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A Case Study of Thai Secondary School Teachers' English Intercultural Teaching and Perception*

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Abstract

This study investigated the integration of English intercultural teaching of Thai secondary school teachers using questionnaires and classroom observations. The results from the questionnaires revealed that participants perceived that they integrated English intercultural teaching at a low level. In the actual classroom, they placed a paramount focus on teaching English intercultural 'knowledge', whereas assessing students' intercultural 'attitudes' and 'behavior' gained the least attention. Finally, it should be noted that the aspects of cultural bias during the teaching practice of participants require further attention.

Keywords: English intercultural teaching, intercultural competence, foreign language education

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Introduction

Intercultural competence (IC), or the ability to communicate in international settings effectively and appropriately through awareness of differences in one's own and others' culture, is crucial for global context. Building Intercultural Competence (2010), Deardoff (2006), INCOM VET (2014), and Root and Ngampornchai (2012) accumulated IC components and summarized that IC is constructed mainly from three constitutional components—knowledge (cognitive), attitudes (affective), and skills (behavioral/actional). According to Fantini (2009), the end result of IC requires effective and appropriate performance when interacting with others who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is also stated that IC is unlikely to take place naturally. Yet, it has to be instructed directly and continually to learners, both for educational, and organizational purposes.

The educational system of Thailand also places the emphasis on IC. In the Language and Culture strand enacted by Ministry of Education (MOE), it aims to enable Thai learners to use English languages to harmonize with the English native speakers' culture, create relationships, appreciate similarities and differences between the two languages and cultures, and make use of languages and cultures appropriately (MOE, 2008).

Nonetheless, the integration of IC to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in the Thai context is in dispute. On the one hand, IC is proposed as the important key in language learning; on the other hand, it is obvious that Thai EFL teachers mainly focus on teaching grammar (Noom-ura, 2013; Saengboon, 2017; Wenjing, 2014) and communication skills (Bruner, 2015; Methitham, 2009; Saengboon, 2017). Although it may be true that the students can develop their cultural knowledge by themselves when they go through a tremendous amount of media such as movies or the Internet (Ito et al., 2009; Kukulska-Hulme, 2010), it is uncertain that they will acquire all of the three constitutional components of IC. Moreover, the students may have bias towards particular norms or cultures depending on their past cultural experiences.

As such, components of IC need to be instructed directly in classes, starting from Grade 7 and Grade 8 levels as MOE indicates that these two levels are the beginning levels to learn to understand one's own and other cultures in order to use appropriate language, gestures, and manners in intercultural communication (MOE, 2008). In this way, the students can gradually apply the three constitutional components of IC to continually enhance appropriate behaviors, and effective communication in intercultural interactions based on each individual capability.

Although studies regarding IC have been widely conducted, it is surprising that so little empirical research aims to investigate how Thai EFL secondary school teachers establish their concerns over IC. Therefore, it is of great significance to conduct a research to know the perceptions and practices of teachers' awareness of their tendencies and limitations in developing students' IC. Most importantly, parts of this study's findings will be used as a baseline framework to further develop a model for English intercultural teaching—the next stage of the main study.

For the reasons above, the objectives of this study, therefore, are to investigate Thai EFL Grade 7 and Grade 8 teachers' perceptions on the practice of their English intercultural teaching, and sort out components regarding English intercultural teaching in their actual practice. The research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: To what extent do Grade 7 and Grade 8 Thai EFL teachers perceive the integration of English intercultural teaching in their classroom?

Research Question 2: What English intercultural teaching components do Grade 7 and Grade 8 Thai EFL teachers employ to teach in the actual classroom?

Literature Review

Guided by the above research questions, the literature relevant to this study includes IC to language teaching, intercultural perspectives to Thailand EFL teaching at the basic education level, and the possibility of implementing the IC theory to EFL teaching practice in Thailand's basic education context. In addition, the conceptual framework is illustrated.

IC to language teaching

Deardroff (2006), one of the famous intercultural scholars, summarized the general consensus on a definition of IC among top intercultural scholars of nationally and internationally known and academic administrators as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p.247).

In language teaching education, IC concepts have been introduced to teaching practitioners for more than two decades (Byram, Holmes & Savvides, 2013). Deardorff (2006; 2009) indicated that achieving effective intercultural interactions are the keys to success in international and foreign language (FL) education while having language skills alone is not sufficient for IC. In this regard, Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) asserted that it is necessary to facilitate students IC concurrently with linguistic and communicative competence to diminish misunderstandings where the language is used by the speakers of that language, as having linguistic, communicative, and intercultural competences are the pivotal achievements of language learning.

To make the IC concept comprehensible in FL education, in 2006, Deardorff conducted a widespread study by working with a large number of leading intercultural scholars across countries in reaching consensus on the components comprising IC. The findings yielded that there were about 22 common intercultural components that are notable among the scholars (INCOM VET, 2014). She then revised and introduced the Pyramid Model of IC, and the Process Model of IC in 2006; 2009 to include accepted IC components in the models. Both models are rooted in applying 1) attitudes – (respect, openness, curiosity) 2) knowledge – (cultural self-awareness, specific cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness) 3) skills – (listening, observing, and evaluating; analyzing, interpreting, relating) 4) desired internal outcomes – (adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative view, empathy), and 5) desired external outcomes– (effective communication, and appropriate behavior in an intercultural situation).

Though the two models comprise the same elements, the Process Model of IC is more oriented to the process. As it highlights a lifelong cycle process of IC which begins from the attitudes and continues to the external outcomes, which follow a path from the personal to the interpersonal level time and again where at no one point could an individual completely attain intercultural competency (Deardorff, 2006; 2009; Nagy, 2009).

Despite a large number of IC models, Deardorff's models are still distinguished and acceptable to use for IC curriculum development in FL educational institutions. For instance, in 2014 VET institutions have applied Deardorff's (2006; 2009) these two models to guide their curriculum and assessment of the development of IC (INCOM VET, 2014). The models had proved their utilities in terms of practicality, pliability, adaptability, and yielding the perspectives of today's leading intercultural scholar (INCOM VET, 2014). Another is, Bertelsmann Foundation, which employed the Process Model of IC to use in its institution in 2008, found that the Model could differentiate skills and attitudes which empower both students and teachers to perceive and perform in intercultural situations effectively, flexibly, and appropriately (INCOM VET, 2014). The aforementioned background and review make it possible to view Deardorff's Process Model of IC as a combination between language teaching and IC disciplines.

Intercultural perspectives to Thailand EFL teaching at the basic education level

The significance of intercultural perspectives to EFL teaching in the most current Thailand Basic Education Core Curriculum of the year 2008 are represented through its aims. The Curriculum aims to enable learners to better understand themselves and others in terms of languages and cultures, and become aware of diversities in worldviews, customs, traditions, society, economy, politics, and administration to create friendship and cooperation with various countries through four learning areas 1) Communication 2) Culture 3) Relationship with Other Learning Areas 4) Relationship with Community, and the World (MOE, 2008).

Intercultural perspectives are further listed explicitly starting from Grade 7 and Grade 8 Level Indicators for the cultural learning area. It indicates that English language learners need to 1) be aware of the knowledge of Thai and native cultures 2) express attitudes of interests and feelings on various matters including cultural relativities 3) gain the skills of cultural comparing, analysing, communicating, and acting/behaving (For more details see MOE, 2008, p. 270-273).

Based on the document, intercultural perspectives are rather essential for English language teaching for compulsory education in Thailand. More importantly, the document makes a clear requirement to contribute cultural self-awareness values to Thai learners to encourage them to be proud of Thai identity as well as raise an awareness of cultural diversities to minimize conflicts and create relationship among the world citizens.

The possibility of implementing the IC theory to EFL teaching practice in Thailand's basic education context

Although several studies propose an intercultural approach to FL teaching, the practical application of intercultural teaching is somewhat rare in FL classrooms worldwide (Alyan, 2011; Byram et al., 2013; Garrido & Álvarez, 2006; Sercu, 2006). A review of literature disclosed that the lack of a firm grasp on how intercultural approach works in language classrooms hinders FL teachers' efforts to encourage learners with intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Atay, Kurt, Çamlibel, Ersin & Kaslioglu, 2009; Gu, 2016; Sercu, 2006; Tran & Dang, 2014; Cheng, 2007; Tian, 2013).

Another point is deemed to be an incompatible, and inapplicable context of FL teaching, and social circumstance in each region of the world that limit an implementation of intercultural approaches or concepts that mostly originated from the West into every localized FL teaching context. For instance, one of the most original, and the most recognizable IC model which has long been extensively cited in several FL research studies is the Developmental of Intercultural Sensitivity Model of Bennett (1986) — a leading American intercultural scholar. Though Bennett's model depicts the process from the stages of being ethnocentric to ethnorelative, and has been promoted for use in many cross-cultural awareness training courses such as Communicaid's Developing Global Competence (see Communicaid, 2018), Spencer-Oatey & Franklin (2009); Hu & Byram (2009) argued that Bennett's model was not designed for FL classes as it has had a major influence on study abroad courses and theories of culture shock.

However, the review literature in this current study discovered that though Deardorff's Process Model of IC was developed in a Western country, its process and components tend to be applicable to the EFL teaching in secondary education contexts in Thailand. When comparing the core and sub-components of the Process Model of IC to the English language Level Indicator for Grade 7 and Grade 8: Thailand Basic Education Core Curriculum A.D. 2008, it reveals the similarity and compatibility on the whole.

To elaborate, both Deardorff's Process Model of IC, and the English language Level Indicator for Grade 7 and Grade 8 not only aim to enhance learners' cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills but they also require somewhat similar sub-components (e.g., cultural self-knowledge, culture-specific,

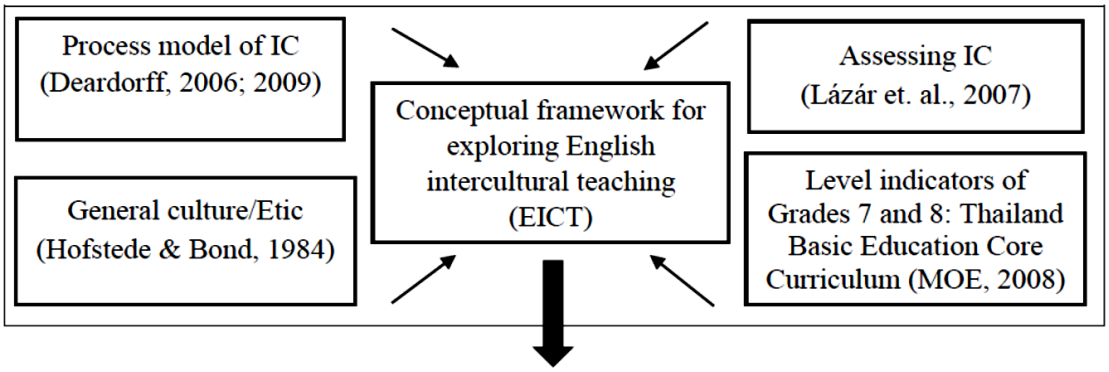
attitudes of interests/openness, feelings toward cultural relativities, cultural comparing, analysing, communicating, and acting/behaving) that can be used to develop learners' IC (For further details of each component see Process model of IC,

2006; 2009, and MOE, 2008, p. 270-273).

As such, it is likely that Deardorff's Process Model of IC can be incorporated into FL Grade Level Indicators: Thailand Basic Education Core Curriculum A.D 2008 to set a primary guideline for English intercultural teaching.

Conceptual framework

To develop the conceptual framework for exploring perception and practice on English intercultural teaching of Grade7 and Grade 8 Thai EFL teachers, theories, concepts, policies, and related documents regarding IC in language classroom were synthesized as follows:



EICT core components	EICT sub-components	Definitions
Knowledge	Sociolinguistic knowledge	Provide knowledge of English language usage for social interactions
	Cultural self- knowledge	Provide knowledge of Thai culture; e.g., history, lifestyle, food, festival, beliefs, values, identity, and worldviews
	Culture-specific knowledge	Provide knowledge of one specific country's lifestyle, beliefs or values
	Culture-general knowledge	Provide knowledge of practice, manners, behaviors, values, beliefs or phenomena that similar to all culture
Attitudes	Openness	Encourage open-mindedness and willingness to move beyond one's comfort zone when learning or encountering differences of other cultures
	Respect	Encourage value and respect for Thai and other cultures
	Withholding-judgment	Encourage attitude suppressing judgment and bias toward Thai and other cultures by not taking sides, and restraining judgment

Continued

EICT core components	EICT sub-components	Definitions
Skills	Comparing & Analyzing	Practice comparing and analyzing similarities and differences between Thai's and other cultures' lifestyles, behaviors, values, or beliefs
	Communicating	Practice communicating in English with proper vocabulary, grammar, convention, or tone in different social occasions through speaking
	Behaviors	Practice performing proper manners while interacting with English users of other cultures in social situations
Assessments	Internal learning outcome assessments:	**Knowledge assessment:** Assess students' cognition of 'sociolinguistic knowledge', 'cultural self-knowledge', 'cultural-specific knowledge', and 'cultural-general knowledge'
		Attitudes assessment: Assess students' 'openness', 'respect', and 'withholding-judgment' attitudes
		Skill assessment: Assess students' skill in 'comparing and analyzing' similarities and differences regarding history, lifestyle, food, festival, beliefs, values or worldviews among cultures together with assessing their reasoning toward these features
	External learning outcome assessments:	**Communicating assessment:** Assess students' effectiveness of English verbal communication in intercultural situations
		Behavior assessment: Assess students' ability to demonstrate appropriate behavior in intercultural situations

Note: The synthesis framework for exploring English intercultural teaching comprises four core components – 1) Knowledge 2) Attitudes 3) Skills, and 4) Assessments.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for exploring English intercultural teaching

Methodology

Research design

The research study employed a mixed methods approach in which the quantitative data and qualitative data were collected and analyzed. With the integration of the two research methods, the data collected in this study was validated through triangulation and, as a consequence, the accuracy of the findings were ascertained.

Participants

This study involved 50 Grade 7 and Grade 8 Thai EFL teachers from 12 schools under the jurisdiction of Secondary Education Service Areas. These schools were located in six Central and Northern provinces of Thailand including Bangkok, Uthai Thani, Kanchanaburi, Khampangphet, Phrae, and Chiang Mai provinces. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants.

Research instruments

This study employed two research instruments— the self-perception questionnaire, and the classroom observation checklist and field note form. Both instruments were developed by the researchers based on the synthesized conceptual framework for exploring English intercultural teaching (see Figure 1). They were used to retrieve information on an integration of English intercultural teaching in the Thai secondary educational context. The content of items in the research instruments were developed corresponding to the four central points of this study—knowledge, attitudes, skills, and assessment of teachers' English intercultural teaching.

Self-perception questionnaire (SPQ) on an integration of English intercultural teaching

The SPQ consisted of 20 items, aiming to examine the level of respondents' self-perception on an integration of English intercultural teaching practice, and sort out English intercultural teaching components that they perceived they employed to teach in the classroom. Therefore, 20 items reflected all sub-components of English intercultural teaching listed in the conceptual framework (see Figure 1). The 4-point rating scale, ranging from 1 (never practiced) to 4 (practiced in every unit), was adopted to assess all items in this part.

The internal consistency reliability for the SPQ was computed, which achieved a Good level—the Cronbach alpha coefficient value was .88 (n = 50). As Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) recommended that an alpha level of .70 is considered a fairly small reliability to construct validation in research whereas .80 or greater is a good level.

Classroom observation checklist and field note (COCF) form

The COCF form was used to record the teachers' English intercultural teaching practice in their classroom. This form collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The checklist consisted of 20 items with the express aim of aiding the researcher and a peer observer to collect quantitative data and then triangulate the data from respondents who achieved a predetermined minimum score from the SPQ— that is from those with a mean score of 2.51. The COCF form utilized a checklist to tabulate the occurrences or absence of all English intercultural teaching sub-components listed in the conceptual framework (see Figure 1) as noted when observing the teacher participants. The field note noted down qualitative data from teachers' instructions involving English intercultural teaching. The checklist statements complemented the questions posed on the SPQ.

To ensure that all questions in the SPQ and statements in the COCF form were valid, five professors holding doctoral degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Language and Communication, and Applied Linguistics who are also experts in intercultural studies were requested to perform an item-objective congruency (IOC) test of each question, and statement item for both research instruments. In respect of IOC scores, Rovinellin and Hambelton (1997) as cited in Turner and Carlson (2003) recommended that each item's accepted score was established at 0.5 or greater. The IOC test on each item of the SPQ and the COCF form was rated from 0.6 to 1, indicating that all items were valid.

Procedure

This study was initiated in June 2017. The respondents were contacted and requested for consent for data collection. After receiving the consent forms from the respondents, the SPQ on an integration of English intercultural teaching was distributed to them. When the questionnaires were returned and collected, they were calculated for the mean score. The respondents whose mean scores of 2.51 or greater—showing the moderate up to the high degree of IC integration in English teaching—were directly contacted by the researchers to receive permission for classroom observation. Out of 20 participants whose mean scores met the requirement, only two of them agreed to classroom observation.

The classroom observation started from August to September 2017. Each participant's teaching practice was observed three times. For validity reasons, the teaching was investigated by one researcher and a peer observer using the COCF form. Additionally, each observation session was video recorded so as to capture the participants' teaching practice. As such, the researchers could replay the recordings for in-depth analysis.

Results

Research question 1:

To what extent do Grade 7 and Grade 8 Thai EFL teachers perceive the integration of English intercultural teaching in their classroom?

By using descriptive analysis (mean and standard deviation), the results from the self-perception on an integration of English intercultural teaching were classified into four categories, high integration (M = 3.26-4.00), moderate integration (M = 2.51-3.25), low integration (M = 1.76-2.50), and lowest integration (M = 1.00-1.75).

The results showed that three out of 50 respondents (6%) achieved the high integration, 17 respondents (34%) reached the moderate integration, 27 respondents (54%) obtained low integration, and three respondents (6%) gained the low integration of English intercultural teaching. The overall results reported that the respondents perceived that they applied low integration of English intercultural teaching practice in their classroom (M = 2.43, SD. = 0.39).

Respondents perceived that they employed to teach IC Knowledge to the greatest extent (M=2.96), followed by IC Skills, IC Attitudes, and IC Assessments, —M = 2.57, 2.41, and 2.18 respectively. The following paragraphs elaborate their perceptions from the greatest to the lowest practice of English intercultural teaching in their classroom.

IC Knowledge:

IC Knowledge teaching comprises four sub-components 1) sociolinguistic knowledge, 2) cultural self-knowledge, 3) culture-specific knowledge and 4) culture-general knowledge. The results

showed that respondents perceived that they employed to teach 'sociolinguistic knowledge' to the greatest extent (M= 3.34) and 'culture-general knowledge' to the lowest extent (M=2.76), (For further details on IC sub-components' definitions, see Figure 1).

IC Skills:

IC Skills teaching entails three sub-components 1) comparing and analyzing, 2) communicating, and 3) behavior. Respondents perceived that they encouraged the students to practice 'comparing and analyzing' cultural differences to the greatest extent (M=2.92) and performing appropriate 'behavior' to the lowest extent (M=2.26).

IC Attitudes:

IC Attitudes teaching contains three sub-components 1) openness, 2) respect, and 3) withholding-judgment. Respondents reported that they encouraged the students to have an 'openness' in learning other cultures to the greatest extent (M = 2.70) and 'respect' to their own and other cultures to the lowest extent (M= 2.22).

IC Assessments:

IC Assessments include internal learning outcome and external learning outcome assessments. The internal learning outcome assessments assess students' cognition and affection that involve all sub-components of IC Knowledge, all sub-components of IC Attitudes, and the 'comparing and analyzing' sub-component of IC Skill. Whereas, external learning outcome assessments assessed students' 'communicating', and 'behavior' skills.

Respondents revealed that they applied internal learning outcome assessments more often than the external one. They perceived that 'sociolinguistic knowledge assessment' was employed to assess the students' internal learning outcome to the greatest extent (M= 3.06) and the 'withholding-judgment assessment' to the lowest extent (M=1.80). In the meantime, 'communicating assessment' was employed to assess the students more often than 'behavior assessment' as the external learning outcome assessments (M=2.28 and M=1.44).

In sum, respondents perceived that they applied a low integration of English intercultural teaching practice in their classroom by mainly providing IC Knowledge but rarely assessing the students' IC Attitudes and 'behaviors'.

Research question 2:

What English intercultural teaching components do Grade 7 and Grade 8 Thai EFL teachers employ to teach in the actual classroom?

The Classroom Observation Checklist and Field note (COCF) form was employed to collect data from two volunteer participants who achieved the moderate score from the SPQ. They were Thai EFL teachers who came from different secondary schools in Lampang—the Northern Province of Thailand. In order to cover their identities, these two teachers will be addressed as Teacher A and Teacher B.

Teacher A and Teacher B were 54 and 50 years old with 20s years of English teaching experience. One of them taught Grade 7 while the other taught Grade 8 students. Both teachers held English teaching degrees—one held a Master's degree and another held a Bachelor's degree. They both used EFL textbooks written by Evans and Dooley (2013)—Access 1 for Grade 7, and Access 2 for Grade 8 students. Teacher A used purely Thai as a medium of his instruction, whereas Teacher B

used 60% English. It was marked that both of them have never had any overseas training or living experiences.

The English intercultural teaching components in participants' classroom

The findings from the six classroom observations of Teacher A and Teacher B calculated from the three classroom observations of each participant are as follows.

Table 1. The overall components of English intercultural teaching (EICT) occurring from the classroom observations of two teacher participants

EICT core components	EICT sub- components	Teacher A (%)	Teacher B (%)	Overall (%)
Knowledge:	1) Sociolinguistic knowledge	100	100	100
	2) Cultural self-knowledge	100	100	100
	3) Culture-specific knowledge	100	100	100
	4) Culture-general knowledge	66.67	100	83.34
	Overall	91.67	100	**95.83**
Attitudes:	5) Openness	66.67	100	83.34
	6) Respect	66.67	33.33	50
	7) Withholding-judgment	66.67	33.33	50
	Overall	66.67	55.56	**61.11**
Skills:	8) Comparing & Analyzing	66.67	100	83.34
	9) Communicating	100	100	100
	10) Behavior	66.67	66.67	66.67
	Overall	77.78	88.89	**83.34**
Assessments:				
- Internal learning outcome assessments				
	11) Sociolinguistics assessment	100	100	100
	12) Cultural self-knowledge assessment	33.33	100	66.67
	13) Culture-specific assessment	33.33	100	66.67
	14) Culture-general assessment	0.00	33.33	16.67
	15) Openness assessment	0.00	33.33	16.67
	16) Respect assessment	0.00	0.00	0.00
	17) Withholding-judgment assessment	0.00	0.00	0.00
	18) Comparing & Analyzing assessment	33.33	0.00	16.67
	Overall	25	45.83	**35.42**
- External learning outcome assessments				
	19) Communicating assessment	0.00	100	50
	20) Behavior assessment	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Overall	0.00	50	**25**
Overall internal & external learning outcome assessments		20	46.67	**33.33**

Notes: The percentages were calculated from three classroom observations—100% = happened in all three observations, 66.67% = happened in two observations, 33.33% = happened in one observation of each participant.

Quantitative results from the classroom observation checklist section on components of English intercultural teaching occurring in participants' classroom were portrayed using descriptive statistics (percentage and mean). While a constant comparative analysis—data were analyzed into

smaller topics or issues and sorted into categories, (see Merriam, 2009) was utilized in categorizing, and interpreting qualitative results from the classroom observation field note section.

To report each category's results, the quantitative results are first reported followed by the qualitative results for elaboration.

IC Knowledge:

For the teaching category, Knowledge teaching appeared in the greatest extent in participants' classrooms at 95.83%. Three out of four knowledge sub-components including 1) sociolinguistic knowledge, 2) cultural self-knowledge, and 3) culture-specific knowledge were noticed in all six classroom observations at 100% except the 4) culture-general knowledge that appeared in participants' classrooms at 83.34%. These following excerpts illustrate participants' teaching instructions while supplementing the students with some IC Knowledge's sub-components in their teaching:

Sociolinguistic knowledge:

Teacher A: (Observation 3, Grade 8; Unit 4: Superstitions in the UK, Thai instruction)

T: Suppose that you have a mission to do, so you can't go to the party. Can you give me two sentences to refuse the party invitation?

S1: "I'm sorry. I can't. I do homework."

T: Good! It's good to begin the refusal with 'I'm sorry, I can't or I'm afraid' because it is a convention. Then, you should add modal verb like "have to" to make your reason sounds obligated. So, instead of saying "I do homework." you say, "I have to do my homework."

Culture-general knowledge:

Teacher A: (Observation 1, Grade 8; Starter Unit: Has/Have got, Thai instruction)

T: Nowadays, the value of people all around the world is to have white and shiny teeth, and fresh breath. We all accept that this type of person has good health, is attractive and full of charm. Though you are not handsome but clean, you can be a popular person better than a handsome yellow-toothed guy with "a dragon breath", you know?

IC Skills:

Skills teaching appeared in participants' classroom for 83.34%. Participants offered cultural 'communicating' skill practice to their students in all six classroom observations at 100%. Whereas, offering 'behavior' skills practice achieved the lowest degree at 66.67%. The following excerpt illustrates participants' teaching instruction in encouraging the students to practice 'behavior' skill:

Behavior skills:

Teacher B: (Observation 1, Grade 7; Unit 2: My things, Thai instruction)

T: No matter how much you don't like the present you get, try to restrain that feeling, and behave yourself in a polite manner by smiling and saying "Thank you. I like it." to the giver. Keep it in mind that they give you a present because they see you as an important person for them.

T: Can anyone come up to act in an appropriate manner when you get a present from a friend but you don't like that present, please?

IC Attitudes:

The last core component under the teaching category was the Attitudes teaching which appeared in the classroom observations at 61.11%. Participants encouraged cultural 'openness' attitude to the students in their teaching practice to the greatest extent at 83.34%, and cultural 'respect' and 'withholding-judgment' to the lowest extent at 50%. The excerpt below involves teacher's encouragement on cultural 'openness' attitude:

Openness attitude:

Teacher A: (Observation 2, Grade 8; Unit 3: Characters larger than life, Thai instruction)

T: Whenever you go aboard, try to be curious and observe what people in that country do. Being open to learn the ways of others can save you from facing conflicts among you and the people of the host country.

IC Assessments:

Internal and external learning outcome assessments were employed to assess participants' students in the lowest degree at 33.33% among the four core components. Participants assessed the students' internal learning outcomes at 35.42% more often than the external one at 25%.

Among the eight sub-components, 'Sociolinguistic knowledge' was employed to assess students' internal learning outcomes to the greatest extent at 100% while cultural 'respect'; however, 'withholding-judgment' assessments were completely absent.

Observations for external learning outcome assessments found that participants assessed students' cultural 'communicating' at 50% but completely ignored the aspect of appropriate 'behavior'.

To sum up, all sub-components of IC Knowledge, IC Skills, and IC Attitudes were employed to teach in participants' classroom except three sub-components of IC Assessments—'respect', 'withholding-judgment', and 'behavior' assessments.

Discussion

The perception on English intercultural teaching practice in EFL classroom

The findings from this study revealed that 50 Grade 7 and Grade 8 Thai EFL teachers perceived an integration of English intercultural teaching practice in their classroom in a low level. They preferred to provide IC Knowledge rather than encourage IC skills and IC Attitudes to their students. Furthermore, they realized that they hardly assessed the students' attitudes, and the ability to perform appropriate behavior in intercultural situations.

The English intercultural teaching components in the actual EFL classroom

Seventeen out of 20 sub-components of English intercultural teaching from the synthesized framework for exploring English intercultural teaching were employed in participants' classroom except for the IC Assessments on 'respect', 'withholding-judgment', and appropriate 'behavior'.

It is noteworthy that participants' perceptions paralleled with their practice in the real setting where IC Knowledge was employed to teach in Grades 7 and 8 English classrooms to the greatest extent and IC Assessments to the lowest extent especially on attitudes and behavior.

This finding also reflects similarity to numerous previous studies (e.g. Ho Si Thang Kiet, 2011; Ryan, 1995; Wright, 2000) and helps to confirm that a large number of EFL teachers taught culture as information, and cultural knowledge as the main aim for cultural teaching.

Nevertheless, largely focusing on providing cultural information does not correspond to IC development concepts, on the contrary, it tends to create drawbacks. Concerning this, IC scholars such as Byram and Feng (2004); Gu (2016); Sercu (2006) agreed with other several proponents that providing cultural knowledge alone to students cannot significantly increase their IC. In this regard, the study of Ho Si Thang Kiet (2011) proved that cultural fact focus resisted EFL Vietnamese learners from intercultural awareness.

Moreover, Hu and Gao (1997) pointed out in their study that teachers tended to mislead their students into judgments that may create stereotypes from providing them with cultural knowledge. This study's findings also agreed with the drawbacks of teachers' misleading judgments about culture in their teaching, which will be discussed in the section below.

The challenge of English intercultural teaching in Thailand secondary educational context

This study's findings reflect three major obstacles in integrating English intercultural teaching into Thailand secondary EFL teaching context—teacher's cultural bias, the lack of IC attitudes assessment, and the lack of IC behavior assessment.

Teacher's cultural bias:

Concerning the relationship with the previous study of Hu and Gao (1997) about the drawbacks of solely teaching cultural knowledge in EFL classroom coincides with what have been found in this study. It was noted that Teacher B might have unintentionally endorsed students' negative reinforcement with her personal judgment every time she tried to provide cultural knowledge teaching to her students. The following excerpts taken during three classroom observations of Teacher B illustrate criticism, sarcasm, and judgment on Thai' culture, values, and manners in terms of the lack of identity, and inferiority to foreign cultures. These expressions came from her personal perspectives that cannot be generalized to the entire context in Thailand:

Teacher B: (Observation 1, Grade 7; Unit 2: My things, English instruction)

T: The foreigners are not like some Thais. We don't want to unwrap the presents we get right in front of the giver. If we unwrap it as soon as we get it, we might not be able to hide our disappointed face for the presents we don't like.

Teacher B: (Observation 2, Grade 7; Unit 2: Souvenirs, English instruction)

T: If the foreigners come to Thailand what would they do, you know? They would love to sit in our Tuk Tuk because it's a signature transportation of Thailand, but why don't Thai people like to sit in a Tuk Tuk? …. One reason is that we don't want to be considered as a poor person.

Teacher B: (Observation 3, Grade 7; Unit 2: Reviewed unit, English instruction)

T: When you stay at home you have a lot of servants or Kon Chai, right?

Ss: No! (Unanimously)

T: Yes, you have. When you are doing homework and you feel hungry you would say, “Dad I want to have noodles can you go out to buy it for me?” or “Mom, I have to wear sports uniform to school tomorrow, can you wash them for me?”, right?

Ss: No! No! (Unanimously)

T: Yes, you are! Thai children are spoiled and get very good care from their parents.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1989) defined the phenomenon above as ‘cultural cringe’ or ‘cultural alienation’. A person who holds this attitude is inclined to devalue their own country's cultural, academic and artistic life, and to venerate the "superior" culture of other countries or a colonizing country, (Hume, 1993).

This type of attitude could work against equipping students with positive cultural self-identity while, in the meantime, supporting them to disrespect or devalue their own culture. The aforementioned three excerpts of Teacher B reaffirmed that the ‘withholding-judgment’ (Attitudes’ sub-component) is genuinely a must for English intercultural teaching in terms of a reminder for Thai EFL teachers to eliminate attitudes that would withhold students from understanding, and valuing their own culture, as it is not the goal of English intercultural teaching.

The lack of IC attitudes assessment:

The second obstacle was that IC Attitudes assessments especially on ‘respect’ and ‘withholding-judgment’ were absent from participants’ teaching practice. Attitudes were addressed in Thailand Basic Education Curriculum A.D. 2008 in terms of an appreciation on the relationship, and similarities and differences between language and culture of native speakers (see MOE, 2008, p. 270-272). In order to encourage students to appreciate relationship, and cultural differences, students need to have basic attitudes of openness, respect, and withholding-judgment among cultures. Thus, assessment tasks such as portfolio, attitude inventory, attitude survey, writing expressions, and so on can be the alternative ways to check whether or not students achieve this expected appreciation.

The lack of IC behavior assessment:

Another obstacle was the absence of ‘behavior assessment’, which is one of the external learning outcome assessment sub-components. The findings showed that participants did not design assessment tasks to assess appropriate behavior in social contexts among cultures in their classroom. If we look back to see the curriculum, it does not only focus on fostering students with effective communication but also on appropriate behavior (see more detail in MOE, 2008, p.271, 273). Thus, students are also expected to be aware of and be encouraged to perform with proper manners in social situations. Appropriate ‘behavior’ could be assessed through performance tasks i.e. simulations, role-plays, real-time conversation with English users, and other performance tasks.

The findings suggested that Thai EFL secondary school teachers, especially for Grade 7 and Grade 8 may need to teach culture in a more processed way. As Deardorff (2006) and Kramsch (1998) found that process teaching fosters students’ knowledge, attitudes, and skills to participate in intercultural contexts positively through effective communication by understanding their own culture, and gaining the acceptance of speakers from other cultures. Fantini (2009) elaborated that acceptance in this case often relies on appropriate behaviors and interactions even more than grammatical correction.

Conclusion

To sum up, this study found that Grade 7 and Grade 8 Thai EFL teacher participants perceived that they employed English intercultural teaching at a low level. The results from their perception were similar to their practice in the way that they placed an emphasis on providing IC Knowledge while ignored assessing students' IC attitudes and IC behavior. Three major concerns were sorted out – the teacher's cultural bias, the lack of attitudes and behavior assessments.

It is remarkable that the case of Teacher B reminds all language teachers to be aware of the unintentional judgments of their own, and other cultures. As disability to control or withhold cultural judgment or bias of the teachers could lead the students to an ethnocentric view or feeling inferior to other cultures (Hu and Gao, 1997). Thence, when positive attitudes are blocked by bias, disrespect, or narrow-mindedness, progress in IC could stop and in reality shift foreign language learners away from even attempting to perceive the world around them.

Finally, it is suggested that Grade 7 and 8 Thai EFL teachers should begin to put more time and effort to provide students with ongoing intercultural teaching and assessing to assist them to learn about others while, in the meantime, learning more about themselves through process learning. When the recursive contact among attitudes, knowledge, skills, and assessment come into play during the process learning, students tend to gradually develop favourable attitudes, intercultural views, effective communication, and appropriate behavior. These abilities can facilitate students to create interrelationships with people from other cultures in today's world, seek knowledge, successfully engage in a livelihood, and pursue further education at higher levels – Thailand ELT's aims.

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