

# THE INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY ENGLISH TEACHERS' VOICES

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**Abstract:** In recent decades, there has been increasing interest in implementing the intercultural dimension (ID) in foreign language teaching to enhance students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC), the capability to interact across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This article reports on a study that examines the English language teaching (ELT) of two Vietnamese university English teachers (VUETs) to investigate if and how they implemented the ID in their teaching. Situating the study within a qualitative case study approach, we collected data from interviews, classroom observations, and documents. Findings of this study show that these two teachers have not yet fully implemented the ID in their lessons. More specifically, they could transmit intercultural knowledge to their students; however, they could not develop their students' intercultural attitudes, skills, or awareness. When providing cultural knowledge, they primarily relied on the prescribed textbooks' cultural content and their understanding. The article sheds light on influential factors for VUETs' ELT practices and offers implications for enhancing Vietnamese students' ICC.

*Keywords:* intercultural communicative competence (ICC), intercultural dimension (ID), English language teaching (ELT), teachers' practices, Vietnamese higher education (VHE)

## 1. Introduction

In an era of globalisation, the role of culture in language teaching has become more urgent than ever. Globalisation has created greater intercultural interactions among people of different cultures. In ELT, learners study English to communicate with English-native speakers and people from other cultures. Therefore, ELT aims to develop these learners to become effective communicators and intercultural mediators who understand and mediate the differences

and otherness across cultures. In other words, the native-speaker model needs to shift into the intercultural-speaker model (Byram, 1997; Byram & Wagner, 2018).

Due to the significance of ICC to language learners in the globalised world, the ID has become a significant area of interest within language education. Within this dimension, culture is integrated into language teaching to help learners see the connection between the target language and culture, and their own language and culture, as such, developing their ICC for the success

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of intercultural communication (Byram et al., 2002; Newton et al., 2010).

In response to the upsurge of the ID in language teaching, numerous studies have been conducted globally to demonstrate the effectiveness of the ID in language teaching. These include studies in Australia (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Naidu, 2018), in New Zealand (East, 2012; Tolosa et al., 2018), in China (Tian, 2016), and in Europe (Byram et al., 2002; Barrett et al., 2014). In Vietnam, few studies have investigated if the actual practices of VUETs focus on the ID. This study was undertaken to address this gap by examining how two VUETs teach English through the ID lens. It is expected that a deeper understanding of VUETs' current practices might provide implications for language policy and planning, teachers' professional development, and materials development in Vietnam and broader similar contexts.

## 2. ICC and ID in Language Education

### *Conceptualisations of ICC*

In this study, ICC is defined as one's ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Barrett et al., 2014; Byram, 1997). In this article, Byram's (1997) model of ICC is used as it is regarded as one of the most influential, best known, and most cited models that guide language teachers to enhance students' ICC in their language classrooms (Galante, 2015; Gu, 2016). Moreover, in his model of ICC, Byram (1997) clearly explained what comprises ICC and defined each component of ICC. According to Byram (1997), ICC consists of five *savoirs* (knowings). *Savoir être* (know how to be/attitudes) is expressed via the willingness to relate one's own values, beliefs, and behaviours to others' who are culturally different. They can be the attitudes of curiosity, willingness, empathy, or openness to cultural differences from

other cultures. *Savoirs* are the knowledge of one's own and others' culture and the communicative techniques for a successful interaction. *Savoir comprendre* (know how to understand/skills of interpreting and relating) is the ability to interpret, explain, and relate others' culture to one's own culture. *Savoir apprendre/faire* (know how to learn or do/skills of discovery and interaction) is the ability to acquire new knowledge from others' cultures and operate one's cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills into actual intercultural situations. *Savoir s'engager* (know how to engage/critical cultural awareness) is referred to as "the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997, p. 53).

### *ICC and Language Education*

In today's globalised world, the interactions among people of different cultures increase via using English as an international language (Kachru, 1992; McKay, 2002). In such a context, the rise of international cooperation in economics, politics, internationalisation of education, immigration, and technological innovation has promoted intercultural interactions (Block & Cameron, 2002; Crystal, 2012). Thus, students' ICC should be developed to interculturally interact with people of different cultures in the global community (Byram, 2015; Byram & Wagner, 2018).

Any communication success depends on the efficiency of information exchange and relationship establishment and maintenance (Byram, 1997). Furthermore, cultural differences can lead to divergent interpretations among communicators from different cultures, which might cause misunderstandings in their interactions. Byram (2012) explained, "being intercultural and the state of 'interculturality' may follow from acting

interculturally” (p. 86). In other words, they can act and relate comfortably between their own culture(s) and others’ culture(s). Consequently, it is the role of language teachers to enhance their students’ ICC by helping them see the connection between their own culture(s) and others’ culture(s) (Byram, 1997, 2009).

### ***ID in Language Education***

Several terms have been used to address the ID in language teaching. Terms such as, intercultural language learning, intercultural communicative language teaching, intercultural language teaching and learning, intercultural language teaching, and intercultural learning, have been used. Despite using different terms, the ID aims to refocus language learning and teaching on the intercultural focus. More specifically, the goal of language teaching has been shifted from communicative competence to ICC (Newton et al., 2010). It is to “prepare them [learners] for interaction with people of other cultures to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours” (Byram et al., 2002, p. 6).

In recent decades, the implementation of ID has received increasing interest in language teaching. The concept of ICC and the ID have been included in national language policies and curriculum frameworks globally. For example, Byram’s (1997) ICC components were included in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001), which has significantly influenced the aims and methods of language teaching across Europe and other parts of the world. The ID was also incorporated in the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1996) used in the United States with the overall goal to “educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to

communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad” (p. 2). In Australia and New Zealand, the ID has been integrated into national language curricula that guide language learning and teaching across the two countries (Harbon & Browett, 2006; Tolosa et al., 2018).

There are various ways for language teachers to implement the ID in language lessons with the aim of enhancing students’ ICC. For instance, language teachers can offer students opportunities to come into contact with other cultures and/or realistic situations they might deal with when communicating with people from different cultures (Aguilar, 2007). One of the most effective ways is the use of other cultures’ communities as resources through ethnographic studies or fieldwork (Aguilar, 2007; Byram et al., 2002; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). With this strategy, students are sent into the target community to have more opportunities to learn about the target culture and communicate with people of the target culture, for example, via academic exchange programmes (Norvilienė, 2012). However, residing in foreign cultures or immersing themselves in different cultures is not enough to increase ICC. Active reflection on different cultures in conjunction with immersion seems to create more understanding (Gregersen-Hermans, 2015; Liu, 2014). Within the framework of language classrooms, teachers can create opportunities for students to get in touch with other cultures by utilising authentic sources from the target community (Kennedy, 2020; E. Peterson & Coltrane, 2003; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005). These sources can be films, documentaries, news, television shows, printed materials, websites, or travel brochures. Another useful strategy mentioned by several scholars (e.g., McConachy & Hata, 2013; E. Peterson & Coltrane, 2003) is the use of role play in which students can act out a misunderstanding that can arise due to

cultural differences between countries. In reality, such situations often lead to communication breakdowns and the feeling of embarrassment or discomfort between the interlocutors. The role of technology in intercultural education is also emphasised (Davis et al., 2005) in which teachers can foster students' ICC using telecollaboration, particularly virtual or network-based exchange (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2018; Peiser, 2015). Using teachers' personal stories to facilitate discussions about subjective and historical perspectives is also encouraged in foreign language classrooms. According to Kramsch and Zhang (2018), this technique might bridge the cultural gaps between the students and their foreign language teachers, who are multilingual instructors. Some other techniques for teachers to add to their teaching practice for developing students' ICC include, but are not limited to, cultural comparisons, intercultural explorations, using proverbs, culture capsules, poster presentations, intercultural interview-discussions, culture quizzes, culture clusters, explicit teacher questioning, reflective writing, research papers, or portfolios (McConachy & Hata, 2013; Neff & Rucynski, 2013; Reid, 2015; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005; Trinh, 2015).

Although the ID has become part of curriculum frameworks in numerous countries, language teachers struggle to implement it in their practices. Biebricher et al. (2019) found a mismatch between the aims within the *New Zealand curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and elementary school teachers' capacity to enact those aims. Teachers faced challenges in 'teaching' stereotypes, finding a balance between the use of the target language and students' language, and finding a balance between culture and language when implementing the ID into practice. In a similar context where ICC was one of the goals in the language curriculum

requirements, Australian language teachers showed high levels of uncertainty about implementing the ID in their everyday practices. Hence, they still faced several obstacles in making ICC their lesson focus (Díaz, 2011; Harbon & Browett, 2006). The underlying reasons for such challenges might be explained by a lack of time (Castro et al., 2004; Vo, 2017), lack of curricular support and suitable textbooks, and lack of ICC assessment (Gu, 2016; Young & Sachdev, 2011), or an absence of teacher professional learning and development regarding ICC (Bickley et al., 2014; Oranje & Smith, 2018).

Concerning language teachers' practices towards the ID, a plethora of research has found that teachers preferred traditional teacher-directed approaches to increase students' cultural knowledge (savoir) rather than to boost students' attitudes (savoir être), skills (savoir comprendre or savoir apprendre/faire), and awareness (savoir s'engager) (e.g., Luk, 2012; Tian, 2016). When touching upon cultural knowledge, they tended to provide cultural facts or artefacts, which would create stereotypes and prejudices towards other cultures (Young & Sachdev, 2011). In some other studies, teachers depended on culture-related topics from the textbooks to integrate culture in their language classrooms (Osman, 2015; Tian, 2016). Some teachers also expressed that they did not regard culture and ICC as the key lesson goals and implemented the ID incidentally (Luk, 2012; Osman, 2015) or rather than by a purposeful design (Tian, 2016).

### 3. The Vietnamese Context

English has gained a dominant position in the Vietnamese education system since Vietnam opened its door to other countries in all aspects marked by the economic reforms in 1986 (*Đổi Mới* in Vietnamese). English has become one of the

compulsory subjects taught at all school levels (from year 3) across Vietnam (S. T. Le, 2011). It is one of the entrance examinations for middle schools (Bui & Nguyen, 2016) and one of the six examinations for senior secondary school students to get their Secondary School Education Certificate (Hoang, 2010; V. C. Le, 1999). Having good English proficiency is also “an important key to employment, promotion and further studies” for Vietnamese people in today’s world (N. Doan et al., 2018, p. 114). English is used in daily activities between Vietnamese people and foreign tourists or a code-mixing between English and Vietnamese language among Vietnamese people (N. Doan et al., 2018; Phan et al., 2014). Consequently, enhancing Vietnamese students’ ICC should become the crucial goal in ELT to prepare for their intercultural interactions.

However, ICC is not yet explicitly included in national language policies in Vietnam. The ID was implicitly incorporated in the current national project, *Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008 to 2020* (hereafter, Project 2020). The project aimed to help Vietnamese youth gain the capacity to use a foreign language independently in communication and further their chance to study and work in an integrated and multi-cultural environment (Government of Vietnam, 2008). Yet, throughout Project 2020 and the circular on its enactment (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014), no reference indicates the ICC concept, its components, nor the significance of culture in language teaching (L. Nguyen, 2014). Hence, there is a gap between what national language policies expect and how VUETs teach English in VHE. L. Nguyen (2014) also found that poor communication between policy-makers and VUETs led to conflicting beliefs within VUETs. On the one hand, they thought that ICC was essential for Vietnamese students

in today’s world. On the other hand, they felt that they were not required to enhance students’ ICC.

Additionally, the ID has not yet become a popular approach to tertiary education in Vietnam. Currently, culture is merely integrated via cultural subjects such as British-American culture or cross-cultural studies in English-major but not in non-English major programmes (T. T. Le, 2017; M. H. Nguyen, 2011). Culture is regarded as a marginalised segment of language teaching for the majority of VUETs (Ho, 2011; L. Nguyen et al., 2016). While the exam-oriented education system significantly influences VUETs’ practices, almost all current English tests and exams aim only to assess students’ English linguistic competence (L. Nguyen et al., 2016; Vo, 2017).

#### 4. The Present Study

The study reported here is part of a larger project that explored how VUETs understand and implement the ID in their ELT to enhance their students’ ICC in VHE. The project was situated within an interpretivist research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) with a qualitative case study approach (Stake, 2005). Data within the larger project were obtained through five data collection methods: an open-ended questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations, field notes, and documents such as lesson plans, textbooks, course outlines, and national language policies.

The study had two distinct phases. Phase 1 aimed to obtain a general understanding of VUETs’ beliefs about ICC. Data were collected from 107 VUETs teaching general English (basic English; GE) at 35 public universities via a web-based questionnaire. In Phase 2, 6 participants were chosen from Phase 1 participants to be interviewed twice (prior and post-observation), observed their three or four

lessons, and gathered their teaching documents. This phase endeavoured to understand how VUETs implemented the ID to enhance students' ICC, the relationship between their ICC beliefs and practices, and influential factors underlying that relationship.

This article investigates the current practices of two VUETs, Viet Bac and Thu Hang (pseudonyms), selected from the six Phase 2 participants. They were chosen because of their similar approaches to enhancing their students' ICC although they had notable differences in personal backgrounds, teaching contexts, and overseas experiences. Two research questions were addressed: (1) to what extent do the participants implement the ID in their GE teaching? and (2) how do they intend to enhance their students' ICC?

### *Context*

In VHE, non-English majors study GE as a compulsory subject in the first two years. Apart from GE, they do not have any subjects related to English-speaking countries. Public universities have the right to choose their GE textbooks and design their course outlines; however, they have to ensure that their students pass the outcome-standard exam or achieve a required English proficiency level before graduation. University students have to reach the B1 level (CEFR) to be eligible for graduation. In each university, VUETs have to follow prescribed GE textbooks during the course because the tests and exams are designed based on the knowledge that students have learned from the textbooks.

### *Participants*

Viet Bac and Thu Hang have a Master's degree in ELT and teach GE to non-English majors at a public university. Their profile is described as follows.

Viet Bac is a 45-year-old-male VUET with 22 years of teaching experience.

He worked as the head of the English department and an English teacher at a university in Hanoi. He started learning English at the age of 16. He travelled to Singapore and the Philippines to undertake training courses about ELT methodologies, spending one week in each country. Apart from these experiences, his opportunities to interact with people from other cultures were limited. He did not receive any intensive training in ICC or the ID implementation in ELT. He only learned culture via several cultural subjects when he was a student at university.

Thu Hang is a 31-year-old-female VUET with 7 years of teaching experience. She was teaching GE to non-English majors at a university in Ninh Binh. She started learning English at the age of 12. Though she had never been to any countries outside of Vietnam, her opportunities to interact with other cultures were ample. After graduating from university, she worked for a Korean company for two years in Hanoi. During that time, she used English to communicate and learned a lot about Korean culture. She regularly communicated with international visitors who came to her hometown, one of Vietnam's most attractive places. She also often talked with her English-speaking neighbours. Like Viet Bac, Thu Hang learned culture separately from language via cultural subjects when she was at university.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The interviews and classroom observations were conducted from September 2018 to February 2019. Specifically, the participants were interviewed for the first time before classroom observations to gather their views about the ID and how they understood their ID implementation into practice. Afterwards, Thu Hang was observed in three 50-minute lessons, and Viet Bac was observed in four lessons to explore their ELT practices. After all classroom observations

were completed, they were interviewed for a second time. This interview aimed to elicit their rationale for their chosen teaching approach. All interviews and classroom observations were scheduled conveniently for the participants. Participants chose the time and content for the classroom observations based on their availability. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated. The classroom observations were audio-recorded and documented with the help of field notes.

All the teaching materials relating to the participants' observed lessons were gathered during the fieldwork. They were the teaching contents of the lessons that the participants needed to complete within the observed lessons, course outlines, lesson plans, and/or PowerPoint slides of the observed lessons. National language policies and curriculum frameworks for English majors and non-English majors at several public universities were also collected, in order to understand the current status of ELT in VHE. Using various documentary sources makes the data more reliable and provides a "thick description" of the phenomenon under investigation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Documents were used as secondary data to obtain an in-depth understanding of the institutional and sociocultural factors that might affect VUETs' ICC beliefs and practices. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data from each data source. Emergent themes were then cross-analysed to triangulate and build up common categories to report the study findings.

### ***Findings***

In this section, each case is presented separately and then merged to discuss the primary approaches they used to implement the ID in their ELT practices.

### **Viet Bac**

Approximately 40 non-English majors specialising in philosophy or public policy were in Viet Bac's observed class. During the pre-observation interview, Viet Bac emphasised the ICC significance to Vietnamese students. In his opinion, they needed ICC to become global citizens because a global citizen needed to use English to communicate effectively with people of other cultures. He indicated, "language is a reflection of a country's culture," so language cannot be taught separately from its culture. He also reported that VUETs had not received sufficient support to implement the ID into practice. Nevertheless, he stated that he was trying his best to make it possible, saying "if you don't have the best thing, make the best thing from what you have."

During four observed lessons, Viet Bac attempted to encourage his students to learn about, and reflect upon intercultural aspects. In the first lesson, he asked students to find four adjectives to describe themselves. After calling some students to speak out their answers, he raised questions, "What do you say about the differences between Vietnamese students and students abroad, English-speaking countries, for example?" Although he did not ask his students to give their own opinions about this question, by raising the question, Viet Bac prompted his students to think and relate the differences between Vietnamese students and students abroad, especially in terms of characteristics.

When the second lesson was about what to say and do during the first meeting, Viet Bac asked his students, "is it possible to ask a Vietnamese person to spell their Vietnamese name as in English?" When some students answered "yes," he said they did not understand the differences between the two linguistic systems, English and Vietnamese. In order to help his students

understand, he compared the two linguistic systems. He explained that Vietnamese is an unmodified and monosyllabic language, so reading and writing are the same, but English is the opposite. Hence, Vietnamese people do not ask others to spell their names during the first meeting. It is significant to note that there is a consistent relationship between pronunciation and spelling in Vietnamese. In other words, one sound is normally represented by one or a fixed combination of letters in Vietnamese. For example, the sound /a/ is written into /a/ or the sound /i/ is written into /i/ or /y/. This explains the fact that when a Vietnamese person hears a sound in Vietnamese, he/she can know how to write that word or letter. During the lesson, Viet Bac mostly focused on vocabulary and grammar to support students' linguistic competence. When the lesson was about how people use their time, he sometimes provided some cultural information about Vietnam, such as working hours, doing housework before Tet (i.e., Lunar New Year), and nap-after-lunch culture. To explain some geographical terms in the reading passage, he showed a world map on the screen to help students differentiate between the United Kingdom and England.

When the third lesson was about vocabulary to address people around, Viet Bac prompted students to identify several words for relatives in English and Vietnamese. For example, *aunt* can be translated into *cô*, *thím*, *mợ*, *bác*, or *bá* in Vietnamese based on the relationship among the interactants and the region where they live. He helped them understand the complexity of kinship terms in Vietnamese that often confused Vietnamese people in different parts of the country.

In the fourth lesson, he only focused on different uses of present simple and present continuous. He used a short video clip in which one person talked about his daily routines. After the clip ended, he

asked, "is it similar or different between school life in Vietnam and Britain?" While some students answered "different," he did not ask them to discuss the differences between the two educational systems.

Reflecting on the observed lessons, Viet Bac indicated that whenever the lessons touched on cultural aspects, he would grasp the opportunities to talk about them by providing further cultural information about Vietnamese cultures and other cultures based on his knowledge. He further stated that he often used video clips or photos to introduce other cultures as he said they were "reliable" and "authentic English." He spent much time on vocabulary and grammar and missed some chances to integrate intercultural aspects during observed lessons. He explained that English was a subject focusing on fundamental aspects of language, that language had to be prioritised over culture. Further, he thought that culture should only be a catalyst for students' language practices.

As noticed during the observed lessons, Viet Bac did not give students sufficient time to discuss the triggering questions and reflect upon what they had known about those cultural aspects. He explained that he did not have enough time to highlight every detail of the lesson. Moreover, his students' English linguistic competence was low, so he needed to develop their linguistic aspects. In his perspective, students' limited linguistic competence also led to a lack of discussion tasks and the frequent use of Vietnamese during his lessons.

When reflecting on the imbalance between language and culture in his lessons, Viet Bac explained that he had to prioritise linguistic aspects to ensure the curriculum requirements and the course objectives. He mentioned the personal factors that hindered his ID implementation. These included his limited knowledge of culture, of ICC, and of



the ID. He also stated that he did not have many opportunities to engage in intercultural interactions and professional development in ICC and ID in his teaching career.

### **Thu Hang**

About 30 non-English majors specialising in early childhood education and primary education attended Thu Hang's observed lessons. Like Viet Bac, Thu Hang realised the importance of ICC to her students, especially in a globalised world and in a province with developing tourism. She indicated that she strived to integrate the knowledge she gained through learning, experiencing, or reading different resources to share it with her students. Therefore, they can use this knowledge for their language use, especially for their future career.

During the three observed lessons with the topic *holidays*, Thu Hang found different ways to help her students learn about and reflect upon popular holidays worldwide and what people often do during those holidays. In the first lesson, she showed some photos of Christmas, Halloween, and New Year on the screen and provoked students to talk about them. To engage students in discussions, Thu Hang used questions, for example, "what holiday is it?", "what do people often do on Christmas?" She also asked some questions to make students relate to Vietnamese culture, for instance, "do we celebrate Christmas in Vietnam?" Her students were eager to join in discussions. However, they sometimes kept silent because they did not know the answers to several questions. At that point, Thu Hang provided cultural knowledge that she had prepared before the lesson. Such knowledge was primarily about facts of a specific culture, for instance, Santa Claus, what children often do with their socks on Christmas Eve, or trick-or-treat practice on Halloween. In this lesson, she also prepared some cultural questions about giving and receiving gifts in some countries,

for example, "opening gifts immediately is impolite in China and Japan." This culture quiz was designed in multiple-choice options. Thu Hang showed each question and asked students to choose the best options before giving the suggested answers.

In the second lesson, Thu Hang applied the same approach to introduce some famous places in the world, such as Eiffel Tower, Great Wall, or Mount Fuji. She used photos to introduce these cultural artefacts; however, she sometimes made mistakes in providing their information. Notably, she showed a picture of the Tower Bridge but told students it was London Bridge or said the Colosseum is in Greece. Reflecting on that point, she explained it might be because of her limited cultural knowledge.

Reflecting on the observed classes, Thu Hang indicated that she would expand the lessons towards the ID based on their topics to boost her students' understanding of other cultures and Vietnam. She further stated that apart from American and British cultures, she also developed their knowledge of Asian cultures. In her opinion, they would have more interactions with people from neighboring countries than Western countries. It was apparent that Thu Hang could create several culture-related activities to enhance her students' savoirs (knowledge). Yet, a lack of discussion and group-work tasks during her lessons inhibited students' development of other ICC components (i.e., skills, attitudes, and awareness). She pointed out several constraints affecting her practices such as large class size, students' limited linguistic competence, a lack of intensive ICC training, or curriculum requirements.

### **Discussion**

#### **VUETs' Current Practices of ELT: Towards the ID or Not?**

In a context where ICC and the ID are not yet overtly included in national

language policies and curriculum frameworks, this study revealed that Viet Bac and Thu Hang attempted to take the first steps to implement the ID in their ELT current practices. According to Byram and Wagner (2018), language teachers play a crucial role in developing students' ICC as they need it to become "intercultural citizens" who are "able to engage in intercultural communication, to think and act critically, and to negotiate the complexities of today's world" (p. 141). Nevertheless, in this study, Viet Bac and Thu Hang primarily emphasised linguistic aspects to ensure students' good exam results. When they integrated culture into their lessons, they tended to provide new or 'unfamiliar' cultural knowledge (savoirs) to their students rather than develop their cultural attitudes (savoir être), skills (savoir comprendre or savoir apprendre/faire), and awareness (savoir s'engager). For example, Thu Hang provided her students the cultural practices about Christmas and Halloween in Britain without asking students to compare these cultural practices in other cultures. This way of teaching practice might increase her students' stereotypical thinking. Findings of this study align with those of several studies (e.g., Sercu et al., 2005; Tian, 2016; Young & Sachdev, 2011) in which language teachers view their role as the transmitters of cultural knowledge in language classrooms.

In Vietnam, the transmission of cultural knowledge in the ID implementation is also evident in several studies (e.g., Ho, 2011; V. C. Le, 2015). This might be explained by the fact that VUETs were not taught or trained to teach English, focusing on the ID in their professional learning and development. Thus, they did not know its principles or what effective strategies they should use to do so. The lack of ICC training and its constraints on teachers' ICC practices have also been well documented in the literature (Ghanem, 2017; Young &

Sachdev, 2011). Findings from this current study and previous studies showed that teachers' professional development regarding ICC and the ID plays a pivotal role in enacting their ICC beliefs into practice. In this study, Thu Hang and Viet Bac expressed that they felt unprepared to implement the ID in their GE lessons without any pre-service and in-service ICC training courses.

The cultural knowledge integrated into the observed classes was primarily cultural facts/artefacts such as photos, maps, video clips, or cultural quizzes, suggesting the teachers viewed culture as static rather than dynamic. Integrating culture into language teaching in this way often stems from the belief that culture can be taught separately from language. Also, integrating culture in language classes by providing cultural facts can potentially create more stereotypes about cultures that students might not have been aware of before (Biebricher et al., 2019). This method of developing students' ICC has been suggested to be avoided (Byram et al., 2002; Byram, 2009). Nonetheless, a plethora of research has found that enhancing students' ICC by providing cultural facts is still prominent across countries, for instance, in China (Tian, 2016), in Spain (Castro et al., 2004), in Canada (Bickley et al., 2014), in the USA (Ghanem, 2017; Klein, 2004), and in New Zealand (Biebricher et al., 2019; East, 2012).

While our research findings indicate that VUETs have not adopted the ID in their current practices, they show several positive changes in their ICC beliefs and practices. This study uncovered that Viet Bac and Thu Hang created several tasks and activities to boost their students' ICC, albeit mostly savoirs/knowledge. While their personal backgrounds, teaching experiences, and teaching contexts varied in many ways they appeared to apply similar teaching strategies. Two key teaching strategies are selected to present and discuss in the following sections.

### **Using Personal Knowledge as the Main Source**

Viet Bac and Thu Hang both chiefly integrated culture in their English lessons via using their knowledge. They frequently told their students what they had known, heard, or experienced about the cultural aspects of their lessons. In most cases, they first raised triggering questions to provoke students' thinking and then provided the suggested answers if students could not answer them. In some cases, they used technology to introduce new cultural knowledge via video clips, photos, or games. Using personal knowledge as the primary source to incorporate culture and ICC in language lessons is also documented in several studies (e.g., Aleksandrowicz-Pędich et al., 2003; Tian, 2016).

Relying on teachers' knowledge to implement the ID in language lessons often hinders their practices due to their limited cultural knowledge. In this study, the wrong information was detected during Thu Hang's lessons. Both Thu Hang and Viet Bac also indicated that they felt unconfident including intercultural aspects in their lessons because of their limited knowledge. They further stated that they were not systematically taught about culture, ICC, and the ID in their pre-service education programmes. Moreover, they did not receive any training programmes for their in-service professional development. A lack of teacher professional learning and development hindering language teachers in implementing the ID is also evident in the literature. For instance, in Ghanem's (2017) study, German teachers articulated that they were not taught or trained regarding ICC; therefore, they were not familiar with its theories or principles, leading to their poor implementation of the ID into practice.

### **Adhering to the Content of the Prescribed English Textbooks**

Another common strategy Viet Bac and Thu Hang used was exploiting the prescribed textbooks' lesson topics. During the interviews, both teachers expressed that they often used cultural knowledge in the textbooks to encourage their students to talk about it or provided new cultural knowledge. For instance, with *holidays* topic in Thu Hang's observed lessons, students were asked to name popular holidays, talk about the activities that people often do during those holidays, and discuss the commonalities and differences between those cultural practices in Vietnam and other countries. Both teachers further explained that they had to strictly comply with the textbooks' content because it was used to design the curriculum frameworks and the test content.

Textbook dependence to integrate culture in language teaching is also found in several other studies conducted in Vietnam. For instance, L. Nguyen et al. (2016) and Ho (2011) found out that VUETs frequently used the lessons' cultural topics to incorporate culture in their lessons. These teachers reported that they needed to follow the mandated textbooks and curriculum frameworks for students' good academic performance. Findings of this study and previous studies reiterated the impacts of the exam-oriented educational system on VUETs' ELT practices. In Vietnam, assessment is used for the sole purpose of high-stakes accountability. Testing to get the certificates becomes more critical than testing to assess students' competence; thus, exam failure is viewed as academic incompetence for both teachers and students (V. C. Le, 1999). Furthermore, relying on textbooks' content to implement the ID in practice might also be caused by teachers' lack of pedagogical skills. From the findings, it seems that textbook use still

dominates VUETs' ICC practices, especially in the context of VHE.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

Findings of this study indicate that Viet Bac and Thu Hang have not yet fully implemented the ID to enhance their students' ICC. Their ELT practices might not help students develop all ICC components (especially skills, attitudes, and awareness); however, they strived to enhance student's cultural knowledge in many ways. Findings also uncovered limitations in their current practices towards the ID. Notably, they mostly used their knowledge and cultural topics in the prescribed textbooks when developing students' cultural knowledge.

Albeit a small sample size, the current study offers valuable insights into the betterment of the popularisation and the implementation of the ID in ELT in Vietnam. Firstly, this study suggests that there should be a formal inclusion of ICC and ID in the national language policies and curriculum frameworks in Vietnam. This could be done via explicit statements about how ICC should be taught or assessed at different education levels. In this study, Viet Bac and Thu Hang indicated that they did not see their role in developing their students' ICC because they were not required to do it. The document analysis also revealed that the role of culture and ICC was not mentioned explicitly in the national language policies and curriculum frameworks of the research sites. If ICC and the ID were included formally and explicitly in the national language policies and curriculum frameworks across universities, curriculum designers might understand that they should adopt more interculturally-informed curriculum platforms during the curriculum development process. As a result, language teachers might realise their responsibility for enhancing their students'

ICC in each of their lessons, thereby striving to achieve that goal in their teaching practices.

Secondly, the research findings indicate that an integrated system of ICC training programmes is paramount for teacher professional learning and development in Vietnam. In this study, both teachers relied on their cultural knowledge and understanding of ICC to implement the ID in their ELT. However, they had not received any systematic ICC education during their teaching career. Their limited knowledge of culture and the ID implementation led to limitations in their ICC practices. Therefore, more training should be provided for both pre-service and in-service language teachers to support their ongoing ICC development and ID implementation in their ELT.

Finally, both teachers showed their reliance on prescribed textbooks for the content and teaching methods they used in their lessons. Sercu (2006) also stated, "textbook authors have an important role to play in evolving teachers' implicit theories and in reshaping teaching practice" (p. 70). This study and Sercu (2006) recommend that textbook designers should have a clear notion of integrating ICC when compiling the textbooks. They should design intercultural tasks in each unit of the textbooks, which could help teachers operate language-and-culture teaching. In doing so, textbooks will no longer be a hindrance for implementing the ID to language teachers. We hope that with the findings of this study and its implications, the implementation of the ID in ELT to enhance students' ICC will become an achievable goal for VUETs and English teachers in similar contexts at large.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## ĐƯỜNG HƯỚNG LIÊN VĂN HÓA TRONG GIẢNG DẠY TIẾNG ANH: TIẾNG NÓI TỪ GIẢNG VIÊN TIẾNG ANH TẠI VIỆT NAM

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**Tóm tắt:** Trong những thập kỷ gần đây, ngày càng có nhiều sự quan tâm đến việc triển khai đường hướng liên văn hóa (ĐHLVH) trong giảng dạy ngôn ngữ để nâng cao năng lực giao tiếp liên văn hóa (NLGTLVH) của học sinh, khả năng tương tác qua các ranh giới về ngôn ngữ và văn hóa. Bài báo này cung cấp kết quả của một nghiên cứu về việc kiểm tra thực hành giảng dạy tiếng Anh (GDТА) của hai giảng viên tiếng Anh (GVТА) tại Việt Nam nhằm điều tra xem họ có triển khai ĐHLVH trong việc giảng dạy của họ hay không và họ thực hiện việc đó bằng cách nào. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện theo phương pháp nghiên cứu trường hợp định tính. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ các cuộc phỏng vấn, quan sát lớp học và văn bản. Kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy hai giảng viên này chưa thực sự triển khai ĐHLVH trong các bài giảng của họ. Nói một cách cụ thể, họ có thể truyền tải kiến thức liên văn hóa cho học sinh của mình; tuy nhiên, họ không thể phát triển thái độ, kỹ năng hoặc nhận thức liên văn hóa của học sinh. Khi cung cấp kiến thức văn hóa, họ chủ yếu dựa vào nội dung văn hóa trong sách giáo khoa và sự hiểu biết của họ. Bài báo làm sáng tỏ những yếu tố có ảnh hưởng đến việc thực hành GDТА của GVТА tại Việt Nam và đưa ra những đề xuất trong việc nâng cao NLGTLVH của học sinh Việt Nam.

**Từ khóa:** năng lực giao tiếp liên văn hóa, đường hướng giảng dạy liên văn hóa, giảng dạy tiếng Anh, thực hành của giáo viên, giáo dục đại học Việt Nam