhou, 2011). As presented in the findings of the current study, the curriculum framework regulates the contents of the course outlines, and the teaching contents are designed according to what the course outlines require. In other words, if the teaching curriculum framework includes IC requirements, the course outlines and the teaching contents will also mention IC instruction. Therefore, the curriculum designers of an EFL teaching curriculum should consider revising their teaching curriculum frameworks to insert more IC content into the frameworks and

course outlines, specifically requiring teachers to implement IC in their daily teaching practices.

In addition, it is imperative that IC elements should be regulated in the objectives, assessment system, learning outcomes in every course outline, and the EFL teaching curriculum framework. With the requirements of IC in the curriculum framework and the course outlines, teachers would be aware of their responsibilities to teach IC, and at the same time, students would realize the IC levels they need to achieve to gain the necessary IC to reach the requirements.

More courses that require students to gain more practical experiences and intercultural communication can be embedded into the EFL teaching curriculum framework to elicit students to learn more IC. These courses may include field trips, internship programs, student exchange programs, etc. The student exchange programs and internships should be financially supported and be arranged in a foreign country so students can practice their IC through personal interactions with people from other cultures. Moreover, more IC-related courses, such as Intercultural Communication or Cross Culture, need to be explicitly included in the EFL teaching curriculum framework to develop students' IC. Furthermore, apart from the allocation of culture to separate IC courses, IC teaching should be required to be incorporated into language teaching in every course (Ho, 2011).

It is apparent that EFL teachers' integration of IC greatly depends upon the availability of IC contents in the coursebooks. Therefore, it is of importance to have more investments for formal teaching materials as well as supplementary materials related to IC. The material developers may need to pay more attention to the teaching materials. That is, the coursebooks chosen or developed for teaching EFL students should be designed in such a way that they

support IC integration. The materials that are chosen for teaching EFL students must be formal and updated with extensive IC contents and IC activities to provide students with an international perspective and allow them to reflect on their own cultures. Notably, the course outlines need to list the major cultural issues to be addressed and instructional pedagogies to be used by the EFL teachers in each lesson so those teachers can know what, when, how, and to what extent IC teaching should be done. With the available framework for IC contents and IC activities in the course outlines and the coursebooks, teachers will be more likely to carry out these activities and address IC. It would be unrealistic to call for an enhancement of IC instruction in EFL teaching without a curriculum and teaching materials that support IC teaching and learning.

8.3.5 Implications for EFL teachers

To integrate IC more effectively in their teaching practices, EFL teachers are supposed to gain more IC and intercultural experience in a foreign country. However, they need to create their own opportunities to go abroad in addition to the training programs offered by their university and faculty, especially if they must wait for those programs to be developed. It would be impossible for all universities and faculties to have policies and programs to support their teachers experiencing life abroad. Therefore, teachers need to be proactive in looking for the opportunities to go abroad and take advantage of every chance to have real-life experiences abroad through attending some short training programs or conferences or pursuing further education in a foreign country. They may need to look for scholarships offered by the Ministry of Education and Training and foreign universities or some programs financed by foreign projects or nongovernment organizations. When teachers have experienced real life in a foreign country, their IC teaching will certainly be more effective, and their students will be more motivated. Additionally, EFL teachers could use social

networks and relationships with foreign friends to seek opportunities to improve their IC and intercultural experiences.

Furthermore, as presented in the findings, one of the most decisive factors that facilitate IC implementation is teachers' full awareness of IC implementation. Therefore, EFL teachers themselves need to realize the importance of IC integration in EFL teaching and actively seek to integrate IC into their teaching. Only when teachers understand the value of IC integration will they want to integrate IC and find solutions for the challenges in IC implementation. For instance, if teachers do not have enough time to implement IC in class and do not have enough material sources, they could assign IC activities for students to do at home, ask their colleagues for help, or find the information from books or websites.

More importantly, to raise students' awareness of the importance of culture and IC in learning a language as well as the close relationship between culture and language, teachers may need to have a long-term strategy to create more motivation for their students to learn IC. They should train students' attitudes towards IC and enhance their sensitivity to cultures. During the teaching process, teachers may need to frequently raise students' awareness about IC by placing great emphasis on the vital role of IC in intercultural communication. Teachers should remind their students that IC is a necessary condition for them to use English effectively in real communicating contexts, so they need to learn IC and acquire understanding of more cultures (T. L. Nguyen, 2013). When students understand the importance of IC and have positive cultural attitudes, they will be motivated and feel interested in exploring IC. As a result, they will try to find many opportunities to explore and learn IC, and thus IC knowledge will be engraved more on their minds.

In addition, teachers should help students set a clear aim when learning a language. EFL teachers may want to create more motivation for students to learn IC by emphasizing that apart from the necessary professional knowledge, students really need to use IC for their future work. Teachers ought to tell their students they may need to work with foreigners in a multinational company in the future, and they need to master IC to behave suitably within the foreign cultures. Then, they can achieve effective communication in work as well as in their daily life. When students are aware that they need to learn IC to survive in a multicultural environment, they will try to explore IC and self-equip themselves with more IC to be competent intercultural communicators (T. L. Nguyen, 2013).

8.4 Limitations of the study

The present study has a number of limitations, including in terms of the research design and the research focus, as follows.

One of the study's limitations is associated with its design. The limited number of teacher participants (eight EFL teachers, including two curriculum designers) is one limitation. With only a small sample of eight participants, validity and trustworthiness are affected by the lack of rigor in the research design. The reasons the current study did not find more teacher participants can be attributed to the small number of teachers in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the research site, and the high requirements for teachers to be study participants. Moreover, since the current study investigated how IC is addressed in the English Language Program in one university, it is hard to generalize the findings for all the Vietnamese EFL programs. However, the findings discovered in the present research may be useful to other contexts of EFL education because of its rich and insightful data descriptions. Additionally, with eight classroom observations in total (one period per one teacher

participant) conducted in the study, it is impossible to exactly reflect the teachers' IC teaching practices. Longitudinal and continuous observations in many different courses in the curriculum over a longer period of time would certainly provide a more profound understanding about teachers' IC teaching practices.

The next limitation of the study is related to the focus of research. It tends to pay much attention to developing students' IC from the teachers' perspectives rather than from students' perspectives. All the sources of information in the study (documentary review, interviews with teachers and curriculum designers, and classroom observations) help generate the findings on enhancing IC inclusion in the EFL curriculum and fostering IC implementation only from EFL teachers' opinions. More focus on EFL students can be done, such as student interviews for their perspectives of IC learning, and student diaries recording their attitude changes during the process of IC learning. Data from students' opinions together with teachers' perspectives would create a more panoramic picture of IC teaching and learning as well as help the researcher give more useful implications for enhancing IC teaching and learning.

8.5 Recommendations for future research

As stated in the limitations of the study, the current study was restricted in some areas that might be developed further. From the findings of this study, some further research can be done to improve the integration of IC into EFL teaching and learning.

Further research with a larger number of teacher participants, more longitudinal class observations, and an analysis of more teaching materials can be considered. A larger sample of teacher participants would help draw a more convincing generalization of the findings. It

also would provide an overall view of EFL teachers' perspectives of IC and their integration of IC into their EFL teaching practices. Additionally, data collected from longer and continuous class observations would help further studies gain a deeper understanding of the EFL teachers' IC practices.

Future research could focus on different layers of analysis in the current study to develop it in a larger scope with more sources of information to gain a better understanding of the nature of IC teaching and learning as well as to improve IC teaching and learning to meet the requirements of the society. A further venue for research may place more focus on investigating the issues from EFL students' perspectives, for instance, (a) their perceptions of IC learning, (b) the process of their IC acquisition, (c) their expectations for IC teaching and learning, (d) the extent they meet the working requirements regarding IC after graduation in addition to teachers' perspectives of IC, and (e) their IC teaching practices. Other sources of data might include (a) interviews with EFL students about their perspectives of IC learning and practices with IC development, (b) students' diaries recording their attitude changes during the process of IC learning, and (c) interviews with EFL graduates' employers in multicultural working places about their evaluation regarding the EFL graduates' IC and the requirements for their employees' IC.

It is also worth conducting some research on adding some courses on training IC teaching methodology (i.e., Teaching IC or Teaching Cross Culture) to the teacher education programs for pre-service EFL teachers and evaluating its effectiveness. In addition, other studies may be done on providing training courses on IC integration for in-service EFL teachers and measuring their impact, as well as the teacher participants' perceptions about their roles in IC teaching, their competence in IC instruction, and their practical changes in IC teaching practices.

8.6 Conclusion

Although the present study has a number of limitations in terms of the research design and the research focus, the findings from this study have provided insights into the nature of IC in the EFL curriculum and implications for refining the EFL curriculum as well as promoting IC teaching and learning in Vietnam. The study has aimed to achieve its main objectives. It has provided an analysis of the EFL curriculum framework and course outlines and investigated the curriculum designers' perspectives to obtain an in-depth understanding of how IC is rationalized by curriculum designers and addressed in EFL curriculum documents. Also, it has presented the findings on how teachers perceive and implement IC in their daily teaching practices. Additionally, it has reported on the factors that facilitate or hinder the integration of IC in EFL teaching and learning practices. To address the obstacles to IC integration, the research offers concrete suggestions to policymakers, academic institutions, faculty, curriculum designers, and EFL teachers.

Using a case study design to collect contextualized data to achieve findings close to reality, the study has contributed to the pool of literature on the inclusion of IC in the EFL curriculum and classroom practices. By providing how IC is being integrated in an EFL curriculum and teaching practices in Vietnam, the study calls for a reform of the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English and a modification of the EFL teaching curriculum frameworks and course outlines to promote educational internationalization in Vietnamese universities. In addition, the study indicated the influential factors to IC implementation at multi-layered levels and a contextualized analysis. The contextualized knowledge discovered in the present research may be useful to other contexts of EFL education because of its rich and insightful data descriptions. Furthermore, the findings help university teachers reflect on their IC teaching practices and realize their

achievements and setbacks in integrating IC into EFL teaching. The study calls for improvements in professional development and teacher training programs to enhance IC integration. Moreover, along with showing the discrepancy between the intentions of curriculum designers and the actual application of IC in EFL instruction, the findings and implications of this study facilitate the curriculum designers and practitioners to better address IC in the curriculum and teaching practices. Accordingly, students' IC may be better cultivated and promoted.

The current study also suggests some directions for future research. The directions include research with a larger number of teacher participants; more longitudinal class observations; more focus on investigating EFL students' perspectives for improving IC teaching and learning; and research evaluating the effectiveness of adding some IC courses to the teacher education programs for pre-service EFL teachers on enhancing teachers' IC integration.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview protocol

1. Interviews with 2 curriculum designers

- Background survey

1. Your age:

☐ 25-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ above 50

2. Your sex:

☐ male ☐ female

3. Your ethnic group:

☐ Kinh ☐ Khmer ☐ Chinese ☐ Cham

☐ Others (Please specify:)

4. The number of years you have been teaching English:

☐ 5-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35

5. The number of years you have been teaching English at the present university:

☐ 5-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35

6. Your overseas experiences:

a. Have you ever gone abroad?

☐ Yes (If you choose “Yes”, please answer Questions b, c, d, e and skip Question 7)

☐ No (If you choose “No”, please skip Questions b, c, d, e and go to Question 7)

b. How many times have you gone abroad?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ more than 6

c. What countries have you visited?

.....

d. For what opportunities? (You can choose more than one box if you have many opportunities to go abroad)

☐ traveling

☐ studying

☐ professional training

☐ attending conferences/workshops

☐ others (Please specify:)

e. How long was the journey? (You can choose one box for each time you go abroad)

☐ less than 7 days

☐ 7 days – 30 days

☐ 1 month – less than 6 months

☐ 6 months – less than 12 months

☐ 1 year – less than 2 years

☐ 2 years – less than 3 years

☐ 3 years – less than 4 years

☐ 4 years – less than 5 years

☐ more than 5 years

7. In case you do not have any overseas experiences, do you have frequent contact with foreigners / with people from another culture? If yes, in what cases?

☐ Yes

☐ No

8. What subjects have you ever taught for BA English-major students?

.....

.....

9. What is the name of the program which you designed its teaching curriculum?

.....

- Interview questions

1. What is your understanding of including IC into the EFL program?
2. What kinds of contents regarding IC have you considered crucial to be integrated when planning the curriculum? And why?
3. To what extent have IC contents been addressed in the EFL curriculum?
4. How do you perceive the integration of IC in EFL teaching, positive or negative or neutral? Why?
5. What aspects of IC have you focused on in teaching and why?
6. To what extent have IC contents been addressed in class? And how?
7. What are the factors that facilitate IC teaching, and how?
8. What are the factors that hinder IC teaching, and how?
9. What do you suggest for a better inclusion of IC in teaching?

2. Interviews with 6 EFL teachers

- Background survey

1. Your age:

☐ 25-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ above 50

2. Your sex:

☐ male ☐ female

3. Your ethnic group:

☐ Kinh ☐ Khmer ☐ Chinese ☐ Cham

☐ Others (Please specify:)

4. The number of years you have been teaching English:

☐ 5-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35

5. The number of years you have been teaching English at the present university:

☐ 5-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35

6. Your overseas experiences:

b. Have you ever gone abroad?

☐ Yes (If you choose “Yes”, please answer Questions b, c, d, e and skip Question 7)

☐ No (If you choose “No”, please skip Questions b, c, d, e and go to Question 7)

b. How many times have you gone abroad?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ more than 6

c. What countries have you visited?

.....

d. For what opportunities? (You can choose more than one box if you have many opportunities to go abroad)

☐ traveling

☐ studying

☐ professional training

☐ attending conferences/workshops

☐ others (Please specify:)

e. How long was the journey? (You can choose one box for each time you go abroad)

☐ less than 7 days

☐ 7 days – 30 days

☐ 1 month – less than 6 months

☐ 6 months – less than 12 months

☐ 1 year – less than 2 years

☐ 2 years – less than 3 years

☐ 3 years – less than 4 years

☐ 4 years – less than 5 years

☐ more than 5 years

7. In case you do not have any overseas experiences, do you have frequent contact with foreigners / with people from another culture? If yes, in what cases?

☐ Yes

☐ No

8. What subjects have you ever taught for BA English-major students?

.....
.....



- Interview questions

1. How do you perceive the integration of IC in EFL teaching, positive or negative or neutral? Why?
2. What aspects of IC have you focused on in teaching and why?
3. To what extent have IC contents been addressed in class? And how?
4. What are the factors that facilitate IC teaching, and how?
5. What are the factors that hinder IC teaching, and how?
6. What do you suggest for a better inclusion of IC in teaching?

Appendix B: Class observation protocol

During the class observations, the researcher will gather data on the following aspects.

(1) The physical setting

→ The physical environments of the classrooms;

→ The layout of classroom and its relevance to school or social functions;

(2) The human setting

→ The organization of students in the class;

→ The characteristics of the class and the teacher being observed (e.g., gender, ethnicity, academic achievement, and overseas experiences);

(3) The interactional setting

→ The interactions taking place between teachers and students in relation to IC implementation (formal, informal, verbal and non-verbal, etc.);

→ The interactions taking place among students in relation to IC implementation (formal, informal, verbal and non-verbal, etc.);

→ IC integration in class: the presence of IC teaching and learning, the frequency of IC teaching and learning, the time for IC teaching and learning, the contents of IC are taught, the extent the IC contents are taught, the IC activities used, the aspects of IC (intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness) are taught;

(4) The program setting

→ The presence of IC contents in the teaching curriculum and course outline;

→ The presence of IC contents in the teaching materials / resources, and their organization;

→ Teachers' pedagogic styles in teaching IC

Detailed class observation protocol

Course name: _____

Lecturer's pseudonym: _____

Class/group: _____

Unit/Topic: _____

Date: _____

Room: _____

Duration of lesson: _____

Descriptive notes	Reflective notes

