

Vietnamese Teachers' Perceptions of Integrating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) into Business English Teaching

Ho Thi Phung Duyen
College of Foreign Economic Relations
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Abstract

This is a case study of the College of Foreign Economic Relations (COFER) (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) with six Business English teachers as participants. The study was done to explore the teachers' perceptions of teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) to the Business English students through their understanding of ICC and ICC teaching practices. The data were collected via classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and analyses of syllabi, lesson plans and two Business English textbooks in current use. Inductive analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that the teachers did not perceive ICC adequately and neither did they teach ICC sufficiently in spite of acknowledging the importance of ICC in Business communication. The study not only enabled Business English teachers to gain a deeper insight into all the aspects of ICC but also provided educators with a good source of data for more efficient policies to develop ICC teaching in Business English education.

Keywords: Perception, Intercultural communicative competence (ICC), Business English

Introduction

Globalization has led to dramatic increase of business communication enhancing the demand for Business English teaching (BET) throughout the world, and Vietnam is not an exception. The flourishing flow of international and regional investment into Vietnam after her participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Asian Economic Community (AEC) and signing the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) has boosted BET in the country's education.

In comparison with general English, BELF is more specific in contexts, more dynamic and idiosyncratic, and consequently, inherently tolerant of differences (Louhiala- Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2013, p. 28). In this vein, language competence only seems inadequate to communicate across boundaries since language and culture are closely interrelated (Liddicoat, 2008). Thus, foreign language teaching, especially Business English education has shifted its objective from communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence. This was proved by the boom in the inclusion of intercultural content in Business English textbooks published in the 2000s (Oñate & Amado, 2013).

This trigger of globalization has resulted in the meaningful Vietnam language education reform with the *National Foreign Language project 2020*, aiming to develop Vietnamese graduates' ICC to use a foreign language confidently in the global environment (Vietnam government, 2008).

Literature review

Visible and invisible culture

Liddicoat et al. (2003) define culture as the cultural artifacts of the people who make up a cultural community as well as the system of values, beliefs and other invisible perceptions lying under their behaviors and speeches. Similarly, Brown (1994, p. 380) affirms the complete meaning of culture as the combination of “both tangible products, such as infrastructures, arts, music, food and clothes, and intangible products, such as customs, beliefs, values and norms”. In the same vein, Weaver (1993) conceptualizes culture as an iceberg with two levels: the surface level represents visible culture or what we can see, hear and touch when experiencing a new culture, and approaching culture at this level is viewed as static. Whereas, the deeper level containing invisible cultural knowledge or values, beliefs, perceptions and so on causing misunderstandings and challenges in intercultural communication usually lie in the hidden part under the water. In order to achieve intercultural knowledge, people should therefore, handle both visible and invisible knowledge of their own cultures and the other cultures.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)

In this study, ICC is defined as “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennett and Bennett, 2004; also similarly to Byram, 1997; Byram, Gribkova and Starkey, 2002; Corbett, 2003; Moran, 2001; and Samovar and Porter, 1993, among others; cited in Lázáret, Kriegler, Lussier, Matei, & Peck, 2007). Byram's ICC model (1997) with the five detailed dimensions facilitating the data collection and analysis was used as the working model for this study. The author's model was referenced by multiple professional researchers in the field of ICC teaching and assessing such as Reid (2015), The Council of Europe (2001), Liddicoat (2008), Deardoff (2006), Sercu et al. (2005), and Korhonen (2003). The five dimensions are described as *intercultural attitudes* explained as curiosity, openness or readiness to view the home culture and the target cultures without prejudices; *intercultural knowledge* consisting of visible culture or cultural products and invisible culture or practices and processes of interaction of the home and the interlocutors' cultures; *skills of interpreting and relating* understood as the capacity to interpret a cultural documents from another country and to explain and relativize it to one's own documents for mediation in different cultural contexts; *skills of discovering and interacting* regarding to 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; and *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 FLT. In this study, teaching ICC and teaching culture through language are used interchangeably.

Intercultural communicative language (ICLT) teaching approach

Byram (1997) implies that in order to become people of ICC, language learners need to join an autonomous process of exploring the home culture and the target cultures, mediating cultural differences and reflecting their knowledge, attitude and skills to overcome challenges in intercultural interactions. In the same vein, Newton et al. (2010b) suggest ICLT approach with the following specific principles: 1/ Teaching culture through language right from the basic level; 2/ Involving learners in authentic communication; 3/ Developing dynamic approach to teaching culture through language; 4/ Explicitly exposing the interrelationship of language and culture; 5/ Acknowledging multicultural and multilingual learners and learning contexts; 6/ Enabling learners to achieve intercultural communicative competence rather than native-speaker competence.

Previous studies

Since teachers' perceptions and their willingness to teach ICC has essential influence on their decision to implement ICC teaching in their foreign language classes (Byram, 2008; Byram & Zarate, 1994; Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004), a number of studies were globally carried out to shed more light on foreign language teachers' perceptions of ICC and their teaching practices (Osman, 2015; Al Hasnan, 2015; Bastos & Araújo, 2014; Dhanaraj, 2013; Mosa, 2013; Tian, 2013; Nguyen, 2013; Abu Alyan, 2011; Kawamura, & Kaczmarek, 2011; Ho, 2011; Tony & Itesh, 2011; Zhou, 2011; Sercu et al., 2005). Although these studies were done in different contexts through different research methods, they shared two results in common- the peripheral position of culture in FLT and the traditional teacher- centered approach for teaching culture in language.

Sercu et al. (2005) carried out an international quantitative study to investigate the European secondary school teachers' perceptions of ICC in FLT. Their findings exposed the image of foreign language and culture teaching teachers, who aimed to teach communicative competence and familiarize their students with foreign cultures through teacher- centered approach. Home culture and skills dimension of ICC were not touched upon in their classes.

After Sercu et al., several researchers have been interested in ICC in ELT. The studies from the Middle- east countries such as Palestine (Abu Alyan, 2011), Iran (Mosa 2013) and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Osman, 2015; Al Hasnan, 2015) showed the EFL teachers' reservation toward the interculturalization of ELT. Although the teachers in these studies perceived the role of ICC in intercultural communication, the culture teaching was mainly the transmission of native cultural knowledge through teacher- centered approach. ICC teaching

was not focused from the macro level to micro level and the teachers were unwilling to teach ICC due to their typical sociocultural context (Al Hasnan, 2015).

In China, the mixed- method studies carried out by Tian (2013) and Zhou (2011) showed the EFL teachers' adequate perceptions of culture with both visible and invisible knowledge, but their teaching pattern was traditionally English language and culture teaching, and ICC skills dimension was not touched upon. However, differently from the other studies in the field, Tian's study discovered the teachers' intentional focus on the home culture besides the diversity of the interlocutors' cultures.

In Vietnam EFL teaching context, Nguyen's ethnographic study (2013) and Ho's study (2011) revealed the teachers' perceptions of ICC with more concern for invisible culture regarding values, beliefs, norms and attitudes underlying the other's behaviors and utterances. Nevertheless, the teachers' real teaching was linguistically dominant and culture teaching was merely providing cultural facts through teacher- centered approach. Nguyen's findings disclosed the teachers' transmitting cultural facts of the home and mostly English speaking countries while Ho's results showed their achieving native speaker- competence as the assessing goal. Multiple contextual factors prevented the teachers from teaching culture through their English language classes.

The facts that most of the related studies focused on teaching culture in general English and there have been few studies on this theme in Vietnam urged me to explore teachers' perceptions of ICC in the field of Business English, the very language embedded closely with authentic contexts and reflects the need of ICC in ELT. Certainly, students study Business English in order to interact in Business contexts and "do business, not just to talk about business" (Frendo, 2005, p.14). This study, therefore, explores Vietnamese teachers' perceptions of ICC in Business English teaching through their understanding of ICC and their ICC teaching practices.

Methodology

Research design

This study was based on qualitative approach with a case study design. Following Yin's recommendations (2009, p.13), we collected data through 1/ in- depth interviews; 2/syllabus, textbook and lesson plan analyses; 3/ field notes of classroom observations. The aim of this rigorous data collection was to develop an in-depth understanding of each participant's perceptions of ICC in Business English teaching.

Participants

I used purposeful sampling suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (1993, p. 378) to choose participants knowledgeable and informative about the issue explored. Creswell (2012) also

affirms that purposeful sampling can raise a new concept or theory. Following the guides, the selection of the participants for this research was based on some specific pre-determined such as 1/ intercultural experience in terms of graduating from international universities or having taught in multicultural schools; 2/ at least 2 years of experience in teaching the Business English course at the research site; 3/ voluntarily participating in the interview and providing their teaching documents; 4/ providing access to their class observations. The personal information of the participants is presented in the table below.

Table 1 The 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.

Research site

After mapping the field through social map, spatial map and temporal map as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (1993, p. 412), we could gain a sense of the total context and decided to select the Department of English at the College of Foreign Economic relations in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam as the research site since it is major is business education, suitable with the aim of the study.

Data gathering instruments

In an interview conducted by Birello (2012), Borg advises to analyze a piece of teachers' teaching documents or their teaching activities for practical view on their perceptions. Yin (2009) recommends using multiple tools for reliable and valid data. Following the experts' recommendations, this study collected data through three instruments: the in- depth interview questions, classroom observations and the analyses of the syllabi, lesson plans, and two Business English textbooks in current use, namely English for Business Communication- 2nd Edition by Sweeney (2011) and Market leader- 3rd edition- pre-intermediate by Cotton, Falvey and Kent (2012).

The open- ended interview questions are written in alignment with the research questions and the theoretical framework with the focus on how the teachers understand ICC and how they teach ICC in their Business English lessons. The course syllabi and lesson plans were examined for 1/the teaching objectives; 2/the cultural contents potential for the teachers to

develop the students' ICC; 3/ the diversity of cultures; 4/ the teaching foci. The examination was guided with the five content analysis reflection questions adapted from those designed by Kawamura and Kaczmarek (2011). The classroom observations aimed at exploring what kind of cultural knowledge the teachers taught, if they integrated culture teaching into BE teaching, if they taught culture from an ICC perspective (which dimensions of ICC are focused) and their teaching foci. I observed each participant's class for 25 periods (50 minutes/ period) out of 45 periods of the whole course during the second semester of 2018- 2019 academic year. I believed that observing the participants for more than half of the course time enabled me to identify their teaching patterns.

Data analysis methods

The research followed the process of qualitative analysis defined as "a systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing and interpreting to provide explanations of the single phenomenon of interest" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, pp.480-488). Firstly, the data from each source was analyzed qualitatively for themes or categories. Secondly, the themes or categories arose from each data source were examined using relational analysis to determine whether there are any relationships among them.

Findings and discussion

The teachers' understanding of ICC in Business English teaching

After coding and triangulating the data collected through the three sources, there were five themes emerged: 1/culture as the way of life, 2/ comparing cultures to be more understanding and tolerant to the otherness, 3/ ICC as the capacity to understand the interlocutors' cultures to behave and communicate in harmony in intercultural communication, 4/ ICC as the second priority after linguistic competence, 5/ integrating ICC into Business English teaching as a must.

Culture as the way of life

The participants viewed culture as an umbrella term containing everything of life such as verbal language, body language, ways people behave and communicate in business and in the daily life, religion, daily routines, leisure activities, cuisine, festivals, customs, people, population and geography. They shared:

In my opinion, culture refers to many things such as language, ways of life, daily routines, or even the cuisine, festivals of countries, and the way people interact with each other every day. (T1, interview 1)

In my opinion, culture is as the same as traditional customs, the way we communicate, the way we entertain, religion, history and the way we dress. (T2, interview 2)

Especially, they emphasized more on “behaviors”, “interactions” and “communication”. This was reflected through their various examples expressing the ways people communicate verbally such as socializing, telephoning, using words in communicating, greeting (T1, T3), entertaining business partners, making small talk (T2) giving compliments, apologizing (T4), and writing business letters (T1) with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Comparing cultures to be more understanding and tolerant to the otherness

When talking about their culture or ICC teaching, the participants mainly mentioned the differences between Vietnamese culture and the interlocutors’. The invisible cultural knowledge with values, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions under the behaviors and speech acts of the others were touched upon more often than visible cultural knowledge such as food, art, and music.

ICC as the capacity to understand the interlocutors’ cultures to behave and communicate in harmony in intercultural communication

Regarding the definition of ICC and ICC teaching, the data from the in- depth interviews revealed that the participants understood the term “ICC” as the combination of Business English language proficiency and knowledge of the target cultures. The home culture was not focused throughout their sharing, and T2 even refused to teach Vietnamese culture as part of her responsibility. In their view, teaching cultural knowledge of the other cultures, especially in the field of business, and language competence enabled the students to have more tolerant attitude toward “the differences” and communicate effectively across boundaries.

ICC is the ability to use the knowledge of culture to communicate and behave effectively and to understand the cultural aspects of the people with whom we are doing business. (T1, interview 1)

The participants all emphasized the important role of cultural knowledge in intercultural communication. They also showed the interest in “the otherness”. They paid more attention to the interlocutor’s likes and dislikes and “satisfaction” in communication and felt the need to understand the other cultures in order to have successful intercultural communication. T3 gave the examples of exchanging business cards with Japanese business partners: “For example, when exchanging business cards with Japanese partners, how should we behave so that they feel pleased? We cannot give the cards in our own way as we usually do with Vietnamese partners” (T3, interview 3).

ICC as the second priority after language competence

In the College of Foreign Economic Relations, teachers are required to provide the students with the syllabus on the first day of the course, and the syllabus is considered as the contract between the teacher and his students. In this research, two syllabi of two courses: Business English for general purposes and English for Business communication and two textbooks of the courses were analyzed. The textbooks, namely Market leader and English for Business communication, were already evaluated to be interculturalized by Lario and Vazquez (2013). According to the authors, one the methods to search for intercultural components in a textbook was to find out “Business contexts in which interculturality appears” such as greeting, negotiating, inviting, travelling and so on. Following the two authors’ guide and using the questions adapted from those designed by Kawamura & Kaczmarek (2011), the researchers examined and analyze the intercultural contents of the course syllabi and lesson plans for: 1/ ICC teaching objective and teaching foci, 2/ business contexts potential for ICC teaching, and 3/ the diversity of cultures in the textbooks. The results from the analyses showed the two common features: 1/ ICC was almost not stated in the course syllabus and in the lesson plan teaching objectives, 2/ the teaching foci of the syllabi and lesson plans were language competence.

In the syllabus of the course “English for Business communication”, ICC objective was written briefly in one general sentence: “English for Business Communication course aims to develop the students’ ability to use English effectively in the international working environment” (COFER, 2014, p. 2). The other one contained no ICC objectives and so did the lesson plans. The detailed content throughout the syllabi and lesson plans focused on the language skills and showed the teaching activities in the order of what was written in the textbooks. Multiple potential ICC teaching activities from the textbooks were cut out and excluded in the lesson plans and syllabi. For example, the four sections of working across culture in the textbook Market leader was crossed out: Saying “No” politely (p.30), Doing Business internationally (p.60), International calls (p.90), and Prepare to do business internationally (p.120). Similarly, cross- cultural sections (pp. 6, 34, 45,) in the textbook English for Business communication were designed as self- learning activities without any guidance or monitoring. There was no focus on ICC teaching activities, and neither were ICC criteria in the marking scheme for the speaking exams throughout the syllabi and lesson plans.

The data collected from the in- depth interviews revealed the same focus on linguistic aspects in teaching and assessing the students’ achievement. The participants viewed language competence as their teaching aim while ICC was just the tool supporting their language teaching and spicing up the atmosphere since the students often liked listening to culture for a change (T5, interview 5, section 2). T3 reported that the students’ language proficiency and the teaching time did not allow her to let the students learn more about.

Integrating ICC into Business English teaching as a must

Regarding the willingness to integrate ICC into Business English teaching, five out of six participants were willing to integrate ICC into Business English teaching and shared their teaching culture from the basic level such as teaching greetings. In their opinion, it would be hard to attract the students if culture was taught separately. According to the participants, “the teacher should teach culture whenever it appears in the lesson”, and the teacher could teach culture from the basic level when the students learn how to greet. In order to help the students avoid offensive mistakes in intercultural communication, the teacher had to explain more than just teaching “Hello”, “How do you do” or “It’s very nice today”.

The participants all showed their willingness to integrate ICC into Business English teaching as long as some barriers about their own inadequate intercultural knowledge and ICC teaching method as well as contextual factors such as the students’ low language proficiency, the shortage of time, facilities, ICC objectives in the teaching syllabi and assessment, and experiential learning policies were solved. T4 even suggested designing a separated course for ICC for more focus on this competence.

The teachers’ ICC teaching practices

The data collected from the teachers’ reporting on their teaching ICC and classroom observations support what they thought about ICC. Their common teaching patterns were 1/ priority of language competence with syllabus and textbook- oriented teaching, 2/ dominance of teacher- centered culture teaching through comparing approach, and 3/ student-centered culture teaching approach.

Priority of language competence with syllabus and textbook- oriented teaching

The data from the in- depth interview analysis showed the participants’ focus on the four skills, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar in their Business English teaching. According to them, the pressure of the students’ passing the exams and the lack of ICC criteria in the marking scheme were the crucial reasons accounting for the very small amount of or even no time for ICC. Followings are the participants’ answers from the in- depth interviews:

... For example, teaching language for giving advice and warnings in textbook profile 1, I firstly teach them vocabulary. Then, when the students have enough vocabulary, I ask them what they know about the exchanging business cards in Japanese culture before move to the listening activity.... (T4, interview 4)

Teachers can teach culture from the basic level such as Greetings, but we don’t have ICC criteria in the test marking scheme. The first and the foremost is the language. (T5, interview 5)

The data collected from the classroom observations showed the similar teaching pattern. Their teaching foci were the four skills, vocabulary, sentence structures, word use and pronunciation. The participants shared a common teaching procedure during each lesson: following strictly the activities in the order listed in the syllabi and textbooks, asking some warming up questions or telling anecdotes relating to the topics of the activities to provide the students with some background knowledge and vocabulary needed for the upcoming activity, explaining bilingually what the students needed to do, asking the students to explain some key vocabulary and correcting the students' pronunciation or language use in their speaking or writing. Most of the teaching time was devoted to linguistic activities and ICC was additionally taught when the cultural instructions were explicit or when the contexts, the vocabulary, gestures or the speech acts needed to have cultural explanations. Followings are the field notes from the participants' classroom observations:

There were multiple intercultural components hidden in the textbook activities such as "Preparing to make a call", "Receiving calls", "Taking and leaving a message"; the teacher mainly focused on key phrases, sentence structures, speaking and listening skills. There were three times during 135 minute lesson when ICC was taught: the use of "excuse me", the preference of using indirect questions in British and American cultures and the differences in addressing between Vietnamese and other cultures. The aim of this ICC teaching was to demonstrate the language of telephoning. Plenty of ICC teaching opportunities were missed. (T1, field notes 1.1& 1.2)

In the same vein, the other participants devoted most of their time to teaching linguistic competence. ICC was taught for 3 minutes out of 45 minute lesson (T5, field note 5.1). In many other lessons, the participants even did not touch upon ICC although there were potential intercultural communicative content in the textbook activities (T2, T5, T6, field notes 2.1, 5.3, 5.4, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4).

Dominance of teacher- centered culture teaching through comparing approach

The data from the in- depth interviews showed that ICC teaching was the teacher's transmitting cultural knowledge of the home (Vietnamese) and the target cultures to the students through comparative approach. The common intercultural topics embedded in the business contexts throughout the textbooks included eye contact, exchanging business cards, developing network, cultural diversity, socializing, telephoning, inviting, welcoming visitors, negotiating and so on. However, the common culture teaching activities were to explain cultural differences, "talk to the students as much as I know about culture" (T3, interview 3, section 3), or show the video clips for the students' understanding of the cultural diversities (T1, interview 1, section 3).

In compatible with the participants' sharing from the interviews, the data from their class observations revealed similar teaching pattern- focusing on cultural knowledge, especially the

values, beliefs underlying the interlocutors' behaviors and utterances via comparing approach. The students in these classes just listened to or observed what the teachers said and showed. For instance, when teaching "Successful meetings", T5 explained more about the topic:

"Mineral water is usually served at meetings. Vietnamese meetings sometimes serve fruits and pastries but not western meetings like those in the USA, Australia ... Western people feel easy to express their ideas at meetings while Asian people like Vietnamese, Japanese, etc. usually keep silent and only speak out their ideas when being invited" (T5, field note 5.2).

Student-centered culture teaching approach

The data from the in- depth interviews and classroom observations disclosed that the teachers also used student- centered culture teaching approach through various techniques such as comparing, discussing, presenting, roleplaying, doing case study and watching films. T1 thought that "when teaching ICC, the teacher should firstly let the student discover the culture by themselves; then the teacher plays the role of the mentor providing them with cultural resources" (Interview 1). T5 shared:

If the lesson touches upon culture, for example, exchanging business cards, I let the students role play and ask them to pay attention to their body language and eye contact appropriately. (T5, interview 5, section 3).

I was a little disappointed when seeing that the participants' real teaching in their real classes showed less student- centered culture teaching than in their sharing from the in- depth interviews. The frequently used techniques were questioning of what the students knew about their home and the target cultures, discussing in pairs or groups and presenting what they just discovered. However, the final aim was language teaching with the teachers' correcting of language use. Followings are the field notes from the participants' classroom observations.

Student- centered approach for teaching ICC was used when teaching "Giving warnings and advice" through a listening text about exchanging business cards in Japan. To warm up, the teacher asked the students what they knew about giving and receiving business cards in Japanese culture. She also asked the students how business people often exchanged name cards in Vietnam. After searching and exchanging the culture of giving and receiving business cards, the students were asked to use the phrases of warnings and giving advices from the book to talk to each other. This practice activated the students' knowledge of their "self" and "other", widening their cultural knowledge and skill dimensions and, all was integrated into linguistic teaching which meant ICC was taught. (T3, field note 3.2)

In sum, the findings from this study revealed that the teachers' perceptions of ICC closely influence their ICC teaching patterns. This mutual relationship is affirmed by Borg (1997) and

Sercu et al. (2005). Specifically, the teachers did not perceive ICC adequately in term of the five dimensions stated by Byram's ICC model (1997), and accordingly, their teaching practices were insufficient to develop the students' ICC.

Regarding how the teachers thought about ICC and ICC teaching in Business English education, the teachers viewed ICC as the combination of language competence, a body of intercultural knowledge of the interlocutors and positive attitudes toward cultural differences for effective intercultural communication. In their view, teaching ICC, therefore, was providing the students with these components in which language skills were the first and foremost. In the light of Byram's ICC model (1997), these perceptions were not complete in ICC meaning because of the lack of skills dimension, enabling learners to join a dynamic culture learning process to explore, compare, mediate and interact (Byram, 1997; Crozet et al., 1999; Liddicoat, 2008; Newton et al., 2010b). Their perceptions were congruent with those in the previous studies (Tian, 2013; Nguyen, 2013; Ho, 2011; Zhou, 2011; Sercu et al., 2005). Moreover, the results were similar in the fact that the teachers merely focused on communicative competence and considered culture as the marginal dimension in spite of acknowledging the importance of ICC in Business English education.

In relation to their teaching ICC, the teachers expressed mostly the Business English and traditional culture teaching pattern, not FL and IC teaching as described by Sercu et al. (2005). This means their teaching foci were language competence and culture teaching was occasionally done through teacher-centered approach with the emphasis on the invisible knowledge of diverse cultures. Although these results resembled those from the previous studies (Tian, 2013; Nguyen, 2013; Ho, 2011; Zhou, 2011; Sercu et al., 2005), they were different from Nguyen's findings (2013) in the point that the teachers managed to touch upon both visible and invisible culture of both non-English speaking and English-speaking countries. This is one of the principles of Intercultural language teaching (ILT) and ICLT, acknowledging bilingual/multilingual learners and diverse contexts (Byram, 1997; Crozet et al., 1999; Liddicoat, 2008; Newton et al., 2010b).

Moreover, the teachers occasionally created opportunities for the students to develop intercultural skills dimension by exploring cultures, discussing, comparing, presenting or role playing on the intercultural topics stated in the textbooks. However, the student-centered teaching activities finally aimed to teach language skills such as socializing, entertaining, negotiating, and so on more than intentionally teach culture. In compatible with Nguyen (2013), the teachers missed multiple chances to teach ICC from the textbooks, and most of their culture or IC teaching were done incidentally when the culture content were explicit, when there came the need to touch upon culture for language teaching or even when the teachers and the students felt like talking about cultures. These spontaneous teaching acts were not adequate to develop the students' culture learning autonomy for ICC as demanded by the standards of teaching culture as practice, ILT and ICLT (Byram, 1997; Crozet et al., 1999, Liddicoat, 2008, Newton et al., 2010b). Thus, it can be concluded that the teachers in this

study neither perceived sufficiently the importance and the conception of ICC in Business English teaching nor handled systematically ICC teaching method. Nevertheless, to some extent, what the participating teachers have shared and performed reveal that the image of expected BE and IC teachers can be reached in the future if there are effective and timely measures.

Conclusion

The study was carried out qualitatively through a case study design with six key Business English teachers from one of the typical Business colleges in Vietnam: The College of Foreign Economic Relations in Ho Chi Minh City. Despite the limited times for the classroom observations, possible subjective bias as the insider of the site and small number of participants making the results not be possibly used for generalization, the study contributes to confirm the results from previous studies in ELT and shed more light on the teachers' perceptions of ICC in the field of Business English education at tertiary level in Vietnam with the findings that Business English teachers neither perceived ICC adequately nor really taught ICC sufficiently. These findings also open a positive view on the feasibility of interculturalizing BE teaching since the participating teachers more or less could touch upon IC teaching in spite of incidental teaching acts. Certainly, BE interculturalization can be done when firstly, there are close connection and consistency in policies from the macro level to micro level so that all relating parties such as teacher educators, policy makers, instructional material developers, Vietnam Business English teachers and their students are all aware of ICC as one of the must-be-achieved targets of BE education; secondly, the teachers are informed, trained and guided on intercultural communicative pedagogy and assessment to develop ICC to their Business English students.

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Author's biography

Ho Thi Phung Duyen is an English lecturer of the Department of Foreign Languages at the College of Foreign Economic Relations (COFER) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. She gained the Master's Degree in TEFL from Victoria University, Australia in 2006 and has been doing her Doctoral research in *Philosophy in English Language Teaching Theory and Principles*. She has been teaching English for 25 years. Her fields of interest include teaching and learning strategies, ESP teaching, ESP curriculum designing, Test bank writing, Students' motivation and Intercultural communication in ELT.

Contact information

Name: Ho Thi Phung Duyen

Institution: College of Foreign Economic Relations

Mailing address: 12A- 21, Van Do Building, 348 Ben Van Don, Ward 1, Dist. 4, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

E-mail address: phungduyen2000@yahoo.com