

## **The influence of college EFL teachers' understandings of intercultural competence on their self-reported pedagogical practices in Taiwan**

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*ABSTRACT: In recent years, considerable concern has arisen over issues of intercultural competence (IC) in relation to English education in the fields of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL), due largely to globalisation. However, relatively little qualitative research has been conducted on EFL teachers' beliefs and their effects on classroom practices. Through in-depth interviews and analysis of teaching materials this study seeks to explore the understandings of IC and self-reported pedagogical practices of five Taiwanese EFL teachers in higher education institutes of technology. The findings suggest that the teachers' understandings of IC did not play a part in their self-reported pedagogical practices, and that cultural self-awareness did not appear in their teaching. Lecturing occupied most of the class time, and discussion with students was rare. Textbooks dominated the practice of the participating teachers. Interestingly, most participating EFL teachers acknowledged the significance of intercultural learning in EFL education. Above all, this study emphasises that pedagogical practices should reflect not only the interconnected world but also the local contexts and real needs of students and teachers. With the increasing influence of globalisation, the development of IC contributes to the implementation of EFL education.*

*KEYWORDS: Intercultural competence; culture teaching and learning; intercultural communication; beliefs and practices; intercultural awareness.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The last two decades have seen the growing popularity of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) learning, with particular emphasis on linguistic proficiency and competence. In recent years, considerable concern has arisen over intercultural competence (IC) in these fields, due largely to globalisation. The worldwide trend of globalisation increases opportunities for interactions in English as the gateway that makes communication possible across cultures. As English has become the lingua franca, globalisation has undoubtedly influenced education, especially EFL/ESL education (Cheng, 2011).

Scholars such as Matsuda (2002), Byram and Morgan (1994), and Sercu (2005) have pointed out the importance of IC in foreign language education, noting that teaching English as a foreign or second language is not merely language teaching, but more importantly "the teaching of global cultures" (Tam, 2004, p. 21). Therefore, foreign language education should integrate diverse worldwide cultures and relate to learners' cultural backgrounds at both the micro and macro levels. Although many studies have been performed on IC in the fields of EFL/ESL, relatively little qualitative research has been conducted on EFL teachers' beliefs and their effects on classroom practices.

With the increasing importance of IC in EFL/ESL education, the purpose of this study is to assess EFL teachers' understandings of IC and how they affect their self-reported

pedagogical practices. The participants of interest were full-time EFL faculty members from higher educational institutes of technology (HEIT) in Taiwan. This study may lead to a better understanding of how and to what extent EFL teachers' understandings of IC shape their self-reported practices. The results of the study could be beneficial to teachers responsible for planning course work in teacher education, curriculum design, and implementations of related foreign language education, especially EFL education.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **English in a global context**

English has developed into a number of varieties, and the so-called Standard English has been questioned in relation to its increasing influence in globalisation (Bamgbose, 2001; McArthur, 2003). With this influence, English not only internationalises the world at a new level but also localises itself to serve the specific needs within the region. Thus, the more varieties of English that exist, the less likely English is to be an international communicative media, as Bamgbose (2001, p. 359) argues. That is, the localisation of English might disqualify it from being a means for international communication because different localities have unique ways of thinking and speaking. Nevertheless, the acceleration of globalisation has undeniably contributed to the spread of English as a world language. Global development has paved the way for the rising popularity of English worldwide.

With globalisation, non-native speakers of English already outnumber native speakers of English (Graddol, 2006). English is often used for international encounters when neither party's native language is English (Jenkins, 2000). However, the danger of such acceptance and recognition is its potential to overlook the importance of a "third language and culture" (Valette, 1986, p. 180), the otherness. In EFL teaching and learning, students and teachers deal not only with the target culture(s) of English but also with the world around them (Cheng, Yi & Tsai, 2009; Neuner, 2003; Tseng, 2002). This reality has caught the attention of researchers such as Dewey (2007), who urges the importance of "pluralism" (p. 348) in English language education, and echoes Kumaravadivelu's (2008) beliefs on "global cultural consciousness" (p. 46) in language education. The influence of globalisation has definitely left its mark on every facet of education, especially EFL and ESL. With the rising influence of globalisation, the culture related to English refers to not only the target culture(s) of the language but also the broader inclusion of the world as a complete entity.

### **Intercultural competence**

To be interculturally competent, "[P]eople must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behaviour as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures," as Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) have suggested. That is, IC first addresses people's psychological state, and subsequent changes cannot be expected if people do not have appropriate attitudes toward cultural differences.

According to Sercu (2005), IC contains three essential components: knowledge, attitudes/traits and skills/behaviour. Knowledge is a cognitive state that includes knowledge of one's native language and culture, decision-making, logic, and so on. Attitudes/traits serve as motivation, which is an internal willingness to face the anxiety, stress and uncertainty of intercultural communication (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Finally, skill/behaviour is external and observable. Skills include adaptability, flexibility, empathy and tolerance for ambiguity acquired from monocultural to multicultural content. In essence, to be *interculturally competent* means to have "culturally sensitive knowledge, a motivated mindset, and a skillset" (Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 1999, p. 19).

### **Intercultural competence in foreign language education**

Change is not exclusive or selective in sectors of society, which it affects. Policy makers include intercultural objectives in curricula, and teachers find themselves faced with the challenge of promoting intercultural competence through their teaching. This is true for teachers of a diversity of subjects, and definitely true for teachers of foreign languages. Foreign language is, by definition, intercultural. (Sercu, 2005, p. 1)

To be competent in intercultural communication means to accomplish communicative objectives in a way that is "appropriate and effective" to the setting in which the communication takes place (Lustig & Koester, 2005). Lustig and Koester (2005) postulated the concept of "appropriateness and effectiveness" because what is accepted in one culture might not be considered appropriate or effective in other cultures. According to Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (2008), intercultural communicative competence integrates the essence of communicative competence and IC. Intercultural communicative competence emphasises grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence (Canale, 1983), with the concept of appropriateness and effectiveness. That is, the implementations of foreign language education are to develop learners' ability "to use the linguistic system in an effective and appropriate way" (Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2008, p. 158).

The challenge lies in building consensus when communication takes place between people from different cultures. While the globalisation phenomenon increases diversity in daily life, communicative competence is no longer sufficient for foreign language teaching and learning (Larzen-Ostermark, 2009). People from different societies or countries tend to behave and think in their own unique ways, because they are under the influence of their own social, political and economic patterns. Cultural understanding of a language requires more than linguistic interpretation. Therefore, managing the difficulties, hardships, frustrations and stress of intercultural encounters contributes to appropriate and effective communication. Intercultural competence in a foreign language ultimately means

...the willingness to engage with the foreign culture, self-awareness and the ability to look upon oneself from the outside, the ability to see the world through the others' eyes, the ability to evaluate others' points of view, the ability to consciously use culture learning skills and to read the cultural context, and the understanding that individuals cannot be reduced to their collective identities. (Sercu, 2005, p. 2)

IC addresses the capability, flexibility and adaptability necessary for different cultural communicative encounters, which makes developing IC a challenging task.

EFL/ESL education needs to take into account the effect of intercultural encounters in addition to language fluency. Without a thorough understanding of other cultures, communication cannot be conducted appropriately, effectively or mindfully. Only with IC will people become capable of handling the difficulties and stress of intercultural communicative encounters. The ever-changing world has brought us closer, and IC is the key to solving the misunderstanding and stereotypes encountered in any intercultural communication. EFL/ESL education should emphasise IC through practice of the four modalities of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Intercultural content in language courses broadens learners' horizons and helps them to acquire IC (Byram, 1997; Corbett, 2003; Lochtman & Kappel, 2008) as a desired outcome in many higher education curricula (Ippolito, 2007; Otten, 2003). Karnyshev and Kostin (2010) explicitly assert that IC would be a necessary skill for one to remain competitive in the globalised society. Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein and Colby (1999), however, have clearly pointed out that both cultural and intercultural teaching are often missing from foreign language teaching and learning. Given the important role of intercultural knowledge in language, it is ironic that many teachers ignore this crucial piece of the puzzle. Robinson's (1981) study concluded that "foreign language study gives one the key to another culture, leads to an awareness, understanding and sensitivity toward other people and their way of life" (cited in Paige et al., 1999, p. 66). Robinson suggests that acquiring culture can be automatic. However, IC includes knowledge, attitudes and skills that require explicit instruction to demonstrate its importance.

### **Cultural self-awareness**

To be able to select, accept, or reject ideas, concepts, and pressures, especially those emanating from other and dominant cultures, people have to be equipped with good knowledge of their own culture and history. (Hyde, 1994, p. 303)

Hyde's statement clearly illustrates the importance of cultural self-awareness in intercultural communication for overcoming bias and stereotypes and contributing to objectivity and understanding of others. IC addresses the importance of others, as well as oneself; it is a bilateral learning process that nurtures one's own maturity and in turn contributes to respect and appreciation for the presence of others.

Huang (2004) indicated that, under the powerful impact of globalisation, one of the most challenging jobs for higher education in Taiwan in the Twenty-First Century is balancing the dynamic between globalisation and localisation. Cultural self-awareness may be dramatically affected by the rising influence of globalisation (Cheng, 2011). With the influence of globalisation, English has also localised itself to reflect unique characteristics within different regions (Bamgbose, 2001). It should be noted, however, that there have been few attempts to address the localised characteristics of English in the classrooms.

### **Teachers' beliefs**

Pajares (1992) proposed that "Teachers' beliefs can and should become an important focus of educational inquiry" (p. 307). How teachers think, what teachers know, and what teachers believe all influence what teachers do in the classroom (Borg, M., 2001; Borg, S., 2003). Researchers, including Cooper (1990) and Dreher (2002), claim that teachers' attitudes correlate with teachers' behaviour and decision-making in classrooms, and ultimately affect students' learning outcomes.

Pajares (1992) also suggested that "Beliefs are far more important than knowledge in determining how individuals organise and define tasks and problems and are stronger predictors of behaviour" (p. 311). To Pajares, embedded beliefs play a larger role than knowledge in affecting decision-making for behaviour. Belief is knowledge filtered through time and space that becomes deeply rooted in the mind and difficult to change. Because of the complexity and contradictory of beliefs themselves, beliefs are hard to be measured or observed, but rather "inferred" (Bullock, 2010; p. 115; Pajares, 1992). Therefore, studies about beliefs need to be undertaken with great care.

### **THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Given the theoretical positions of the study and the status of the field as briefly reviewed above, this study aimed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are Taiwan EFL teachers' understandings of intercultural competence in English language education?
2. How do Taiwan EFL teachers' understandings of intercultural competence influence their self-reported pedagogical practices in the classroom?

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **The participants**

The participants were selected from four institutes using purposive and network sampling. Tape-recorded, open-ended and in-depth interviews with five EFL teachers were conducted in this study. The participants were two male teachers and three female teachers representing four different HEITs, two public (HTA and HTB) and two private (HTC and HTD). Most participants were born and raised in Taiwan, except for Jason, who was a native English speaker from the United States. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participating teachers.

#### **The Institutes and the curriculum**

HTA, established in the early 1970s, is located in Taipei. HTA has been ranked as one of the best higher education institutes in Taiwan. Different from other HEITs in Taiwan, HTA offers doctoral degree in some selected fields. In the wave of internationalisation of higher education, HTA has been devoted to build educational connections and collaboration with higher education institutes overseas. HTA offers the following degrees in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages: bachelor's

degree, two-year college program, and master's degree. In addition to English, the Department of Applied Foreign Languages also offers other foreign languages, such as French, German, Japanese and Spanish as elective courses. The curriculum for the bachelor's degree in the Department of Foreign Languages at HTA does not require students to take any culture-related courses, other than a required course named "Western Culture". The curriculum is designed to strengthen the following language skills: listening comprehension, speaking, reading, writing and translation. Culture is not a focus in its curriculum.

Name (Pseudonyms)	Age	Years of Teaching	Highest Degree Earned	Location of Highest Degree Earned	Position at the Institute
Iris (Yu-Li)	44	18	PhD in Second Language and Culture	U.S.A.	Professor at HTA
Eric (Shih-Wen)	58	37	Master's Degree in Educational Psychology	U.S.A	Lecturer at HTB
Jessica (Ching-Chen)	43	10	PhD in Foreign Language Acquisition	U.S.A.	Associate Professor at HTC
Jason	52	18	Master's Degree in Asian Studies	U.S.A	Lecturer (Native English speaker from the U.S.A.) at HTC
Katie (Yin-Ling)	34	7	PhD student in Western Literature	Taiwan	Lecturer at HTD

**Table 1. Biographical information of the participating EFL teachers in Taiwan**

HTB, located in central Taichung, was originally established as a business school by the Japanese in the early 1900s. At present, it has a student body of over 18,000 and is known for its good tradition and prestige. HTB has been constantly making efforts to internationalise the institute as a whole and has successfully established educational cooperation and intellectual projects with seventeen institutes overseas in the United States and Japan. Accordingly, one of HTB's missions is to equip its students with global vision, which is particularly important to HTB because it is a business-oriented institute. Most of HTB academic courses have a business application, which potentially benefits students' future employment prospects. The pedagogical direction of the Department of Applied Foreign Languages at HTB claims to give equal emphasis to theory and practice. One of the goals of the Department is to develop a global vision for students and help them play a role on the international stage, which is especially important in HTB because it is a business-oriented institute. Based on the curriculum provided for bachelor degree students majoring in English, the culture related courses are: Introduction to Western Literature and Chinese History.

Founded in the early 1960s as a private college of business, HTC has become one of the outstanding HEITs in central Taiwan. As emphasised in its mission statement, HTC requires all students to be proficient in at least one foreign language, with a preference for English. It is worth noting that HTC has official cooperation agreements with four universities in the United States, one in the Czech Republic, one in Austria, and one in Brazil. Because of such connections with universities overseas,

HTC has study abroad programs customised to meet the needs of diverse students. HTC is one of the few institutes that would consider study abroad an important part of its mission and has been constantly devoting efforts to it. Students in HTC do not have many choices in choosing classes related to culture and foreign language education. Every English-major student is required to take Western Civilization and Culture, Introduction to Linguistics, and Introduction to Western Art. Those courses are considered the most relevant to cultural studies. Aligned with the missions of the institute, the Department of Foreign Languages aims at promoting study-abroad programs and helping the institute achieve its mission by enhancing students' English proficiency levels. Given that, the department is geared toward developing students' global vision through the learning of English.

HTD, located close to Taipei, was established in 1990s. Even at its young phase, HTD has a student body of more than 8,000. HTD is located in a geographical region where Hakka culture is dominant. Hakka are a unique ethnic group of Chinese. Hakka people are known for their preservation of certain cultural characteristics as expressed, for example, in their dishes, custom and culture. Hakka people are also known to be adamant in defending their own culture, hard-working and enduring. Because of its geographic connection with Hakka culture, HTD's Department of Foreign Languages has set up a short-term goal to establish a graduate school for Hakka culture. The curriculum at the Department of Foreign Languages primarily focuses on the application of the linguistic skills to business settings, and students at the Department are required to take the following culture-related courses: Language and Culture; Introduction to Eastern and Western Culture.

### **Data collection**

The data collection included in-depth semi-structured interviews (five interviews, an average 2 hours each) and relevant documents, including teaching materials. The research approach was based on a naturalist-interpretive paradigm, which focuses on "understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena within their social worlds" (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3). All interviews were conducted using interview protocols (see Appendix A). However, I remained open to discussion even with a predetermined list of questions, as Goodson and Sikes (2001) emphasise that, "a researcher can never know for certain which experiences have been influential and relevant in a particular sphere of life, for sometimes connections are apparent only to the individual concerned" (p. 28). All interviews were conducted in English as participants chose, as they were asked whether an interview in English would be comfortable for them. Each interview was taped, transcribed, translated into Chinese, and finally back-translated into English by the researcher and her assistant. Back translation was done to minimise the effect of misinterpretation. Finally, transcripts were sent back via email to the interviewees for further proofreading.

### **Data analysis**

The method of constant comparison proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used to analyse the interview data. The analysis of the interview data was conducted in the following stages. First, the collected data were organised and sorted into two parts based on the research questions. Then, key-words from each part were retrieved through multiple rereading. Third, patterns of linkages and themes were identified

among the key-words. Finally, a brief summary of the themes was developed to represent the participants' perspectives. A document analysis of textbooks was conducted to triangulate other sources of data. The textbooks used by the participating EFL teachers were analyzed based on Damen's (1987) Evaluation of Cultural Content (see Appendix B).

## RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS

*Question #1: What are Taiwanese EFL Teachers' understandings of intercultural competence?*

The findings indicated several themes: 1) IC is a mixture of cultures, a phenomenon, and an invisible force; 2) IC develops naturally; 3) IC is about world culture and diverse cultures in the world; 4) IC deals with people from different cultures; and 5) IC addresses the vague concept of cultural self-awareness.

For some EFL teachers, IC is still a new and unclear term that does not relate to their teaching. Their understanding of IC is that there are diverse cultures around the world because globalisation is a worldwide phenomenon. Jessica interpreted IC as follows:

The world has become smaller and smaller. This means that a mixture of cultures and it [IC] is unavoidable. We do not learn it on purpose. It is always there. It doesn't matter if you like it or not. It is gradually influencing us. Interculture is something we must face nowadays.

In the same fashion, Eric gave an insightful example of how the intercultural phenomenon has evolved in Taiwan:

Now in Taiwan, there are so many so-called "foreign brides". Sooner or later, the way they think and the way they live will influence Taiwanese people. There are so many foreigners here. When we interact with them, we learn something from them and they will learn things from us. In this way, it is intercultural. For example, there are so many English words in Japanese. Of course, there are so many Chinese or Japanese words in English.

Globalisation is synonymous with IC and what makes IC critical is that it permeates our daily life. For some EFL teachers, IC is a natural ability acquired by living in the modern world. Eric pointed out:

IC is unconsciously influencing people. It is in our daily lives and it just influences us and we just have to accept it. It is in media, on TV, magazines. We see and we read. Gradually, we just accept it. Just like now, Taiwanese people are watching so many Korean and Japanese soap operas.

Jason shared the same beliefs as Eric:

[T]hey [his students] are more exposed to the Internet which contains information from different cultures. Nothing to them is shocking anymore, I think. Everything is so available to them.

Interviews with Jason, Jessica, Iris and Katie revealed that they questioned the traditional view of American English and had become more aware of other English-speaking countries such as South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Katie believed that English should be applied to international communication settings when English was the only common language. Katie further gave an example of intercultural communication between Chinese and Japanese or Korean when English was the only communication possible. To Katie, IC is all about the "otherness", not just the Western cultures that are usually associated with the English language.

Iris also emphasised the importance of global culture, namely world culture, in English education by explaining:

[I] would choose to focus on the global village. That would be good to my students. American culture is not enough...if you want to live in this age, you cannot just live in American culture or Taiwanese culture. You need to diversify because we see not only Americans but also many other foreigners, such as Japanese, Koreans, and even Europeans here in Taiwan. We cannot just assume that Americans are the only foreigners that we get to meet.

IC includes not only the ability to deal with people from different cultures but also an adequate amount of knowledge and understanding of one's own culture. Two distinctive characteristics related to cultural self-awareness were identified: 1) Cultural self-awareness does not relate to English teaching and learning, and 2) culture is not emphasised in English classes. Eric, Jason and Jessica explicitly argued that Chinese or Taiwanese culture should only be taught in Chinese or other classes. In Eric's words:

Usually, this is taught in the Chinese classes and we don't have this topic in English classes. Of course, sometimes, we ask our students to compare and explain the differences. In English classes, we seldom teach Chinese things and we don't have to.

Jason emphasised that,

In my classes, I provide the opportunities to clarify on misunderstandings, wrong stereotypes or misconceptualisations whenever they [the students] have doubts. Otherwise, English is simply a tool...I don't deal with cultural self-awareness issues. I believe that they [the students] know themselves better than I do.

To Eric, English classes are supposed to teach English knowledge, with a primary focus on students' language proficiency. Therefore, it was not surprising that some teachers did not see cultural self-awareness topics as their responsibility. Cultural self-awareness does not fit into the curriculum requirement. Most participating teachers agreed that cultural self-awareness is important and that it contributes to one's cultural identity; however, they also revealed that English classes do not discuss or incorporate the learners' host culture.

*Question #2: How do Taiwanese EFL teachers' understandings of intercultural competence influence their self-reported pedagogical practices?*

To answer this question, it is necessary to investigate how EFL teachers teach in their classrooms and their students' reactions towards their classroom practices. The

findings show several themes in the participating EFL teachers' self-reported pedagogical practices: 1) teaching based on textbooks/teaching materials; 2) a lack of emphasis on culture teaching and learning in the curriculum; 3) linguistic skills outweigh all other concerns; 4) multimedia is rarely used to facilitate teaching; 5) the avoidance of unfamiliar cultural topics; and 6) an emphasis on a teacher-centred approach.

Textbooks provide teacher guidelines on what to teach in the classes. Accordingly, textbooks greatly influenced what and how teachers taught in the classroom. Katie, Eric, Iris and Jessica all responded that they taught what was in the textbooks. Textbooks not only created guidelines but also hindered EFL teachers. Eric responded:

We all learn our culture from the textbooks. If culture is written and introduced in the right way, then we receive good culture. Textbooks are important resources for what teacher must cover in the classes. Syllabi are usually written based on textbooks.

Unlike most teachers, Jason did not show a particular concern with textbook selection as he emphasised that, "textbooks play a part in my classes, but I would say that I, as a teacher, am more vital to my students and to what they learn."

Some EFL teachers revealed that the curriculum did not emphasise or prioritise the role of culture in English education in Taiwan. Katie explicitly stated:

For the curriculum in Taiwan, there isn't any single course about culture. The most common way to introduce culture is when students encounter some culture related topics in the books. Then I would talk about what I know and my own experiences. More or less, teachers have either study-abroad or traveling experiences to share with students.

Similar to Katie, Jessica emphasised that she had never been asked to teach culture in her English classes as she said that, "[T]hey [the Department of Applied Foreign Language] have never emphasised that [culture teaching], and test results are usually the concerns." Jason explained:

My job here is to give you language skills that will allow you to explore the world and to develop things you are interested in or curious about...Language is a tool for sharing your thoughts and is a medium of communication. I am sure that culture is part of a language. But, without the linguistic skills, culture cannot be understood.

Iris also explained:

You want to know the culture, you must know the language...for most of the universities in Taiwan, culture is still not considered as important as the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing).

Katie, Jessica, Jason and Iris indicated that linguistic proficiency was what they were supposed to emphasise in their classes.

The participating teachers rarely used multimedia. Classroom teaching primarily involved lecturing on topics from selected textbooks and rarely engaged students in

discussion. The two most common reactions from the perspectives of students from participating EFL teachers' perspectives were the following: 1) students enjoyed cultural related topics; and 2) students enjoyed familiarity with American culture in English education in Taiwan.

Jason explained the phenomena when he described that,

The students usually assume the foreigners here [Taiwan] are from the States [The United States of America]. I believe that the media, especially the Hollywood movies, play such a big part in their life so that they have the perception that the foreigners here they see are Americans.

Iris, Eric, Jessica, Jason and Katie all revealed that their students enjoyed culture-related topics and were motivated to learn more English. The participating EFL teachers believed that their students were generally more familiar with American culture than any other culture of English-speaking countries because of the influence of textbooks, teachers, media, the internet and society in general.

## **RESULTS OF TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS**

Almost all of the participating teachers (Iris, Eric, Jason and Katie) used one textbook for their class and rarely used supplementary materials. None of the participating teachers had a restriction in terms of textbook selection. The reliance on textbooks by the participants highlighted the importance of the cultural content in the textbooks. Appendix C provides an overview of the textbooks used by them. Appendix D gives an overview of the textbook cultural content based on Damen's Evaluation of Cultural Content (1987) (Appendix B).

Textbook content includes several distinctive characteristics: 1) objective cultural content; 2) dominance of American culture and values; 3) emphasis on linguistic skills; and 4) no cultural self-awareness.

Most textbooks abound with cultural background information; however, the cultural content only refers to objective Western culture. Textbook cultural content is too abstract for learners with few contacts with Western culture.

Most cultural content is associated with American values, reflecting the fact that American culture and values dominate most textbooks available on the market. In addition, most textbooks are designed to increase students' language proficiency.

Finally, none of the textbooks contained any information about local culture. In line with EFL teachers' self-reported pedagogical practices, cultural self-awareness was excluded from the textbooks and class discussion.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study highlights the understandings, self-reported pedagogical practices, and student reactions of five HEIT teachers in relation to EFL education in Taiwan. Based

on EFL teachers' self-reported pedagogical practices, intercultural issues did not appear in their teaching. The participating teachers did not teach cultural values that operate in a language. More importantly, EFL teachers did not possess theoretical frameworks for IC, and textbooks primarily dominated and constrained classroom practices. The myth that plagues many participating teachers is that knowledge of other cultures leads to a better understanding of and attitude toward other cultures, while the importance of cultural self-awareness is not recognised. In fact, developing one's IC takes more than knowledge. Because of the difficulty of assessing and evaluating IC, it is often controversial in teaching.

The participating EFL teachers' understandings of IC seemed to remain at a surface level; most of them perceived IC as a phenomenon that develops naturally as a consequence of living in a world of diverse cultures. The lack of complexity was revealed in participating EFL teachers' understandings of IC, and they acknowledged their difficulty in further articulating these concepts. A partial explanation for this may be that IC is considered relatively unimportant in most EFL/ESL teacher education (Kurogi, 1998). Most foreign language teachers are not yet well prepared to incorporate the content of IC into their pedagogical practices as indicated by Paige et al. (1999), Sercu (2005), Yuen and Grossman (2009), and Larzen-Ostermark (2009).

Cultural self-awareness is crucial for a complete understanding of IC. Overemphasising American culture in English might prevent EFL teachers from giving enough attention to cultural self-awareness, a common thread that ran through all EFL teachers' discussions. This over-emphasis on American culture may cause students to lose interest in other cultures and in their own cultures. As globalisation has become widespread, advocates for educational reform argue for a de-emphasis on globalisation and a re-emphasis on localisation, as Huang (2004) has asserted. The results also support Crystal's (2000) suggestion that the global and dominant status of English might diminish that of other languages, especially minority languages. Friedman (2005) describes *glocalisation* as the best competitive advantage that any culture in the world today should possess. Without understanding one's own culture in relation to others, it is difficult to respond to the impacts of globalisation (Friedman, 2005). It is of paramount importance that foreign language acquisition should incorporate learners' host cultures to make learning more relevant to their daily lives.

The findings also showed participating EFL teachers' self-reported pedagogical practices to be teacher-centred. Lecturing occupied most of the class time, and student discussion was rare. Participating EFL teachers did not provide opportunities for their students to reflect on their own experiences. Katie gave a striking example of her intercultural experiences in her English classes as she described her interaction with the local Hakka culture, indicating that integrating learners' host cultures into foreign language courses contributes to student learning. The utilisation of students' daily life experiences also makes IC more comprehensible and relevant to them. English is often used for international encounters when neither party's native language is English (Jenkins, 2000). Jason, Jessica, Katie and Iris emphasised the rising importance of English as a lingua franca, indicating the awareness of otherness in the world. Their perspectives also reflect that the world has been becoming *an entity* as emphasised by Friedman (2005). Further, their perspectives lead to the question of the ownership of English. To Jason, Katie and Iris, English was taken as a tool to help

explore the world around them. If so, intercultural understanding becomes more critical when communication take place for non-native speakers of English.

Several pedagogical implications can be drawn from this study. First, EFL educators should be more aware of the significance of cultural self-awareness in foreign language acquisition. Without a thorough understanding of one's own culture, IC cannot be developed. Language should be viewed as a vehicle for learners to explore the world around them. Second, teachers should act as coordinators and facilitators to guide students' participation in class discussion. Third, teachers should be aware that textbooks merely serve as a tool, and should not be viewed as the only guidance in classes.

Finally, this study does not suggest that IC teaching should override linguistic skills; rather, it addresses the acquisition of language proficiency through IC learning. Attention should be focused on why most participating EFL teachers rejected IC teaching and learning as an integral part of foreign language education even though most of them acknowledged the significance of intercultural understanding in EFL/ESL education. This is in accordance with the results of Sercu (2005), although Sercu used a different method. The remaining challenge is how to infuse intercultural teaching and learning into EFL teachers' belief systems. Only through the exploration of teacher beliefs and a thorough understanding of IC can foreign language education be appropriately and effectively implemented because beliefs are strong indicators of practices as indicated by Borg M. (2001), Borg S. (2003), Pajares (1992) and Bullock (2010). This study identifies the huge gap between the participating EFL teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices as pointed out by Bullock (2010) and Fang (1996). The interview data demonstrated that teacher education should serve as a starting-point for IC awareness. Curricula and textbooks require adaptations to fit in to a local context.

Lustig and Koester (2005) referred to IC as "an art" (p. 200) in the hope that people would use their artistic talents to communicate appropriately and effectively in any setting. In the modern world, the artistic and humanistic traits of respect, mutual understanding and empathy help move us forward to a new era of globalisation.

## LIMITATIONS

Investigating their own conceptual frameworks was difficult for the participants because it involved not only challenging their existing knowledge and beliefs but also recognising their perspectives. Because classroom observation is difficult to conduct, self-reported practices are often the only available descriptions of educators' perceptions in the classroom. Both perspectives are based on participants' subjective understanding, which varies greatly because of background differences. Admittedly, subjectivity is inherent in qualitative research. Therefore, the current research was triangulated with teaching materials and other documents to provide multiple sources of evidence. Finally, this study was conducted mainly in English, in keeping with the choice of the participants, which is neither the investigator's nor the participants' native language. All of the participating teachers (except Jason, who is a native speaker of English) were asked if they were comfortable to have the interviews in English. To minimise the effect of misinterpretation, the transcripts were translated

into Chinese and the back-translated into English. However, the interpretation of language might still create certain misunderstandings that are not easily measured or observed.

## CONCLUSION

As indicated in Sercu's study (2005), "the social, psychological, and environmental realities of the school and classroom" shape and influence teachers' practices (p. 174). Future research could investigate how society, parents, school administrations, faculty members, school culture, and school organisation interact, and to what extent these factors influence teachers' practices. Research into student outcomes regarding their IC and their view of cultural learning in foreign language classes would be fruitful. Comparing research findings with those of teachers would be beneficial because student outcomes are strong indicators of overall educational performance. In sum, more research is needed to provide concrete ways of helping teachers and students deal with IC in the field of EFL/ESL education.

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<sup>1</sup> The data were taken from the author's unpublished dissertation. Ching-Mei Cheng (2007). The Influence of EFL Teachers' understanding of Intercultural Competence on their Self-reported Pedagogical Practices in Higher Education Institutes of Technology in Taiwan. Unpublished dissertation. Minnesota: University of Minnesota.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocols

1. What are Taiwanese EFL teachers' understandings of intercultural competence in English language education?
2. What are the participating EFL teachers' self-reported pedagogical practices?
3. What are students' reactions in classes from participating EFL teachers' perspectives?
4. What are the reasons for students' reactions in classes from participating EFL teachers' perspectives?

## APPENDIX B

### Evaluation of Cultural Content

1. Is the presented information authentic?
  - a) Is it timely?
  - b) Is it fair?
2. If it is problem-oriented, are solutions provided? If so, are they adequate?
3. Is the descriptive vocabulary appropriate? Unbiased?
4. Please list three adjectives which you might use in describing your overall impression of the cultural information presented (adequate, biased, incomplete, boring, limited, comprehensive, mainstream, quaint).
5. If you were using this book, would you delete, change, or supplement any of the cultural material in the text? Give examples.
6. What changes are expected on the part of cultural learners (students)? Are these expectations realistic in view of the type of student for whom the book has been written?
7. Comment on these expectations in view of the multicultural nature of your prospective class (see selection procedures). Would you wish to adjust any of the materials, exercises, or methods for the various cultural groups?

*Note.* From L. Damen. (1987). *Culture learning: The fifth dimension in the language classroom* (p. 275). Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

## APPENDIX C

### Textbooks selected by participating Taiwan EFL teachers

Name of the textbook	Publisher	Authors
<i>Reading for Real: Intermediate</i>	Lynx Publishing	Costantino, M., Corsi, C., Dabbs, T.
<i>Creative Reading Book 2</i>	McMillan	Smallwood, I., Lung, L.
<i>Business Across Cultures</i>	Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.	English, L., Lynn, S.
<i>Essays from Contemporary Culture</i>	Harcourt Brace College Publishers	Ackley, K.
<i>On the Record: Mastering</i>	National Textbook Company	Hughes, R.

<i>Reading and Language Skills with the Newspaper</i>		
<i>Mythology Edith Hamilton</i>	Hsin-Lu Publishing.	
<i>Icon 1: International Communication through English</i>	McGraw Hill	Freeman, D., Graves, K., Lee, L.
<i>Impact Vales</i>	Pearson	Day, R., Yamanaka, J., Shaules, J.
<i>Comprehension Plus</i>	Modern Curriculum Press	Lapp, D., Flood, J.

**Table C1. Textbooks selected by participating Taiwan EFL teachers**

## APPENDIX D

### Evaluation of cultural content in selected textbooks

<b>Name of Textbook</b>	<b>Features of Textbook</b>	<b>Cultural Content</b>
<i>Reading for Real: Intermediate</i>	Designed to strengthen students' comprehension in English by exposing them to a variety of cultural contexts. The book makes real life applications of English. Every unit starts with a pre-reading section, which provides students with information necessary to understand the cultural context of the reading. Most of the cultural content in this textbook is based on the North American life style.	Overall, the cultural content is <i>limited, incomplete and biased</i> . Changes and adjustment are necessary to provide students more balanced views of diverse cultures and a subjective emphasis is also essential.
<i>Creative Reading Book 2</i>	One of the features described in this book is "Becoming aware of intercultural communication and developing intercultural skills". Some units of the book have special sections of intercultural notes, designed to raise learners' intercultural awareness. The twelve units of the book contain diverse cultures around the world. Every unit is designed to bring different perspectives from different cultures.	Overall, the cultural content is <i>adequate, but incomplete</i> . The subjective culture needs to be emphasised explicitly to communicate to learners the significance of culture learning. Therefore, supplementary materials might be needed.
<i>Business Across Cultures</i>	This book explores issues in cross-cultural communication in business settings. As indicated in the book, "the case studies provide students with a realistic context in which cross-cultural misunderstandings occur while also presenting useful business concepts". The ten case studies present learners with different perspectives from different cultures; yet they also emphasise American values. American values are used as a standard of comparison.	Overall, the cultural content is biased and limited because American culture is still viewed as <i>the</i> standard, which is especially critical when EFL learners in Taiwan associate English with American culture. Without clarifying the importance of other cultures, this textbook is somehow misleading.
<i>Essays from Contemporary Culture</i>	This textbook is designed to explore contemporary issues such	Overall, the cultural content is incomplete and limited.

	as affirmative action, political correctness, drug abuse, and other social issues in American society. The textbook encourages readers to reflect on relative issues from their viewpoints. The ten chapters include American values or the so-called North American life style.	Contemporary issues in the United States do not necessarily relate to students' lives in their own contexts. Compensating for this weakness will depend on teachers' experiences and knowledge. However, this textbook is a great source for culture-specific courses.
<i>On the Record: Mastering Reading and Language Skills with the Newspaper</i>	The textbook is designed to develop learners' reading skill from newspapers. The articles chosen are examples of the finest in American journalism.	The textbook is not based on any culture-related topics.
<i>Mythology Edith Hamilton</i>	Ancient Greek and Roman tales of Gods and heroes. The textbook is widely used for literature classes in Taiwan.	Ancient Greek and Roman stories are great sources of culture teaching if teachers know how to relate to learners' real lives. Overall, the cultural content presents in implicit ways.
<i>Icon 1: International Communication through English</i>	The textbook is designed to develop learners' modalities in listening, speaking, reading and writing. The examples shown in Unit 2 are from America, such as the popular talk show, <i>Opera</i> , and the sitcom, <i>Everybody loves Raymond</i> . Cultural content is rare.	The overall cultural content is very limited, boring, and incomplete. The book only shows a few cultural examples, and those examples are limited to American culture. Subjective culture is completely absent in this book.
<i>Impact Vales</i>	The textbook is designed to develop learners' oral communication skills. Only the introduction unit is designed to provide students the concept of World English, which brings different perspectives of what English means to different audiences.	Overall, the cultural content is very limited.
<i>Comprehension Plus Level C</i>	The textbook is designed to develop students' writing and reading skills, and is structured in a way that students learn how to outline, summarize, and paraphrase.	The textbook is not designed based on any cultural context. No cultural content exists.

**Table D1. Features and cultural contents of selected textbooks**