



Teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence: The Perspective of Philippine ESL Teachers

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Abstract: In the 21st century, ESL does not focus on linguistic competence and language proficiency alone but also on intercultural communicative competence or the ability of someone to communicate effectively and appropriately in English within a culturally diverse society. This study attempts to shed light on the current status of Intercultural Communicative Competence teaching based on the perspective of the Philippine ESL teachers. The participants of this study were fifty ESL teachers who were selected purposively. In order to collect data, this study used Likert scale questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with nine public school teachers. Findings showed that teachers acknowledge the importance of ICC and they have positive perceptions of incorporating it in English language teaching however ICC teaching still remains vague for most of them. Due to lack of awareness and relevant trainings, most of the participants feel that they are not interculturally competent enough. Lastly, most of the participants perceived that ICC should be done through implicit teaching and they also revealed that the common classroom practices on culture integration involve modelling or showing respect and sensitivity to others, making connections, using literary text as springboard, and role playing. The findings of this study would be instrumental in creating new ICC activities, teaching models and lesson exemplars in the Philippine context; moreover, they could be used as bases for developing teacher training programs that will guide teachers on how to incorporate ICC in their ESL classes.

Key Words: Culture; Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC); English as Second ;Language; English Language Teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization, economy, industry and the widespread use of internet brought people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds closer (Chen, 2011); hence, multicultural communication (Fang, 2011) and intercultural communication are becoming the common form of communication in many people's daily life (Sharifian, 2013).

The communication in intercultural contexts requires intercultural communicative competence which refers to the ability to understand cultures, including your own, and use this understanding to communicate with people from other cultures successfully. It includes understanding how gestures

and the distance between speakers vary from culture to culture, (British Council, 2009). According to Kim as cited in Huang (2014), intercultural communicative competence is the overall internal capability of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication: namely, cultural differences and unfamiliarity, inter-group posture, and the accompanying experience of stress.

Before, the focus of teaching English is on linguistic competence and language proficiency. Nowadays ESL teachers are expected to consider intercultural communicative competence or the ability of someone to communicate effectively and appropriately in English within a culturally diverse



society. According to Bennett (2003) the person who learns a language without learning a culture risks becoming a fluent fool. Brown(2000, p.177) stated that a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.

The study of intercultural communication takes special significance because it offers tools to help us as we grapple with questions about religious and ethnic differences, hate crimes, and many other related issues. At the same time, the reality of cultural diversity in school classrooms today presents tremendous and demanding challenges to teachers because even people who share a common culture do not necessarily share the same attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Therefore the teaching of intercultural communication should also be addressed.

Nowadays researches in the area of intercultural competences have become increasingly popular and there are lots of curricular documents that emphasize the importance of development of ICC for learners. However according to Reid (2015) the recommendations are mostly general and do not provide specific guidance for teachers. Consequently, the teachers are often confused and the question of content, materials, strategies and techniques often arises.

This study attempts to shed light on the current status of teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Philippines by answering the following questions:

1. How clear is the concept of ICC among ESL teachers?
2. How do they perceive the incorporation of intercultural communicative competence in ESL classes?
3. How do they incorporate culture in ESL classes?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data Collection Procedure

The design of the study is mixed-methods. It is a kind of research method based on the assumption that collecting data that is from diverse sources (quantitative and qualitative) provides a

more comprehensive understanding of a research problem, thus enriching the depth of findings (Creswell, 2007; Dornyei, 2007). Quantitative data attained from the questionnaire were obtained through the google form sent to the participants, and in hard copies of the questionnaire provided upon visiting the school and handing the survey to the teacher respondents. On the other hand, qualitative data collection technique was also employed in this study to better examine the study's naturalistic orientation. Nine teacher interviewees contributed to the study by attending a 15-minute semi-structured interview session. The interview sessions were recorded using a cellphone as an audio recorder.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative part of this study involved 50 ESL teachers from different public schools who participated by answering a 12-item survey questionnaire. The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha, is 0.834. This value is considered to be within the acceptable range of reliability (Orcher, 2007). This sufficiently high value of internal consistency indicates that survey items align with each other in measuring the teachers' perception regarding intercultural communicative competence.

Table 1. Teachers' Perception on the importance of Intercultural Communicative Competence

	Mean
Importance of knowing ICC concepts	4.6
Importance of integrating culture in ESL classes	4.63
Importance of acquiring ICC skills and attitude	4.52
Importance of ICC for effective communication	4.33

Note: A low mean indicates an ICC is perceived as less important; a high mean value indicates a higher level of agreement among participants.

As shown in Table 1, the overall mean score of ESL teachers' perception on the importance of ICC is 4.52 (out of 5) which means ESL teachers acknowledge the importance of acquiring ICC skills and attitude. This result strongly suggests that the argument that culture and ICC need to be regarded as an inseparable part of ESL classes.



Table 2: Teachers' willingness to integrate ICC in English Language Teaching

	Mean
Culture integration visibility in teaching experience	3.97
Positive Attitude towards acquisition of ICC even in basic education	4.52
Willingness to integrate ICC in ESL classes	3.62
Willingness to learn ICC to improve quality of teaching	4.45

Note: A low mean indicates that participants have low willingness to integrate ICC in teaching; a high mean value indicates a higher level of willingness among participants.

As shown in Table 2, the overall mean score of ESL teachers' perception on the importance of ICC is 4.13 (out of 5) which means that participants are willing to integrate ICC in their English language teaching.

Table 3: Teachers' Adequacy on ICC concepts and trainings

	Mean
Teachers' awareness on ICC concepts	3.47
Teachers' Adequacy of ICC knowledge and skills	3.37
Teachers' Adequacy of ICC trainings and seminars	2.75
Teachers' Awareness on ICC themes and topics	3.27

Note: A low mean indicates that participants have inadequate knowledge, awareness or training on ICC; a high mean value indicates a higher level adequacy in ICC concept, awareness and trainings.

As presented in Table 3, the overall mean score of ESL teachers' adequacy on ICC concepts and trainings is 3.21 (out of 5) which means participants are mostly undecided whether they have adequate knowledge on ICC concepts and topics. The 2.75 mean related to ICC trainings shows that teachers lack seminars or training for this dimension of teaching.

Results of Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative part of the study divulged interesting information on the teachers' perception of ICC. To this end, the interview responses were transcribed, summarized, separated into common themes, with teachers' responses being categorized and reported (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). These aspects are presented below (Table 4), in order of relative significance employing the teachers' comments and responses as illustration and evidence to complement the findings of this study.

Table 4. Teachers' Interview Responses

Interview Questions	Themes	f	100%
How do you perceive intercultural communicative competence?	• A vague concept	5	56%
	• Something that develops respect and sensitivity to others	2	23%
	• Exploring diversity and cultural background of learners	2	23%
Do you consider yourself interculturally competent? Why?	• Yes - through reading - encountered in graduate school.	3	33%
	• No -don't have enough trainings -a concept which is Rarely encounter	7	77%
What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence?	Strengths: - Students will be globally competitive	6	66%
	- It could develop harmonious relationship in the classroom or in the community.	7	67%
	Weakness -Lesson preparation is laborious and time consuming.	5	56%
	It can lead to classroom conflicts if teacher have personal biases	3	33%

	and/or not knowledgeable about ICC		
How should Intercultural Communicative Competence be taught? explicit or implicit? Why?	Implicit	4	44%
	Explicit	3	33%
	Both	2	22%
What are the common classroom practices which you think are related in teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve modelling or showing respect and sensitivity to others 	6	66%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> making connections, 	3	33%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> using literary text as springboard 	5	55%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> role playing 	2	22%

As seen from the table, 43% of the participants have clear idea about ICC however more than half of the teacher-interviewees find ICC as a vague concept. This result is in consonance with the result of quantitative data that teachers have inadequate knowledge and idea regarding ICC and its integration in ESL classes. Most of the participants rarely encounter the term ICC. Only few (33%) can confidently say that they are interculturally competent because they have gained knowledge about ICC through attending graduate studies and reading books. In terms on how culture should be taught or integrated in classroom most of the teachers express that it should be done implicitly so students will not be bombarded with too much contents. Most of participants want culture integration to be more reflective and exploratory in the part of the students. The common classroom practices that the participants express include modelling or showing respect and sensitivity to others, making connections, using literary text as springboard, and role playing. Most of them highlight the importance of making connections like determining the background of the students, activating schema, and giving activities related to real-life situations. They also believe that using literary or culture-related text can be a rich source of information about culture.

To get a better picture, a sample of the interview responses provided by the teachers is presented as follows:

1. How do you perceive intercultural communicative competence?

Teacher 6: Ahhmm... ICC Intercultural Communicative Language, I think it develops respect sensitivity towards others and ahhh... probably ahhh... increase interest in knowing how others react, behave and think in a certain issue or a situation..

2. Do you consider yourself interculturally competent? Why?

Teacher 8: ICC competence, at its most not yet. I'd still do need to rethink, revisit and recheck on my pedagogies on this particular topic may lead to refine my delivery of the lesson.

3. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence?

Teacher 5: ICLT, develops or hones ahhh... good relationship in a diverse community ahmm...it enhances ahhh... once capacity to deal and mingle with others, however if teacher have bias or the beliefs and the views are in contrast with others especially with students this creates negative impact in one's understanding.

4. How should Intercultural Communicative Competence be taught? explicit or implicit? Why?

Teacher 2: With the consideration, on the learner's age and current stage in junior high school as well as in senior high school basically explicit teaching is not an option, It can be delivered implicitly for the learners to accomplish their task with the being bombarded with or being pressured with the outcome of their activities.

5. What are the common classroom practices which you think related in teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence?

Teacher 9: utilizing literary or ahhhmm culturally related texts as part of the motivation or as part of the discussion can be ideal in incorporating culture in classroom teaching because Ahhmm text are good source of culture related experiences and life lessons.



4. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study reveal that most participants are interested and willing to teach ICC because it can be a way to make the students globally competitive. For them ICC could be of help in developing respect and sensitivity for others. Participants find ICC important although for them the whole concept of ICC is somewhat vague due to lack of training and seminars about it. Most of them express that they still want to learn more about how to teach ICC in their English classes.

Participants perceive that ICC should be done through implicit teaching and reveal that the common classroom practices on culture integration involve modelling or showing respect and sensitivity to others, making connections, using literary text as springboard, and role playing. The findings of this study point out that although ESL teachers find culture and ICC integration important there is a need for developing teacher-training programs and materials that will guide teachers in incorporating ICC in their classes.

This study has limitations as it was conducted with a small sample size. Therefore, it is suggested that further research should be carried out with a larger sample size. In addition, further research can be made for developing creating new ICC activities, teaching models and lesson exemplars that could guide ESL teachers in teaching ICC in the Philippines.

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