



FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHERS' INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE INTO BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHING

Ho Thi Phung Duyen*, Ton Nu Nhu Huong

University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, 57 Nguyen Khoa Chiem St., Hue, Vietnam

Abstract. Globalization has triggered the need to teach intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in Business English education for effective communication and interaction across cultural diversity. This case study was carried out at a college specializing in International Trade in Vietnam with six Business English teachers as participants. The study aims to explore factors influencing the teachers' integrating ICC into their Business English teaching. The data were collected through 1/ in-depth interviews; 2/ analyses of two syllabi and two Business English textbooks in current use; 3/ classroom observations. Theme analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings reveal that the teachers hesitate to teach ICC due to multiple influential factors. The results of the study are a good source of data for more efficient policies to develop ICC teaching and learning in the era of global integration.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, Business English, influential factors

1. Introduction

In comparison with General English, Business English (BE) is more special in its own ways. In other words, BE is frequently embedded with more specific context and diversity [12]. Thus, Business English teaching (BET) needs to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) since this competence enables them to deal with cultural differences in global communication to add values to their own business and customers [8].

Globalization has resulted in the *National Foreign Language project 2020*, implying to develop Vietnamese graduates' ICC to use English confidently in the global environment [20]. In an interview carried out by Birello [2], Borg affirms the crucial role of influential factors in studies of teachers' cognition and practices. This study was implemented to explore what factors influence the teachers' integrating ICC into their BET.

* Corresponding: htpduyen@cofer.edu.vn

2. Literature review

Interrelationship between contextual factors and teachers' practices

Borg's model of teachers' cognition [3] states that teachers' knowledge of the subject matter and the contextual factors play an important role in the teachers' teaching practices. According to Borg, at the stage when teachers stand in their real classes, contextual factors such as parents, principals' requirements, the school, society, curriculum mandates, classroom and school layout, school policies, colleagues, standardized tests, and the availability of resources may limit their ability to implement what they want to teach. Öztürk and Gürbüz's data-driven model [17] also emphasizes the crucial position of the contextual factors influencing teachers' practices. The authors draw contextual factors, namely, institutional context, including organization atmosphere, curriculum policy and testing policy, learner profile consisting of proficiency, motivation and attention and improvisational teaching. These are considered as the factors influencing teachers' decision making of what to teach and how to teach [17].

Intercultural communicative competence

In this study, intercultural communicative competence is defined as "the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" [11, p. 9]. Byram's ICC model [4] with the five detailed dimensions facilitating the data collection and analysis is used as a working model for this study. The five dimensions are described as 1) *intercultural attitudes*, explained as curiosity, openness or readiness to view the home culture, and the target cultures without prejudices; 2) *intercultural knowledge*, consisting of visible culture or cultural products, invisible culture or practices, and processes of interaction of the home and the interlocutors' cultures; 3) *skills of interpreting and relating*, understood as the capacity to interpret cultural documents from another country and to explain and relativize it to one's own documents for mediation in different cultural contexts; 4) *skills of discovering and interacting*, regarding the ability to obtain new intercultural knowledge and to use the achieved knowledge, attitudes, and skills to interact under the challenges of real-life communication; 5) *critical cultural awareness*, explained as the ability to evaluate cultural differences critically from the mediating point of view. These five dimensions make up what to teach and how to teach for achieving ICC in foreign language teaching (FLT). The characteristics of ICC require dynamic teaching and learning, through which learners need to participate in the autonomous process for the acquisition of ICC. In this study, teaching ICC and teaching culture through language are used interchangeably.

Previous studies

Because teachers' perceptions, their practices, and influential factors are mutually related [3], several studies are globally carried out to reveal challenges preventing teachers' integrating ICC into their FLT classes [1, 9, 10, 14–16, 18, 21, 23]. Although these studies are carried out in different contexts with different research methods, their results share multiple barriers in common: lack of time, lack of intercultural objectives in the curricular, teachers' limited ICC awareness, ICC knowledge, ICC teaching pedagogy, students' low language proficiency, and inadequate cultural content in the teaching materials. Besides similar challenges, there are different obstacles emerging from previous research.

The studies from the Middle east countries, such as Iran [14] and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [1, 16], show the EFL teachers' reservation toward the interculturalization of English Language Teaching (ELT). Intercultural communicative competence teaching is not focused from the macro-level to the micro-level, and the teachers are unwilling to teach ICC due to their typical socio-cultural context [1]. In Asia, Tian [21] reveals that test-oriented teaching in Chinese universities make the teachers focus more on language teaching. In the same vein, Ho's study results [9] show that achieving native-speaker competence, not ICC, was considered as Vietnamese students' learning goal.

The facts that most of the reviewed studies focus on general English, and there have been few studies on this area in Vietnam urged us to explore influential factors of teaching ICC in the field of Business English, where the language is embedded closely within authentic contexts of cultural diversity and thus, reflects the need of ICC.

3. Research methodology

Research design

This study is based on a qualitative approach with a case study design. Following Yin's [22] recommendations, the study collected data with three instruments: the in-depth interview questions, classroom observations and the analyses of two syllabi and two Business English textbooks in current use, namely, English for Business Communication (2nd edition) by Sweeney [19] and Market leader (3rd edition, pre-intermediate) by Cotton et al. [6]. The aim of this rigorous data collection is to develop an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing the teachers' integrating ICC in their BET.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

Code	Age	Sex	Years of teaching BE	Intercultural experience	Highest degree
Teacher 1 (T1)	39	M	15	yes	MA
Teacher 2 (T2)	38	F	10	yes	MA
Teacher 3 (T3)	44	F	17	yes	MA
Teacher 4 (T4)	38	F	10	yes	MA
Teacher 5 (T5)	35	M	8	yes	MA
Teacher 6 (T6)	45	F	18	yes	MA

Participants

Purposeful sampling suggested by McMillan and Schumacher [13] was used to choose the participants knowledgeable and informative about the issue explored. The selection of the participants for this research was based on some specific pre-determined criteria, such as intercultural experience, at least 2 years of experience in teaching a Business English course at the research site, voluntarily participating in the interview, providing their teaching documents, and offering access to their class observations. The personal information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Research site

After mapping the field through the social map, spatial map, and temporal map, as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher [13], the researchers could gain a sense of the total context and decided to select the Department of English at a college in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam as the research site since its major is business education, suitable to the aim of the study.

Data gathering instruments

In the current study, the open-ended interview questions were written with the focus on the factors influencing the teachers' integrating culture into BET. The classroom observations aim at exploring the physical setting of the real teaching context. The course syllabi and textbooks were examined for 1/ the teaching objectives; 2/ the cultural contents' potential for the teachers to develop the students' ICC; 3/ the teaching foci; 4/ the diversity of cultures. The

document examination was guided by the five content analysis reflection questions adapted from those designed by Kawamura and Kaczmarek [10] as follows:

- What are the objectives of the syllabi, lesson plans, and the textbooks in current use?
- Do the syllabi, lesson plans, and the textbooks provide cultural topics potential for the teachers to develop their students' ICC?
- What are the syllabus and lesson plan teaching foci?
- What kinds of cultural topics are presented in the teaching textbooks?
- Besides cultures of English-speaking countries (e.g., England, the USA, and Australia), does the textbook touch upon cultures of non-English speaking countries (e.g., Korea, Japan, Vietnam, China, and European countries)?

Data analysis

The data from each source were analyzed qualitatively for themes. Then, the themes that arose from each data source were examined by using the relational analysis to determine whether there are any relationships among them.

4. Findings and discussions

The multiple constraints influencing the teachers' integrating ICC into their BET are revealed through the data analyses. The themes emerging from the data are 1/ students' low English language proficiency; 2/ lack of time; 3/ absence of ICC objectives in the teaching syllabi and assessment; 4/ lack of facilities; 5/ lack of after-class activities and foreignness in the studying environment; 6/ teachers' inadequate cultural knowledge and ICC teaching pedagogy. These factors are grouped, analyzed, and discussed in three aspects, namely, learner profile, institutional context, and teachers' knowledge as stated in the data-driven model by Öztürk and Gürbüz [17].

Learner profile

Students' low English language proficiency

This factor is mentioned as the first and foremost to account for the teachers' hesitation to implement ICC teaching in the participants' classrooms. Through the in-depth interviews, the participants complained the students' low English language proficiency making them spend more time teaching grammar, vocabulary, even translating the texts from English to Vietnamese to ensure the students' understanding. For example, T3 revealed that the vocabulary, listening

and grammar sections occupied most of the teaching time. "Understanding culture is beyond the teacher's expectation" (Interview 3). T4 complained that he had to review the previous lessons and taught the four skills and grammar; "I have to review many things, so I have no time for the students to practice cultural situations" (Interview 4). Öztürk and Gürbüz's [17] model also places the role of learners in the center, affirming its importance in influencing directly the teachers' instructional decisions. Just like the present study, the studies of Sercu et al. [18], Ho [9], and Tian [21] reveal that the students' low English language proficiency is one of the barriers preventing the teachers from teaching culture in their EFL classrooms.

Institutional context

The institutional context in this research includes the syllabus and testing policies, the college atmosphere, teaching time, facilities, and experiential learning. The followings are the results of the data analyses.

Lack of time

Limited time for teaching culture is the second frequently mentioned obstacle. The linguistically oriented syllabi and assessment force the participants to devote most of their time teaching language skills to meet the test requirements. For instance, "I don't have enough time to integrate ICC into my BET" (T6, interview 6).

Absence of ICC objectives in the teaching syllabi and assessment

In the college, the teachers are required to send the students the course syllabus by the first day of the course and follow strictly the content written in the syllabus. The analysis of the syllabi and textbooks shows that the ICC teaching objective is not stated or stated briefly in the syllabi; the syllabus content and assessment are linguistically oriented although the two BE textbooks in current use are interculturalized with diverse cultures.

The in-depth interviews show the same findings as those from the document analysis. The teachers have to follow the syllabi under the pressure of enabling their students to do the tests. They avoid the students' questions about why there is a mismatch between the teaching content and the test content. Regarding the interculturality of the textbooks in current use, the participants evaluate that the cultural context in the teaching textbooks is culturally diverse, and so is the source of English textbooks at the English Department.

It can be concluded that the college's syllabus and testing policies are unfavorable for teaching ICC. In line with previous studies [1, 9, 16, 18, 21, 23], the ICC teaching objective is almost absent in the BE syllabi, and the assessment is linguistically oriented. Unlike the results

of the studies of Ho [9], Banafsheh [14], Hasnan [1], and Osman [16], which emphasize the lack of cultural content in the teaching materials or the dominance of British and American cultures, the BE textbooks in this research contain business contexts from various cultures potential for ICC teaching. Nevertheless, the fact that the college makes the teachers follow the syllabus sequence strictly and take the content of the exams into account negatively affects their ICC teaching.

Lack of facilities

The participants all complain about the low quality of the internet system, making it hard for them to download the necessary materials for teaching culture directly in the class. Further, the traditional table and bench arrangement with 40 to 45 students in one class prevent them from organizing teaching activities.

Lack of after-class activities and foreignness in the studying environment

T1 mentioned the importance of after-class activities and extra teaching materials. He was aware of the pragmatic aspect of BE language teaching and learning and realized the crucial role of ICC in communication. In his view, one of the disadvantages for the students is to study in the environment lacking foreignness. He suggested several activities that can develop the students' ICC, such as "cultural cuisine events" and "cultural fashion shows". Similarly, T2 showed her hesitation to teach ICC because of the lack of experiential learning. She mentioned, "hypothetical situations, not the real ones, are unable to convey what the teacher wants to teach them" (T2, interview 2). Sercu et al. [18] state that experiential learning enables students to experience real intercultural situations to encounter real challenges through real interactions with people from other cultures. However, both of the findings from their international study and the current research show no opportunities for the students to experience real-life intercultural communication.

Teachers' inadequate cultural knowledge and ICC teaching method

As for the participants, they all studied British and American cultures as a separate course in the Bachelor program at the university. In their view, the ICC teaching method is very important since "it will come to the deadlock if the teachers cannot convey cultural knowledge to the students in an appropriate way" (T5, interview 5). According to them, ICC teaching is integrating the knowledge of the target cultures into BE teaching; nevertheless, they did not know how to do it systematically. They admitted the lack of their own cultural knowledge and continued learning this field by themselves. For instance, "I'm not confident about my ICC. I have to study more from my husband and other people" (T2, interview 2). Like the teachers in

the study of Sercu et al. [18], the participant teachers drew their own image as the cultural knowledge providers to make the students understand the otherness and have positive attitudes in intercultural communication. Borg affirms the crucial influence of teachers' knowledge of the subject matter on their teaching practices [2]. The lack of ICC knowledge and pedagogy, also resembling the reviewed studies [1, 9, 10, 18, 21, 23], sufficiently limits their integrating culture into their BET.

The classroom observations support data analyses from in-depth interviews and documents regarding influential factors. All of the classes where the researcher observes share the same physical setting: There are 40–45 students in a classroom with 20 tables and benches arranged in two blocks. Each classroom is equipped with an OHP, a screen for the teacher to show documents from his/her self-equipped laptop, a chalkboard, and a desk for the teacher. The laptop is often used for playing the audio records in listening activities and showing the slides of the lessons. The internet system is so weak that no one could access any websites. The listening activities occupy most of the class time since the teacher participants have to play the records multiple times. There are no international teachers or students in every observed class. The reviewed studies in the Iranian, Saudi, and Palestine contexts [1, 14, 16] show similar difficulties in the physical setting of the classroom with the lack of facilities and a large number of students in one class.

5. Conclusions

The research was carried out qualitatively as a case study design with six key business English teachers from one of the typical business colleges in Vietnam. Despite the small number of participants, the study contributes to confirming the results from previous studies in English language teaching and shed more light on the barriers influencing teachers' teaching intercultural communicative competence in business English education at the tertiary level in Vietnam. Certainly, interculturalization in business English can be done when there are close connection and consistency in policies from the macro-level to the micro-level so that all relating parties, such as teacher educators, policymakers, instructional materials developers, teachers, and their students, are all aware of intercultural communicative competence as one of the must-be-achieved targets of business English education. Specifically, teachers need to be trained and guided on intercultural communicative competence pedagogy and assessment to teach intercultural communicative competence to their business English students. Facilities necessary for intercultural communicative competence teaching and learning should be provided, and intercultural communicative competence teaching objectives must be included in

the business English teaching curricula with detailed instructions to facilitate the teachers' implementation.

REFERENCES

1. Al Hasnan (2015, January 1). *Teachers' perceptions of the importance of intercultural communicative competence in Saudi EFL education*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Retrieved July 15, 2018, from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1666397044/>
2. Birello, M. (2012). Teacher cognition and Language Teacher Education: Beliefs and Practice. A Conversation with Simon Borg. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 5(2), 88–94.
3. Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *The Language teaching journal*, 36, 81–109.
4. Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural competence*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
5. College of Foreign Economic Relations– COFER (2014). *Business English Curriculum*.
6. Cotton, D., Falvey, D. & Kent, S. *Market leader* (3rd ed.). London: Pearson
7. Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
8. Frendo, E. (2005). *How to teach Business English*. New York: Longman.
9. Ho, S. T. K. (2011). *An investigation of intercultural teaching and learning in tertiary EFL classrooms in Vietnam*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. New Zealand: Victoria university of Wellington.
10. Kawamura, M., Kaczmarek, E. (2011, January 1). *A Study of Native English Teachers' Perception of English Teaching: Exploring Intercultural Awareness vs. Practice in Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Retrieved July 15, 2018, from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/912201234/>
11. Lázár, I., Krieglér, H. M., Lussier, D., Matei, S. G. & Peck, C. (Eds). (2007). *Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence – A guide for language teachers and teacher educators*. Austria: Council of Europe.
12. Louhiala-Salminen, L., Kankaanranta, A. (2013). "What language does global business speak?" – The concept and development of BELF. *Ibérica*, 26, 17–34.
13. McMillan, H. J., Schumacher, S. (1993). *Research in education– A conceptual introduction*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.

14. Mosa Reza Banafsheh (2013). In Pursuit of Intercultural Communicative Competence in EFL Context: Exploring Iranian English Teachers' Perceptions. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6(13), 65–83. Retrieved July 15, 2018, from <https://doaj.org/article/e534723183ea4465b6f1f3167172d46a>.
15. Nguyen, T. L. (2013). *Integrating culture into Vietnam University EFL teaching: A critical ethnographic study*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. New Zealand: Auckland University of Technology.
16. Osman, H. (2015, January 1). *Investigating English teachers' perceptions of intercultural communicative competence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Retrieved July 15, 2018, from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1766582096/>
17. Öztürk, G., Gürbüz, N. (2017). Re-defining language teacher cognition through a data-driven model: The case of three EFL teachers. *Cogent Education*, 4(1). Retrieved September 7, 2018, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1290333>.
18. Sercu, L., Bandura, E., Castro, P., Davcheva, L., Laskaridou, C. Lundgren, U., Garcia, M. & Ryan, P. (eds.) (2005). *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence: An international investigation*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
19. Sweeney, S. (2011). *English for Business Communication– Student's book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
20. Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2008). "National Foreign Language 2020 Project". Retrieved from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/237474972/National-Foreign-Language-2020-Project-EnglishTranslation>. Retrieved July 9, 2018, from http://vanban.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/chinhphu/hethongvanban?_page=5&class_id=1&document_id=78437&mode=detail&org_group_id=0&org_id=0&type_group_id=0&type_id=0
21. Tian, J. (2013). *Beliefs and Practices Regarding Intercultural Competence among Chinese Teachers of English at a Chinese University*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Retrieved July 15, 2018, from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1430500617/>
22. Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
23. Zhou, Y. (2011, January 1). *A study of Chinese university EFL teachers and their intercultural competence teaching*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Retrieved July 15, 2018, from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/916901494/>