

**TEACHING AND ASSESSING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE
COMPETENCE (ICC): EXPERIENCE WITH STUDENT-AUTHORED
CRITICAL INCIDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a pedagogy of using a critical incidents-based (CI-based) method combining student-authored critical incidents, reflection, and interviews to teach and assess intercultural learning. The researcher used student-authored critical incidents as authentic cultural materials, with reflection on those incidents and interviews as assessment tools. The results generated from a thematic analysis and interviews showed this CI-based method was beneficial as a resource of valuable authentic contexts in which cross-cultural misunderstandings occur while also presenting cultural concepts to students. In addition, this CI-based method was used as a tool for reflective self-assessment, driving students to rethink and to reinterpret the situations they experienced. Some pedagogical suggestions are offered to make a contribution to teaching and research in intercultural competence pedagogy.

Key Words: critical incidents, intercultural communicative competence, assessment

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has brought people with diverse cultural backgrounds to be more connected than ever. This means it is important to have tools to navigate different cultural landscapes in a world full of differences and diversity. This is where intercultural communicative competence (ICC) comes into the picture in foreign language education. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) refers to the ability to understand one's own and other cultures and use this understanding to communicate with people from other cultures effectively and appropriately. The general recognition of ICC as one of the educational goals of foreign language teaching has led to widespread discussion on how to teach and assess ICC

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(Byram, 1997; Ke, 2010; Liao, 2005; Tsai, 2009).

In recent years, a great number of studies on cultural instruction have recognized the importance of fostering ICC through classroom-based training and experiential learning (Byram, 1997). While teaching methods and cultural materials designed specifically for different learning contexts have been investigated and discussed, some relevant problems have been encountered. These include a lack of appropriate cultural materials in textbooks and teacher training on how to teach culture. Additionally, the implementation of effective ICC assessment practices has also drawn many scholars' attention (Deardoff, 2012; Scarino, 2009; Sercu, 2010). Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) state that assessing knowledge is only a small part of what is involved in evaluating ICC; the most challenging part is to assess whether learners have changed their attitudes or become more tolerant of difference and the unfamiliar. Deardorff (2014) also raises the concerns that most assessments focus on results instead of the process, which provides an incomplete picture of an individual's intercultural competence development. In addition, due to the fact that most existing instruments have been primarily developed in Western societies, some scholars warn that there might be gaps or mismatches between the purposes of the assessment tool, students' needs and course aims (Chao, 2014; Deardorff, 2009; Fantini, 2009). Hence, many scholars in Asian countries have called for immediate attention to the issue of finding effective assessment strategies for ICC (Chao, 2013; Lee, 2012; Luk, 2012). Due to these concerns, there is a necessity to continue exploring intercultural competence assessment.

To address these issues regarding teaching and assessing ICC, this paper examines the use of a CI-based method combining student-authored critical incidents and written reflection papers to foster the development of intercultural communicative competence in EFL classrooms. The reasons for this proposal are based on three considerations. First, critical incidents have been used as materials to raise students' cross-cultural sensitivity and practice their critical thinking in many business settings (Stakhnevich, 2002). However, it should be noted that few previous studies have explored the use of critical incidents for assessment in foreign language classrooms. Second, assessing ICC through students' reflection on critical incidents they experienced is a qualitative approach that can provide more personalized, detailed accounts of the process of intercultural competence development than can be assessed by quantitative assessments alone (Fantini, 2006; Straffon, 2003). Third, this

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approach takes advantage of the increasing opportunities of international contacts in an academic context and international travel, by using students' personal experiences to enrich course material with authentic cultural content in EFL classrooms.

Based on these considerations, this paper explores the potential of integrating student-authored critical incidents and written reflection papers for ICC in a culture learning course in a college located in northern Taiwan. This is achieved by enquiring into two research questions.

1. How is the aspect of attitude in ICC developed through reflection on critical incidents?
2. What are students' perceptions of the critical incident learning experience in this class?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural competence has been studied in a variety of fields. As a result, a considerable number and variety of definitions and terms relating to this concept have been produced over the last few decades. Byram (1997) highlights the importance of the language component in understandings of intercultural competency and distinguishes between intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). ICC, the ability to communicate successfully with people from another culture, is regarded as an essential competency around the world in response to increasing interrelations with others from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. While there is a plethora of different terms and concepts representing intercultural competence, they are all based on three main elements: knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Byram's ICC model consists of these three elements supplemented to form five key values as shown below.

1. Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one's own
2. Knowledge: knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.
3. Skill of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge

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of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

4. Skill of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own culture.
5. Critical awareness/political education: ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria the perspectives, practices, and products of one's own and other cultures and countries.

As this model indicates, to enhance ICC, it is necessary to enrich our cultural knowledge, develop skills to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, and improve skills to reflect on our attitudes toward intercultural encounters.

Studies on Cultural Instruction

The recognition of ICC as an important educational goal has encouraged broader discussion of how to integrate cultural elements into language learning classrooms worldwide. Research on this issue has explored classroom-based teaching methods such as the use of films, international students and festivals (Chao, 2013; Liu, 2017; Hsu, 2014), investigated cultural materials or textbooks (Luo, 2017), examined the effects of study abroad on ICC (Root & Ngampornchai, 2013), and studied the development of ICC through E-learning (Chen & Yang, 2014, 2016; Ke, 2011).

Recently, a group of university teachers in Taiwan who took part in a project supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE) promoting curriculum design for developing ICC shared their teaching plans and activities to shed light on how to incorporate the teaching of the intercultural dimension in language curricula for Taiwanese students (Huang, 2017). It was found that many of the teaching tools presented by these teachers were commonly-used English teaching materials. These included movies, music, sitcoms, stories, novels, and festivals. However, the true merit of each teaching plan was that these teachers showed how they utilized these familiar tools with a combination of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities to help achieve cultural learning with the aim of raising intercultural awareness. The project also found that having a cross-cultural campus where students had opportunities to interact with

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people from other cultures played a role in course design. With respect to assessment, the practice of presentational assessment with students giving class presentations was commonly used by the teachers.

Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence

Given that ICC is considered as one of the educational goals, it is reasonable and important to assess language students' intercultural learning. Assessment measures can be categorized as direct or indirect assessment. Indirect assessment refers to perception of student learning (Deardorff, 2016). Indirect data is often collected through surveys or inventories. Many different inventories have been created to measure outcomes for various research purposes and contexts. Examples include the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI) by Bhawuk and Brislin (1992), Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) by Hammer and Bennett (2002), Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) by Chen and Starosta (2000), and Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) by Fantini (2006). The survey scores are quantitative. While these indirect assessment tools are the most widely used forms, some researchers (Byram, 1997; Ruben, 1976; Fantini, 2006) also indicate they use direct assessments to collect more detailed and individualized accounts for analysis to avoid doubts as to whether individuals provide accurate self-assessment in indirect assessments. Direct approaches to assessing intercultural competence include in-depth interviews, portfolios, reflections, performance assessment, learning diaries, and observations in real contexts. Direct assessment is often qualitative in nature. Deardorff (2016) pointed out that there is a large dependence on the use of surveys and inventories in intercultural competence assessment. This is why the direct assessment approach of reflection writing was integrated into this study.

Critical Incident Technique for Intercultural Teaching and Learning

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was first developed by John Flanagan (1954, p.327). He defines the critical incident technique as “a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles.” Wight (1995, p.128) defines critical incidents from a cultural perspective as “brief

descriptions of situations in which there is a misunderstanding, problem or conflict arising from cultural differences between interacting parties or where there is a problem of cross-cultural adaptation.”

A critical incident need not be a dramatic event; it need only be one that has significance for the participants. It is often an event that made the participants stop and think, or one that raised questions for the participants. It may have made the participants question an aspect of their beliefs, values, attitudes, or behavior. Such critical incident reflection is crucial in the development of intercultural communicative competence. Learners’ awareness and understanding of their own and other cultures grows with intercultural encounters. It takes reflection, however, to process a depth of understanding that develops openness and promotes an examination of values and attitudes, which according to Byram (1997), Deardorff (2006) and Fantini (2006) are the foundation of intercultural competence, along with knowledge and skills.

According to Flanagan (1954), the use of CIT includes five steps: a) establish aims of the activities studied; b) set a plan to implement the technique; c) collect data; d) analyze the data; e) interpret and report the data. The CIT is a qualitative research methodology that has been used to identify recommendations for effective practices and competencies for a wide variety of professionals in many disciplines.

In the intercultural communication field, it has also been widely used, both for research and in particular as a source of data for intercultural training (Chen, Tjosvold, & Su, 2005; Chang, 2009; Dela Cruz, Salzman, Brislin, & Losch, 2006; Thomas, 2010). For example, Chen, Tjosvold, and Su (2005) used CIT to investigate the conflicts between foreign managers and local Chinese employees in Shanghai with an aim to improve their relationship and productivity. The studies mentioned have shown that the use of CIT can make a contribution to the identification of interactional problems or achievements from people’s real experience, the strategies people use for achieving particular purposes, or the behaviors to be studied.

In an educational context, Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) used CIT to explore secondary and high school teachers’ ethical dilemmas in critical incidents, which provided educational leaders with ideas to establish educational programs to enhance teachers’ ethical knowledge and understanding and the competence required to address ethical issues in schools. In the field of ELT, Finch (2010) used CIT to promote students’ awareness and development of learning through reflecting on their previous learning practice at elementary and secondary schools in Korea.

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CIT has also been used for student teachers' professional learning and in-service teachers' professional development (Chien, 2017; Mirzaee & Aliakbari, 2018).

Critical incidents are also recommended as teaching and learning activities to raise cross-cultural awareness and exercise critical thinking in classrooms (Stakhnevich, 2002). A typical critical incident includes a story about a cross-cultural miscommunication or a situation where unexpected behavior occurs with a subsequent set of suggestions on how to solve the situation. An example of a typical story is shown in Appendix A. Students are expected to analyze the incident and think of it from the viewpoints of different cultures and the possibilities of intercultural communication by using the suggestions for interpretation. However, most of these kinds of stories in textbooks present foreign cultures that are disconnected from students' life experiences or lack the integration of own-culture. These shortcomings may cause difficulties in stimulating students' interest in cultural learning. Moreover, studies regarding the use of CIT from the perspective of students to promote ICC in ELT are relatively few in number. Therefore, it is thought that this study allowing students to write about a personal experience with the goal of exploring the experience and reflecting on it can add a different perspective in the literature.

METHOD

Settings and Participants

The participants were 19 non-English majors (one freshman; 12 juniors; six seniors) who enrolled in a one-semester course, Discussion of Cultural Issues, offered by the language center at one private university in northern Taiwan. The participants included 11 students from the School of Foreign Language and Literature, six from the School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, and two from the School of Business. Among them were 15 females and four males. A pre-survey at the beginning of the semester indicated that most students had had intercultural experiences, an important resource allowing the researcher, who was also the instructor of the course, to integrate a critical incident-based method to teach and assess students' intercultural communicative competence.

Course Design

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Course Description

The objective of this course was to boost students' understanding of the similarities and differences in cross-cultural values and behavior and develop their ability to express themselves orally or in written form through discussion of specific issues. The content of this course included a variety of cultural themes, such as stereotypes, discrimination, nonverbal communication, and globalization. These cultural issues were discussed using various materials, such as reading texts, critical incidents, or films. This paper focuses on the integration of critical incidents into the class to develop students' ICC. Table 1 shows the course outline and classroom procedures.

Table 1

Course Outline and Classroom Procedures

Week	Theme
W1-W4	Globalization/Pop Culture
W5-W8	Culture/Cultural Values
W9	Midterm
W10-W11	Barriers to Communication
W12-W15	I. CIT: A Critical Incident II. CIT:Group Presentation III. CIT:Group Discussion: Students' Critical Incidents IV. CIT:Write Reflection
W16-W17	Identity
W18	Final

Classroom Procedures

In the weeks (12-15) involving critical incidents, the instructor provided the students with a critical incident as a realistic context in which cross-cultural misunderstandings occur (see Appendix A). Then the instructor invited the students to think about cross-cultural conflicts and explore cultural information that helps them better understand the causes driving the conflict presented. Using the acquired cultural information, the

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students were asked to form groups and develop plans to help solve the conflict in the incident. The plans developed by each group were presented in class.

The lesson on this critical incident served as a guide to understanding what critical incidents were. Students were then invited to write a brief description of situations in which there was a misunderstanding, problem, or conflict arising from cultural differences between interacting parties based on their own experiences or on stories of others they had heard. Group discussion of these incidents was then conducted, in which each student shared what happened in their stories with group members. At this stage, students were encouraged to ask each other questions, to discuss the possible reasons causing the problems, and to talk about how they would react if they were in the situation described. After group discussion, each student wrote a reflection on their own or other's incidents.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

To answer the first research question regarding the development of ICC, student-authored critical incidents and reflection papers were collected for thematic analysis. To take into consideration the potential problem of language constraints, a confirmation interview with each participant was also conducted to clarify the details of the critical incidents and reflection papers. In addition, the instructor's classroom observation field notes were used to support the findings. The researcher scheduled meetings with the students during weeks 16-18. Individual and group interviews were conducted for this study in accordance with each student's availability for interviews. Each interview lasted from a half an hour to two hours depending on the number of the interviewees each time. This interview also served to answer the second research question regarding students' perceptions of this CI-based method by asking the participants the following three key questions:

1. Do you enjoy discussing other students' critical incidents? Why or why not?
2. What do you think of writing a critical incident and reflection?
3. In what ways does this CI-based method help you learn?

The use of Chinese language was allowed during the interview. The interview data was recorded and transcribed.

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To analyze and interpret the data, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted. The researcher read all data carefully and repeatedly to code a) key incident; b) participant's immediate feelings or thoughts; c) participants' internal dialogue, a conversation with themselves considering alternative explanations; d) turning points to make changes; e) evidence of participants looking at the views of others, considering the alternatives and learning from them; (f) participants' new thoughts generated after taking this class; and (g) participants' opinions about this method. The researcher then read the coded entries several times with care to code the excerpts as evidence. To assess the aspect of attitude in ICC, the definition of attitudes in Byram's ICC model was adopted to identify an ability to change perspectives. A sentence such as "I have realized that I can understand other cultures by seeing things from a different point of view and by looking at my culture from their perspective." indicates this ability.

FINDINGS

The findings presented below are based on the interpretations shown in the reflection papers and the confirmation interviews. They include a) experience with cultural differences; b) evidence of successful learning of course content and; c) student perception of the CI-based method; and d) instructor's classroom observations. There were 19 reflection papers, detailing five intercultural contacts happening in Taiwan and 14 occurring in the countries of Germany, the USA, Canada, Australia, and Indonesia. Of these 19 (S1-S19), four papers were written by those without intercultural experience relating to their reflection on a critical incident shared by one of the others in the group discussion. The quotations shown in the following sections were chosen by the researcher as they were seen as illustrating typical responses from students. Thus they serve as representative examples of students' thought and reflections on the issues.

Experience with Difference

Initial Reactions to Differences in Critical Incidents

The cultural issues revealed in the critical incidents include topics of stereotypes, cultural values, cultural behavior, defining culture, prejudice, discrimination, and ethnocentric views. In the incidents described, all

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students, at the outset, showed their feelings with emotional words, such as ‘surprised’, ‘feel sad and lonely’, ‘shocked’, ‘feel strange’, ‘confused’ or ‘annoyed’. Take S2’s exchange concerning the experience of seeing refugees in a class in Germany for example.

“I still remember the first time I saw the refugees in class. Surprisingly, they didn’t look any different from a normal guy, ...It’s just that they had the Westerners’ contours but with Orientals’ black hair. I really sympathized with their situation, but I was still kind of looking down on them...” (S2, critical incident)

Another example is S12’s description of her friends’ exchange experience, also in Germany.

“I got a cold and then put on a mask to avoid giving it to others. But it was very strange. I felt my classmates from Western countries always kept a distance from me, ...I was very confused about the situation. Did they hate me?” (S12, critical incident)

A Journey from Ethnocentric to Ethnorelative

From the participants’ critical incidents and follow-up reflection papers, journeys moving from ethnocentric to ethnorelative attitudes were identified. This involved participants making a journey from a view of their own culture as superior to eventually ending with making intentional changes in their own values. Take two stories as examples. The first example was taken out from a story of S13’s traveling in the US when she experienced how a group of Chinese people was discriminated against. However, her reflection showed a new, different view on what happened leading her to a new understanding of herself.

“After taking this course...I figure out the reason why I was so angry...When I was young, I used to think that Taiwanese are superior to Chinese people. The waitress’s attitude showed that she thought Chinese and Taiwanese people are the same, and that made me furious. I was discriminating against the teenagers from the Chinese study group as well.” (S13, reflection)

The second piece of evidence of such a journey was S2’s experience of encountering a refugee from Syria in Germany. After having a chance to

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know each other better, she wrote the following excerpt in her reflection as evidence to show her new perspective.

“From the beginning I had a prejudice due to limited knowledge about the refugees. Afterwards I saw the real refugees and heard the stories they shared, I started to reflect on myself...This made me become a more mature person and I have also learned to respect different cultures without attaching labels to people. I should never judge people by negative prejudices or stereotypes such as people from China are low-class or people with dark skin are considered to be bad guys.” (S2, reflection)

The critical incidents and reflection papers by S3, S4, S9, S15, S7, S12, and S14 revealed a journey from acceptance, showing curiosity and respect, to adaptation, a view of understanding the world through different eyes and making intentional changes in one's own behavior and values. Take S9 and S14 as examples. S9 had a part-time job interview experience with a Japanese school based in Taiwan. Knowing some information regarding Japanese business culture as a Japanese language learner, he carefully prepared for the job interview, putting on formal clothes, and taking off his earrings to make a good impression. Through this experience, he made a comparison of Taiwanese and Japanese culture in terms of part-time job interviews.

“...when it comes to Japanese business culture, there are so many taboos. I wore formal clothes and even put some makeup for this interview. Earrings are one of the business taboos, so I took them off before the interview. In Taiwan, there might be some rules for the dress code as well, but for a part-time job interview, normally it is not so strict at all. Although this school is based in Taiwan, it seems they don't really do as the Taiwanese people do. Why don't they do as Romans do when they are in Rome? I didn't understand. But because of this class, I have become more conscious about the importance of respecting other cultures.” (S9, reflection)

S14 depicted her experience of hosting a French friend in Taiwan. Her French friend came to Taiwan after a short stay in Okinawa, Japan. S14 noticed that her friend got sunburned on his face. She was so worried, running to the drugstore to get medicine for him, and kept reminding him

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to see a doctor. Then she was sad about her friend's reaction, "you are too over the top and worry too much. I seldom go to see a doctor in France if it's not a serious situation." Due to this incident, she tried to find out information regarding the culture of seeing a doctor in Taiwan and France. And she realized there is a huge difference in terms of convenience and money issues. This reflection brought her to the following conclusion.

"However, thanks to this writing project, I finally can understand his feelings a little bit when we kept worrying about the sunburn. Thus, I think next time, I'll try to use a different way to care about him, like "let me know if you need anything!" (S14, reflection)

Based on the findings from the students' critical stories and reflections, the application of CIT could be a useful tool to assess students' narratives. From the initial reactions to the new thoughts shown in the reflections, the attitudes valued in Byram's ICC model could be clearly seen: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures, and belief about one's own.

Evidence of Successful Learning of Course Content

The analysis also showed that students demonstrated a good understanding of culture by using the concepts discussed in class to interpret their experience. Three shared areas were identified: breaking stereotypes, three levels of human mental programming, and cultural values.

Stereotypes across Cultures

S10, S11, S6, and S2 discovered to their surprise that their stereotypes were unconsciously rooted in their minds, and from their intercultural experience developed a better understanding of stereotypes and themselves. Take S11's two-week study abroad experience in St. Louis, U.S.A., during the same semester for example. As a student of Social Work, he had confidence in his knowledge of stereotypes and the necessity of overcoming bias. The thing that shocked him first was his host family, a white family, giving him a word of caution--watch out for the black people on the bus. The following is his quote in the reflection.

"what made us more surprised was the white family who wanted us to

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be very careful about black people. I thought host family members would be more understanding that we should not use skin color to define others or have stereotypes, but they still reminded us in this way. The stereotype is going on. Just like the video about the doll test we watched in this class.” (S10, reflection)

During the checking interview, he added the following quote.

“One morning, the other Taiwanese students and I were on the bus. All of a sudden, a black man was approaching us. At that moment, I felt so uneasy and got so nervous. I was thinking he might do something horrible to us. But it turned out he was going to yield a seat to one of my female friends. Now when I remember what happened at that moment, I realize that I myself have bias, too.” (S10, interview)

Culture or Personality Differences

In the reflection papers of S1, S5, and S8, the concept of what culture is and what culture is not was well recognized. S5's story gave a good example of not blaming everything on culture in intercultural communication. In her description, one thing well-known about Japan is its pornography industry and the image of Japan's open mind to sexuality. Therefore, when she met a Japanese exchange student who tried to hold her hands with a hint to build a further relationship with her, she was shocked and her stereotype was reinforced. She said,

“He told me that in Japan most people would have sex first before deciding whether they would like to get together or not. This was the first time I felt culture shock very strongly. And it also proved that Japanese are sexually open...I said no to him. Although we have very different values and I don't agree with that personally, I realized I have to respect his value about love since we were born and grew up in two different countries.” (S5, reflection)

Moreover, she had a new interpretation regarding this issue after taking this class. She added,

“But maybe I was not so right. Was his behavior equal to Japanese culture? After our discussion about human nature, culture, and personal style, we can't see culture as a reason for every difference.

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Maybe it was his personal behavior. It doesn't represent the whole Japanese culture." (S5, reflection)

Cultural Values

S19 used the concepts of collectivism and individualism to interpret the mask-wearing story in Germany shared by S12.

"In my opinion, I think people in Western countries are more likely individualistic because they don't worry that other people might be infected with a cold from them. On the other hand, most people in Taiwan usually wear a mask with a thought of not giving a cold to other people." (S19, reflection)

S16 also gave feedback to the same story by S12, highlighting the cultural differences between Taiwan and Korea.

"The story reminded me of another story I heard before. In Korea, people also don't wear a mask when they get a cold. Just like the Western people, they wear masks only when they are really ill or when they have just had plastic surgery done. Therefore, every time when Taiwanese people visit Korea and wear masks, they are misunderstood by the locals." (S16, reflection)

These findings were very gratifying for the instructor because they indicated students' genuine learning in this class. Students used the cultural concepts, such as stereotypes, what culture is and different cultural values discussed in the class to help express their thoughts or support their opinions in their reflections. For the instructor, this clearly evidenced the realization of learning, understanding, reflection, and interpretation.

Student Perception of the CI-Based Method

In the confirmation interview section, students' feedback regarding their learning experience using critical incidents was collected. Overall, all participants agreed that the CI-based method was useful for learning intercultural communication and gave it a favorable response, although some felt it was very challenging to express their thoughts in writing. The participants enjoyed learning from each other's intercultural experiences.

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The various personal stories made them think more and learn to look at things from different cultural perspectives, which turned into a journey of self-exploration and made them become more culturally aware. The following were some of the most representative quotes.

“This assignment gave me an opportunity to carefully rethink what happened and write down my opinions again years later. My classmates are interested in my story. I never thought that my story could be discussed this way and we could use what we have learned in this class to explain it.” (S2, interview)

“Through this writing and reflection, I found that I see what happened differently. I think the knowledge I learned in this class has helped me to understand why I was so angry at the waitress at that time--in fact it was my bias that I was not aware of.” (S13, interview)

“My English is not so good, so writing English is bit difficult for me. Sometimes I can't really write well about what I want to explain. I really wanted to share my interesting experience with my classmates, so I sometimes used Chinese to explain the details in our group discussion. I am also glad this interview allows me to clarify in Chinese. But I think I learned a lot in this class” (S11, interview)

The most preferred component of this CI-based method was sharing personal stories in the group discussion. For those who have had little intercultural experience, this was a very precious channel to see the world. S16 said “I don't have much intercultural experience, but my classmates' stories helped me see the world and learn new knowledge about other countries.” This viewpoint was shared by S17, S18, and S19, who also do not have much intercultural experience.

In general, the students gave positive feedback and showed their appreciation for this CI-based learning opportunity. The application of CIT was not only a teaching resource but also a useful tool for assessment. Although it took the instructor a lot of time and effort to organize and implement this activity, receiving such positive feedback did bring a moment of elation. It also encouraged the instructor to develop more ideas on how to expand this study in the future, which are noted in the sections of discussion and conclusion.

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Instructor's Classroom Observation

In general, the data from the instructor's classroom observation field notes supported the above-mentioned findings. First, compared to the instructor's previous teaching experience using fictional critical incidents, the use of student-authored critical incidents led to more active participation. In the small group discussion, students paid attention to the storytellers and were more willing to ask questions and give feedback or opinions, allowing them to think and listen to different voices. Each student was the author of his or her own personal story. Thus all members of the group had a chance to speak. This is an important condition to promote the small group interaction and engagement. By doing so, students' cultural learning interest could be also increased. In addition, another condition contributing to the effective discussion was the cultural concepts they learned in class. The instructor found that students often mentioned phrases, such as 'like what we talked about earlier...', or used examples the instructor used in lessons to facilitate expressing their new thoughts or attitude in oral discussion, presentations, or in reflections. This confirmed the idea that this critical incident writing activity was partly integrated in the class.

DISCUSSION

The findings regarding the aspects of ICC development revealed in reflection papers and students' feedback showed that student-authored critical incidents were very beneficial. The critical incidents served as a valuable resource for authentic contexts in which cross-cultural misunderstandings occur while also presenting useful cultural concepts. They also served as a tool for reflective self-assessment, driving students to rethink and to reinterpret the situations they experienced. As a result, this CI-based method can be considered useful and valuable for fostering ICC. This teaching experience engendered some thoughts on the core values contributing to the success of this pedagogy which shed light on how to teach and assess ICC in EFL classrooms.

First of all, several benefits regarding critical incidents were recognized based on the findings. Student-authored critical incidents serve as a stimulus for discussion, which can also increase

participation and engagement. More importantly, these various authentic critical incidents illustrate the barriers to intercultural communication, the acquisition of cultural information, and the development of intercultural awareness. Moreover, using the incidents experienced by Taiwanese students assures the integration of own-culture (Taiwanese culture) in intercultural learning, which can help students understand how their own cultural identities shape the way they see the world, as well as assist them in learning the similarities and differences between their own culture and that of others.

This CI-based method can also help solve a challenge facing many language teachers regarding teaching culture: a lack of appropriate cultural materials and resources. Student-authored critical incidents are certainly a good source of material regarding diverse cultures with different perspectives for teaching and learning ICC. A good example shown in the findings is the story about wearing masks in Taiwan and European countries, which led to a lively discussion among the participants. This is an excellent example of how student-authored incidents can generate highly engaging and topical information regarding cultural differences that cannot be found in standard textbooks. The wearing of face masks has become a hot issue around the world amid the current coronavirus outbreak. Why some countries recommend wearing a mask while others do not is not just about government orders or medical advice, but also about culture and history.

A key value of this method is that it incorporates reflexive interpretation by students of their own experiences through the written reflection papers. This reflection process is a key aspect of cultural learning which will help equip students to function more effectively in the globalized world in which they live. It also gives teachers an important tool for the assessment of course goals related to the changing of students' attitudes towards cultural learning, their own culture, and that of others.

The new knowledge regarding cultural concepts learned in class helps students to interpret the wider culturally-based attitudes and behaviors both of themselves and of others. By doing so, the course aims for learners can be achieved by equipping them with a more profound understanding of ICC. For example, S2's interesting viewpoint on the issue of mask-wearing using an interpretation

based on the concepts of collectivism and individualism learned in class showed her successful learning in this aspect of cultural values. The additional reflection papers following the description of critical incidents in this study allowed students to reflect upon critical incidents arising in intercultural experiences. Many of the collected reflection papers on critical incidents showed that the process of reflection helped students become aware of their own ethnocentric patterns of thought. S13, for example, unexpectedly found that her reflections on the incident she experienced led her to generate a new interpretation of her initial reaction to the way she was treated by an American waitress. Thus the inclusion of reflective exercises in the course can be seen as succeeding in delivering an important message to students: that it is necessary to constantly reflect on our attitude toward intercultural encounters to understand how we see ourselves and the world. It also helps bring home to students that ICC is a lifelong developmental process requiring frequent practice of critical reflection because there is no point at which one becomes entirely interculturally competent (Deardorff, 2016).

Another benefit of this method is that critical incidents can be further used as a research tool to explore students' thoughts on what they experience while learning cultural concepts in class. Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) state that the most challenging part of cultural teaching is to assess whether learners have changed their attitudes and have become more tolerant of difference and the unfamiliar. Student reflections are a powerful tool in overcoming this challenge by clearly showing the extent to which students' attitudes to cultural learning changed over the course. This allows teachers to develop an assessment of student learning that will help them provide students with opportunities to develop intentional intercultural awareness and to guide students in exploring their intercultural journeys, reflecting on the past, thinking in the present, and preparing for the future. Thus this method provides teachers with a form of assessment that can actively assist in helping achieve the course goals rather than being used as merely a test tool.

Next, the above thoughts point to some pedagogical suggestions which can be put forward to facilitate the development of intercultural communicative competence on the university campus. First, thanks to the impacts of globalization on students' life, in particular the promotion of internationalization in education, there

is now a multitude of opportunities for studying or traveling abroad. In this regard, students' experiences of international contacts can be a very rich source of cultural learning materials to be utilized and expanded on by teachers in the classroom. However, although this CI-based method was beneficial in this study, there were two challenges teachers might encounter.

The first question might be raised by teachers: what if most students do not have intercultural experience? It is a serious problem for the method if there are no students with intercultural experience. This is not common because we live in an increasingly globalized world, but if it does occur, a possible solution is using the critical incidents in intercultural movies as an alternative to intercultural experience. Thus, the effects of the combination of CIT and films on students' ICC can be further studied in the future. The other challenge facing teachers is how to prevent the participants from producing certain types of reflections for good grades. In this study, the student reflections and interviews were not part of the grade for this class, which can possibly help minimize the problem. In addition, as noted in the section of Evidence of Successful Learning of Course Content in the findings, the use of classroom concepts in students' reflections shows genuine learning, which can be proof of non-fake results for the researcher. Despite this, fake results may still happen. Therefore, a limitation is acknowledged.

Second, intercultural communicative competence needs to be deliberately incorporated in the language curriculum. As Borghetti (2017) asserts, intercultural competence is a value, such as honesty or politeness, and it should be promoted in both formal and informal curricula as such. In EFL classrooms, cultural activities should be specifically designed to explore the components of ICC, i.e. the areas of knowledge, skill, and attitude. These activities should also engage students in being aware of their own culture and other cultures through the involvement of students' interests and personal experiences. The skills of observation, interpretation, and intercultural awareness, and strategies to manage intercultural conflicts or misunderstandings should be fostered. Third, it is also worth considering the multimethod approach used in this study for assessment as, despite the extra time involved, it allows teachers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' intercultural learning.

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Finally, regarding the matter of language level, one lingering question of this research is whether students were able to express their thoughts well or completely in written form in the target language. As shown in the findings of the interviews, some students did state writing posed a difficulty for them. However, their further explanations regarding their critical incidents in Chinese displayed intercultural competence not shown in the reflection papers. This echoes Deardorff's belief in the relationship of language proficiency and ICC (2016): "While language fluency is necessary, it is in itself insufficient to present intercultural competence." (p.121) Therefore, culture teaching should never be avoided due to a lack of language fluency. A degree of tolerance for the use of own language is supportive in assessing students' ICC in this case. Under the current paradigm shift intercultural communicative competence is widely recognized as a key goal in foreign language education, so language proficiency should not be a hurdle that causes teachers to hesitate to promote ICC. Instead, efforts should be made in the specific curriculum design for individual classes with a consideration of level of difficulty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper presents an example of a course design using student-authored critical incidents as tools for teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence for college EFL learners. The main purpose of student-authored critical incidents was to collect personal experiences of situations in which there was a misunderstanding, problem, or conflict arising from cultural differences between interacting parties or where there was a problem of cross-cultural adaptation. These various critical incidents were used as authentic contexts in which cross-cultural misunderstanding occurs while also presenting cultural concepts. Students talked about each incident together, which allowed them to identify the problems and be aware of the differences, explored possible solutions, and tried to understand the incidents from different perspectives. A follow-up reflection on the critical incident encouraged students to rethink and reinterpret the situation after gaining knowledge regarding intercultural communication, allowing teachers to trace students' attitude changes and the

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development of intercultural communicative competence. The findings showed that students gave very positive feedback for the method of student-authored critical incidents, and assessment indicated both an absorption of knowledge concerning specific cultural practices and a significant change in attitudes among students regarding intercultural communication. This demonstrates the value of the critical incident approach in ICC and indicates the necessity of further implementation of research on this pedagogy in the future. In the end, several limitations still need to be acknowledged for the application of ICC in instruction and research. First, CIT is a useful tool for assessing the perspectives of the participants through self-narratives. However, CIT can't prevent a disadvantage relating to the untrustworthiness of self-reports facing many researchers. Second, although this study produced fruitful results, there is still room for more discussion. Further studies using CIT but with more examples of incidents can be conducted to explore more aspects of ICC in the future, such as an investigation of the relationship between the types of incidents and students' ICC development, or of how Taiwanese students use linguistic strategies in real communication.

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APPENDIX

An Office Party

An American manager by the name of Bill Morris worked for an American multinational firm. One year he was transferred to France. When he began working in the French office, he wanted to get to know his employees and show them that he was friendly and interested in a good work relationship. He decided to throw a party for the whole office. He thought it would be a good way to get acquainted with everyone in a less formal environment. He invited everyone in his office, including secretaries and executives, for a big party in his elegant apartment. Everyone accepted the invitation. He was pleased that no one had declined his invitation.

At his apartment Morris served a buffet of snack foods and drinks. The employees could help themselves to whatever they liked. The manager liked this casual style of parties. As an informal and relaxed host of the party he could show them that he was an open person and easy to talk to. Morris feels these are important qualities of a manager and boss.

The party, however, was not a success. The employees were very uncomfortable as guests. They felt they didn't know Morris well enough to be in his home. They thought he was showing off his money by inviting them to his elegant apartment. They also were not comfortable with one another because they were not used to socializing together.

(from *Business Across Cultures: Effective Communication Strategies* by Laura M. English & Sarah Lynn, Longman)

Procedures:

1. Read the story
2. Review the story
3. Identify problems and make inferences
4. Research information about the two cultures mentioned in the story
5. Presentation and Discussion