

## **Asynchronous Video-Based Discussion for the Enhancement of Intercultural Competence among Vietnamese non-English Majors**

Thao T. P. Mai (thaomtp@due.udn.vn)

English for Special Purposes Section, University of Economics, The University of Danang, Vietnam

Gunther M. Wiest (gmwiest@gmail.com)

English for Academic and Professional Purposes, ADA University, Azerbaijan

Ngoc D. Nguyen (ngocnd@ptit.edu.vn)

Department of Foreign Languages, Posts and Telecommunications Institute of Technology, Vietnam

### **Abstract**

Aiming for the assessment and development of intercultural competence (IC) in recipients of tertiary education, this research incorporates the usage of Flipgrid, a type of video discussion platform by which we facilitated an online intercultural exchange program among Vietnamese, Azerbaijani, and Chilean non-English major students. Our data collection focuses on Vietnamese students. Tools include questionnaire surveys based on the INCA framework (Byram, 2008) as a quantitative method and in-depth interviews based on those of Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) and Straffon (2003) as a qualitative method. Furthermore, we chose Flipgrid videos for data in our case studies; respondents were already familiar with this platform from the interactive components of our study. Our findings illustrate that the number of students who can develop a system of principles and then refer to them in almost any intercultural encounter is low; this appears to result from the limited scope of the main topic of the intercultural exchange, i.e., the sharing of native language (L1) proverbs in various situations. However, most participants fully respected the beliefs, values, and behavior of peers from other countries as a result of having put themselves in others' positions to understand all aspects of L1-proverb-based discussion. This openness helped Vietnamese students to view the uncertainties arising from intercultural communications as interesting challenges and they resorted to using gestures, paraphrasing, or simplifying their speech, etc., as a way out of difficulty. Moreover, in their comprehensive interview videos, they stated that exposure to accents different from those of their own country had improved their English listening skills, thereby contributing to the interpretation of intercultural experience from the perspectives of both one's own and one's faraway peers' worldviews.

*Keywords:* Intercultural Competence, Intercultural Exchange, Virtual Exchange, Telecollaboration, Flipgrid

## **Introduction**

With the ever-increasing globalization of the 21st century, more people nowadays have both direct and indirect contact with others from diverse language and cultural backgrounds (Fantini, 2009). Besides the impressive number of people studying or traveling abroad, there are ample opportunities for employment overseas. If multinational companies want to guarantee their future success, they must hire interculturally competent employees (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Intercultural competence reveals itself in many different scenarios as an extremely important skill. To be competitive in such an increasingly multicultural society, the mere building up of knowledge of host culture and language is not sufficient for the pre-departure phase (Jackson, 2018). Instead, people need to develop more efficient intercultural communication skills (i.e., intercultural competence (IC)) which will help them to participate in intercultural dialogue or international trade and to deal with the challenges presented by communication barriers such as 'cultural stereotype and prejudice, identity conflict, language deficiency, and the lack of interaction skills' (Dai & Chen, 2014, p.1).

It is therefore critical for language educators to move beyond local experiences and expectations and help learners not only acquire intercultural knowledge but also apply this knowledge to sociocultural contexts so that they can grapple with the interconnectedness of the resultant diversity. Accordingly, this research sought to allow Vietnamese learners of English to experience and reflect on the challenges of intercultural communication via an authentic virtual learning environment. The most fundamental objective was for them to equip themselves with the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in English in a diverse society (ATSEL, 2011, cited in Bickley et al., 2014), thereby experiencing the benefits of enhanced IC.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Definition of Intercultural Competence**

The wide array of terms used to denote intercultural competence and its underlying dimensions confirms the lack of consensus among writers and researchers (Deardorff, 2006, 2011; Fantani, 2009; Griffith et al., 2016), e.g., *multicultural competence*, *global citizenship*, *transnational competence*, *cross-cultural skills*, *intercultural communication*, *intercultural sensitivity*, and *cultural intelligence* (Deardorff, 2012). The usage of these terms depends on the discipline involved. Despite the disagreement of contemporary studies on the definition of IC; there is emerging agreement regarding its fundamental dimensions (Chao, 2014).

Quite succinctly, Sercu (2004) has categorized the definition of IC in terms of the professional and educational domain. In the former, IC includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and traits, through which Chen and Starosta (1996, cited in Sercu, 2004) focus on affective (intercultural sensitivity), cognitive (intercultural awareness), and behavioral (intercultural adroitness) components (Chao, 2014). The synthesis of these three realms allows for IC to be elaborated as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural settings based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006; Muller & Gelbrich, 2001, cited in Ha, 2015; Perry & Southwell, 2011;

Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006). This definition by Deardorff (2006) was also rated highest by a group of 23 international scholars to find a definition of IC which is generally accepted (Deardorff, 2004, cited in Griffith et al, 2016).

However, in the latter, i.e., the educational domain, Byram's definition of IC has long been considered the most applicable and influential in foreign language education (1997, cited in Chao, 2014; Fantini, 2009; Griffith, 2016). Therein, he identified two essential components of competence for being an intercultural speaker: communicative competence in the target language (including linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse) and IC (including attitude, knowledge, skills of interpretation and relating, skills of discovering and interacting, and critical cultural awareness/political education). According to Byram (2008), intercultural attitudes (*savoir être*) refer to one's interest in one's interlocutors' cultures, values, and beliefs and willingness to share their opinions on different topics including withholding judgment about relevant issues; knowledge (*savoirs*) refers to the understanding of how social groups and social identities function and the productions and practices in both one's own and one's interlocutors' country or countries; skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) designate the ability to identify, interpret and explain sources of issues in one's own country, then postulate on the similarities and differences between the two cultures to understand the misunderstandings; skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*) entails a holistic understanding and acquiring of historical, political and social knowledge of a culture, followed by behaviors in accordance with these customs in real-time verbal and nonverbal interactions; and critical cultural awareness/political education (*savoir s'engager*) involves critical interpretation of the values of one's own country and one's interlocutors' cultures. Due to its highly applicable value in foreign language education, the authors of this paper will use this framework in data collection and analysis, following the INCA scales described further in this paper.

### **Assessment of IC using INCA scales and other tools**

In addition to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scales used to assess IC's communicative dimension that is referred in Byram's model (2010) by linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence, the Intercultural Competence Assessment project (INCA) scales were created and developed by Byram and some other researchers to help assess IC. The INCA group applies Byram's subsequent intercultural communicative competence (ICC) model theory while developing its ICC theoretical framework comprising six components of IC (*Tolerance for Ambiguity, Behavioral Flexibility, Communicative Awareness, Knowledge Discovery, Respect for Others, and Empathy*) under three strands (*Openness, Knowledge, and Adaptability*) and three levels (*Basic, Intermediate, and Full*) as seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
*The IC Strands, Components, and Levels in INCA Scales*

<i>Strands</i>	<i>Components</i>	<i>Levels</i>		
		Basic	Intermediate	Full
Openness	Respect for otherness			
	Tolerance of ambiguity			
Knowledge	Knowledge discovery			
	Empathy			
Adaptability	Communicative awareness			
	Behavioral flexibility			

Besides the INCA scales (Byram, 2008), Byram et al. (2009) also created a portfolio assessment model called the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) during collaboration with different educational institutions. The AIE is extremely useful in assessing students' IC via an alternative perspective and it provides more thorough insights into how to understand their perceptions in intercultural settings. The affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of a student's IC are examined and analyzed in this study using the AIE, or what we have referred to with students as 'Autobiography', as a base.

## Method

### Respondents and Procedures

The group studied in this research comprised 40 non-English major students belonging to several faculties of University of Economics, The University of Danang including tourism, accounting, banking, and business management. Among them, 32 were females and eight were males. The percentage of respondents was 75% or 30 students. The research procedure involved having students, via 10 tasks, answer several instructors' questions, share proverbs from their native languages (L1), and discuss the meanings using English as a lingua franca. Soon after, students needed to listen to at least two videos from the other two countries and reply to them (again, by video). The 10 tasks centered on L1 proverb-based discussion points. Unlike other telecollaborative endeavors in which students mutually help each other to learn the other's L1, the participants of our Azerbaijan-Chile-Vietnam (ACV) Exchange were not requested to teach the L1 proverbs they referenced. Any learning of such proverbs by faraway peers was incidental and not central to our study. For these reasons, this paper does not present L1 proverbs referenced by students during the completion of their tasks.

The platform Flipgrid is the vehicle by which students from the three linguistic-cultural groups asynchronously interacted with each other.

### IC Assessment Approaches, Methods, and Tools

Given its complexity, the assessment of student progress in IC warrants certain considerations which consist of optimal pathways for students to demonstrate what they

know and can do (ACTFL 2015, cited in Wilberschied, 2015). It is imperative to combine both indirect and direct evidence, both quantitative and qualitative methods, to measure an individual's intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2011).

Indirect Evidence includes the questionnaires we crafted which asked students to rate their performance according to three levels of the INCA scale: basic, intermediate, and fully competent. Ratings focus on six different dimensions: *Tolerance of Ambiguity*, *Respect for Otherness*, *Knowledge Discovery*, *Empathy*, *Behavior Flexibility*, and lastly, *Communicative Competence* seen via *Openness*, *Knowledge*, and *Adaptability*. Some of the questionnaire items are presented in the forthcoming tables.

Direct Evidence includes the Learning Contracts given to all participants at the beginning of the intercultural exchange program to ensure that they were familiar with the learning objectives such as what would be learned, how it would be learned, and how evidence of learning would emerge. With even more attention, the AIE (Byram et al., 2009) was distributed after the exchange for students to critically reflect on what they had experienced. Via this self-assessment model, they were able to examine their personal opinions and attitudes and relativize them to those of peers in the other two countries, thereby broadening their knowledge of social and cultural issues. Additionally, a semi-structured interview in three case studies was used to elicit data on the nature and development of IC, adding rich layers to the preliminary results of indirect assessments (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Straffon, 2003, cited in Sinicrope et al., 2007).

Drawing on the Works of Fantini and Tirmizi (2006, p. 37) and Straffon (2003), the questions of the interview included the following:

1. What abilities do you think are important towards intercultural success?
2. To what extent did you develop these abilities? Why or why not?
3. Was learning of the English language important to your success? Why or why not?
4. What do you think is more important to pay attention to, cultural differences or cultural similarities?
5. When you encounter a cultural difference, what is your first reaction?

## Results & Discussion

Based on the data for Indirect Evidence collected and analyzed in this study, the levels of IC on which students evaluated themselves were seen to vary by component. These components comprise three interrelated areas distinguished in Byram's model: attitudes (*savoir être*), behavior (*savoir faire/apprendre*), and knowledge (*savoir*) (Byram 1997, p. 34). The most noteworthy revelation of this study is that the students became more aware of their social identities and of diversity among classrooms and communities, which was also observed among foreign language teacher trainers in the research of Akpinar and Unaldi (2014).

**Finding 1. Openness.** Results from Autobiography and Interview segments indicated that despite most of the Vietnamese students' initial shyness about sharing feelings or fears of falling victim to others' prejudice or stereotypes, as indicated by Allport (1979, cited in Byram, 1997), they viewed the telecollaboration as a great opportunity to meet, chat, and discuss life with friendly, fun-loving, and humorous people from Azerbaijan and Chile. According to the three completed case studies, every attribute

of positive attitude (e.g., curiosity, interest, respect for otherness, tolerance for ambiguity) lays an important foundation for successful interactions. For these students, curiosity, and interest in discovering new cultures fueled a motivation to discover about otherness, which entails encountering different values and beliefs from one's own and then seeing how they make sense as part of a different system of perceiving our world. Participant questionnaires also confirmed this finding with 83.3%, the highest rate, agreeing that they fully respect the beliefs, values, and behavior from other countries, as seen in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Openness (Respect for Otherness)*

Domains/Levels of Competence		Basic	Intermediate	Full
<i>Openness</i>	<i>Respect for Otherness</i>	3.4%	13.3%	83.3%
		Sometimes I may jump to conclusions about different behavior that I later realize are not entirely correct.	I react neutrally to cultural differences, rather than hastily categorizing them as good or bad.	I fully respect the right of those from other cultures to have different values from my own and can see how these values make sense as part of a way of thinking.

Owing to their considerable *Respect for Otherness*, they are more open to the perspectives of others and are more willing to relativize their values, beliefs, and behavior. The capacity and willingness to cast aside ethnocentric attitudes and perceptions (*savoir être*) (Sercu, 2005) or to 'decenter' (Kohlberg et al., 1983, cited in Byram, 1997) is considered the fundamental basis of the intercultural development process (Alfred et al., 2003; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2011). In this case, according to the INCA theory, they are ready to suspend belief about the naturalness of their own culture and consider the naturalness of others (Byram, 1997).

**Table 3**  
*Openness (Tolerance of Ambiguity)*

Domains/Levels of Competence		Basic	Intermediate	Full
<i>Openness</i>	<i>Tolerance of Ambiguity</i>	33.3%	66.7%	0%
		When uncertainty arises from cultural differences, I adopt a tolerant attitude as long as the issue is not a sensitive one for me.	I now see the uncertainties that can arise from intercultural encounters as an interesting challenge, provided that the issues involved are not sensitive for me.	I am aware of ways of coping with ambiguous situations even when these give rise to inner moral conflicts that are serious for me.

As for *Tolerance of Ambiguity*, participants acknowledged the prevalence of ambiguity resulting from exposure to the different accents of foreign interlocutors, as opposed to those of their compatriots, and the subsequent, unavoidable misunderstandings in their intercultural interactions. Although none of the questionnaire respondents chose the full competence category, thus indicating that they are not aware

of how to cope with ambiguous situations when even moral dilemmas arise (which further illustrates that they are not able problem solvers or intercultural learners (Sercu, 2004), findings from their Autobiography revealed the opposite. Also seen in Table 3, most participants considered the uncertainties arising from intercultural communications as an interesting challenge (66.7%) and rely on constructive solutions to ambiguous situations such as gestures, paraphrasing, or simplifying what they have said. Moreover, when there was any lack of clarity, some students opted to search on the Internet or ask their friends, thereby finding information related to the issue at hand, understanding it, and reducing embarrassment in communication. On one hand, these strategies contributed to students' interpretations of intercultural experience from the perspectives of both one's own and one's faraway peers' worldviews. On the other hand, they exemplified students' skills concerning the *savoir apprendre* or *savoir comprendre* dimensions of IC by Byram (1997).

We authors agree that successful interaction in intercultural communication depends largely on attitudinal factors which concern the attitudes held toward people who are perceived as different in respect to the cultural symbolism, beliefs, and behavior that they exhibit (Byram, 1997). This also manifests itself in Hofstede's unique analysis that IC starts with awareness, grows with knowledge, and is completed with skills (Ashwill & Duong, 2016; Leon, 2014). Being open to the perspectives of others may, besides prompting a transformation in behavior, lead to a wider worldview (Paran & Sercu, 2010). This helps multinational users of Flipgrid to gain knowledge about certain cultural groups and to interact effectively with them, which will be subsequently discussed.

**Finding 2. Knowledge.** In this online, intercultural exchange program environment, those in the process of acquiring an intercultural perspective were drawn into contact with the interactive nature of language and culture instead of the mastery of grammatical rules and linguistic conventions (Alfred et al., 2003). Learners were summoned to rely on existing knowledge of their cultures, acquired both consciously and subconsciously through primary and secondary socialization (i.e., largely in the family and in the formal education), to unravel the meanings of both L1 and foreign language (L2) proverbs and to discover the inner resources that lead to refining as well as extending their knowledge (Byram, 1997). Additionally, knowledge about other countries and identities brought to the interaction by interlocution was presented in contrast to the stories from a student's nation, with a similar or different interpretation of the stories told between two or three foreign nationals. Participants seem to have enjoyed learning about proverbs from afar and comparing L1 and L2 nuggets of wisdom.

However, upon being questioned extensively during the Interview stage, the three participating students admitted that their knowledge involving the national culture or social identities as well as that of the shared beliefs, symbolism, and behaviors of these different groups had not improved dramatically. They commented that the topics were not varied, but involved only wisdom, morals, and traditional views, i.e., the advice on different situations handed down from our ancestors, however void of various other aspects of culture. This concurs with the responses to questionnaires, of which very few students had developed a deep understanding of the cultures they had interacted with or acquired a system of principles to be reliably applied to almost any intercultural encounter in the future, cf., the full competence category of Table 4 which draws upon 10 tasks spread over six weeks (a mere 10% and 6.6%, respectively).

**Table 4**  
*Knowledge (Knowledge Discovery)*

Domains/Levels of Competence		Basic	Intermediate	Full
<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Knowledge Discovery 1</i>	20%	70%	10%
		I have some general knowledge about the cultures of those I work with. This knowledge consists of facts that are not always connected and I don't yet have an overall picture of the relevant cultures.	I take the trouble to find out about the cultures I am likely to be working with, paying attention not only to isolated facts but to values, customs, and practices common in those cultures.	I have a deep understanding of the cultures I encounter frequently. When involved in new intercultural situations I strive to acquire the best possible available knowledge and understanding both through prior research and by seeking regular clarification within the group.
	<i>Knowledge Discovery 2</i>	66.7%	26.7%	6.6%
		I learn from intercultural experiences and add to my previous knowledge.	When I experience new values, customs, and practices I use the knowledge to develop into an overall system of principles.	I have acquired a system of principles that can be applied reliably to almost any intercultural encounter.

The sharing (not 'teaching') of proverbs was envisioned by the authors of this study as a great way for participants to uncover the cultural values and beliefs of their society (Mieder, 2004, cited in Hirotani & Fujii, 2019; Moeller & Nugent, 2014), and to explore the attitudes of those from another. Every student had a chance to complete a variety of tasks whose content was related to different situations covering family, friendship, teamwork, togetherness, issues now outdated in the 21st century, etc. Due to constraints of time and scope, students might have not interacted with and responded to as many Flipgrid videos from faraway peers as they would have liked. Likewise, they touched upon L1 proverbs and related topics, but such less-than-ideal interactions may have led to students' not having a deep understanding of the two other participating cultures, as indicated in Table 4 and explained above by the authors. However, 66.7% rated themselves as being at a basic level or able to learn about the other nationals' symbols, heroes, and rituals, which bolstered their previous knowledge. Moreover, 70% reported an inclination to pay attention to the values, customs, and practices common in other cultures, thereby visualizing a complete picture of those values rather than only isolated facts. The Autobiography also revealed that some students had noted down new cultural information related to otherness, using it to facilitate contact with 'other nationals'. They also claimed it to be effective in the acquisition of intercultural knowledge as well as linguistic elements. Although increased ease with linguistic rules is not the main purpose of building IC (in contrast to ICC), this intercultural exchange program also benefited from such language skills as listening, speaking, and vocabulary. In short, while they thought that they could not learn deeply about the others' cultures, they were able at the

very least to obtain an intellectual grasp of where their values differ from those of their peers (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004, cited in Ashwill & Duong, 2009) in addition to developing their language skills in English, the lingua franca of the exchange. Another aspect of the knowledge category, empathy, will be analyzed below.

**Table 5**  
*Knowledge (Empathy)*

Domains/Levels of Competence		Basic	Intermediate	Full
<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Empathy</i>	3.4%	23.3%	73.3%
		Although I often find culturally different behavior curious, I try to make allowances for it.	I have developed a mental checklist of how others may perceive, feel, and respond differently to a range of routine circumstances. This supports my concern to put others at ease and avoid upsetting them.	I often imagine myself in the place of those from different cultures when trying to understand all aspects of a work problem. This supports my spontaneous concern that others in the group should receive fair treatment and consideration.

As can be seen in Table 5, over two-thirds of students stepped outside the boundaries of their self-awareness and imaginatively entered the world of another person to understand different perspectives on the mutual understanding between themselves and their peers, which shows a high degree of intercultural empathy. In this case, as found in the Autobiography, they carefully observed faraway fellow participants of the exchange, noticing emotions that were hardly made explicit, and they were able to understand them (Byram, 1997). The Vietnamese students noticed their counterparts' gestures, behaviors, utterances, and responses to anticipate their feelings, and they made an effort to avoid rubbing anyone the wrong way. Some even perceived their interlocutors' interests by taking note of what and how they asked about Vietnamese culture/cultures and then shared similarities and differences among Vietnamese realities and their own. Although some students here did not even know what their dialogue partners thought, most of them could feel the delight and surprise, albeit slight nervousness, from others based on the friendly, enthusiastic, lively, exciting, and comfortable ambiance in their interactions. This further motivated them to talk and share a lot about Vietnam and cultural realia. This replaced the timidity and embarrassment felt at the beginning of the project which stemmed from the fact that many Vietnamese students are not sufficiently confident in their values and beliefs (Ashwill & Duong, 2009) or their English language competence in comparison to English language learners from other countries. Additionally, some posited that the exchange might turn out to be an unpleasant experience for them and the other two nationalities since all three had previously never been in such an arrangement. Nevertheless, the exchange was seen in the end as a wonderful chance for meeting, sharing, and discovering among Eastern and Western cultures despite different time zones and social identities. This demonstrates that they had in effect put themselves in other nationals' shoes to interpret, predict, and describe the views and sentiments of others (Calloway-Thomas et al., 2017).

Summarily, *Respect for Otherness* is a basic condition for successful interaction, yet the skills needed for taking on other perspectives, for describing what others feel in certain situations after diligent observation of those others, and for noticing the emotions that are hardly made explicit (in other words, empathy) are also necessary for this attitudinal factor to be complete (as indicated in the INCA theory). Empathy, again, can be asserted as the sentiment most crucial to the potential to alter what we do interculturally, and this is especially so in higher education (Calloway-Thomas et al., 2017).

**Finding 3. Adaptability.** Regarding *Knowledge Discovery* in Table 4 (*Knowledge Discovery 2*), only a few students (6.6%) claimed to have acquired a system of principles to be reliably applied to any intercultural encounter. This coincides with the low number of students who are confident enough to recognize and develop their communication strategies to prevent, solve, or mediate problems from language differences or any other conventions (10%), categorized as full competence as can be seen in *Behavior Flexibility 3* of Table 6 below. Just slightly higher with 16.7% of the same component at the basic level, they tend to take part in unsystematic modes of communication with the hope that other partners will adapt. 43.3% of students tend to take a passive role when any confusion arises (at the basic level in *Behavior Flexibility 1*) since they have not developed any plan for reacting to events. Despite any lack of inner confidence, 73.3% (*Behavior Flexibility 3*) are seen to seek every possible way to minimize the risk of offending others' feelings.

**Table 6**  
*Adaptability (Behavior Flexibility)*

Domains/Levels of Competence		Basic	Intermediate	Full
<i>Adaptability</i>	<i>Behavior Flexibility 1</i>	43.3%	20%	36.7%
		I learn bit by bit the best ways of behaving but have not yet arrived at underlying principles and do not have a plan for reacting to events. When a situation becomes confusing, I tend to take a passive role.	My behavior is now influenced by principles that guide me and I often plan for eventualities, including ambiguous situations.	When ambiguous situations arise, I can usually clarify or otherwise deal with them to the benefit of the group.
	<i>Behavior Flexibility 2</i>	13.3%	53.3%	33.3%
		I take events as they come, doing what seems right at the time.	I adapt my behavior in new situations, taking account of lessons learnt in previous intercultural situations. I sometimes adopt the behavior patterns of others, rather than waiting for them to adopt mine.	I make use of my knowledge and understanding to tactfully inform, support, and encourage others in an intercultural group. I consistently adopt behavior that minimizes the risk of offending or hurting others' feelings.

		16.7%	73.3%	10%
	<i>Behavior Flexibility</i> 3	When people communicate in ways I do not understand, I try in an unsystematic way to take part, but hope that they will eventually adapt to the way I communicate.	I seek to achieve good communication both by making my own conventions clearer and by adopting those of others. When there is, or might be, a problem with communication, I quite often find ways around it, e.g., using gestures, re-explaining, simplifying, etc.	I use my communication strategies to prevent, solve, and mediate problems arising from differences in language or other communication conventions.

In addition to the constraints of insufficient time for exposure to different aspects of foreign culture further leading to students' perception that they had not gained enough knowledge to systemize the deep cultural patterns of the other countries, as mentioned earlier, these very students felt a lack of the confidence needed for taking an active role when interacting with 'other nationals'. Moreover, a second, more sociological dimension seems to be warranted to account for religious and philosophical backgrounds and differences among intercultural exchange participants.

The Confucian view of language, i.e., the full scope of Confucian perspectives on human emotions relating to the cultivation of virtue and moral character, the establishment of society, and the overall view of the universe is one of many intellectual resources of Asian culture in which Vietnam is rooted (Chang, 2008, cited in Nakayama & Halualani, 2010). In addition, the Buddhist teaching of righteous speech and its moral implications for verbal communication are de facto guidelines for patterns and practices of Vietnamese-style speech in which (1) good communication should be de-linked with falsehoods of any sort, (2) slander and callousness leading to friction and hostility among people are discouraged, (3) the absence and refraining from the usage of harsh language are presupposed, and (4) speakers are encouraged to desist from frivolous and idle chatter and to embrace purposeful and productive speech (Dissnayake, 2003, cited in Nakayama & Halualani, 2010, p. 205). Although Dissnayake elucidated that there have not been enough theoretical investigations into the extent of compatibility of Buddhist ethics of good speech with contemporary Asian public speakers, Mai and Nguyen, two authors of this paper who have been living in the cradle of Vietnamese cultural values and beliefs, feel that Confucianism and Buddhism have dramatically affected and continue to affect the way Vietnamese people think and operate (Nguyen, 2002). This is similar to realities for the Chinese, as reflected in studies by Li and Moreira (2009), and Guang (2013). Thus, the humbleness resulting from the Confucian and Buddhist ethics of righteous speech has affected the percentages in the tables previously presented, and so have Asian (and more precisely, Vietnamese) efforts and precautions taken for not hurting others via one's speech.

**Table 7**  
*Adaptability (Communicative Awareness)*

Domains/Levels of Competence		Basic	Intermediate	Full
<i>Adaptability</i>	<i>Communicative Awareness</i>	53.3%	26.7%	20%
		I know that others may communicate in ways I am not familiar with.	I am aware of a number of useful strategies for dealing with common communication problems.	I have a good overall understanding of the kinds of communicative difficulties that can arise in an intercultural context and of a wide range of strategies for resolving them.

Over half of the participants under focus accepted the differences in communicative conventions among different countries as a result of unfamiliarity with the ways that their faraway peers communicate in daily life. These everyday differences stem from the history, national values, and prevailing views of one's country, its relationship to others, and its place in the world (Ashwill & Duong, 2016). Over a long period in the past, Vietnam experienced extensive aggression and colonization by many countries, including both Western and Asian empires (Miike, 2010, cited in Nakayama & Halualani, 2010). On a positive note, however, the same country has had intercultural contacts with different peoples, ideas, and products from many different communities. Resulting from national and local history as well as religion and philosophy as mentioned earlier, Vietnamese students are quite sensitive to potential difficulties in real communication with outsiders. Not surprisingly in this international telecollaboration, all or the vast majority of Vietnamese participants respected, accepted, and dealt with problems emerging from various interactions.

Later on, in the Interview stage, one student remarked on the considerable problem created from language barriers, since the lower the level of English, the less understanding among the three cultures, i.e., of Vietnam, Azerbaijan, and Chile. In fact, due to first time exposure to different accents in English of the three non-native nationals and the different levels of English language competence, many students found it challenging to understand all that their counterparts had said in their Flipgrid videos. Consequently, they used a variety of strategies to adapt to different levels of foreign language competence (accounting for 46.7% of the communicative awareness), e.g., by simplifying utterances or aiming for clearer articulation, which is indicative of an ability to use real-time knowledge, skills, and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture, as claimed by Byram (1997).

Regarding how their faraway peers communicated or the cultural beliefs, meanings, and behaviors that they brought to interactions, each student of our three case studies had a different perspective. While latent similarities among the three cultures helped these students find it easier to interpret and understand others, leading to the enhancement of empathy among them, it is the differences that impacted their attitudes towards communicative awareness. On one hand, they respected the others and on the other hand, they felt motivated and stimulated by curiosity to find out more about otherness. They tried to avoid giving out biased articulation by keeping rather silent at first; their subsequent observations and development of strategies to deal with

communication difficulties lead them to intercultural experiences which were much more positive than negative.

## **Conclusion**

This study describes and discusses the influence of an intercultural, online exchange program for equipping non-English major university students with the intercultural competence paramount to 21st-century education (Yeh & Wan, 2018). Overall, our Azerbaijan-Chile-Vietnam (ACV) Exchange on the user-friendly and educationally meritorious Flipgrid platform has facilitated Vietnamese students' development of intercultural competence (IC) via six different components, with noticeable variance. A high proportion of students realized the relevance of their attitudes towards the success of any intercultural encounter. In addition, the ability to interpret and understand other cultural perspectives to deal with ambiguous situations was reflected in their flexibility of behavior, successfully situating them between their own culture and language and those of the other two groups. Each task of the exchange was extremely useful for guiding language learners into new roles as intercultural speakers.

As evidenced in our study, language educators should explicitly identify characteristics of IC, in turn prioritizing clear learning objectives that prepare students to communicate openly and build intercultural relationships so that they can thrive in almost any host culture (Moeller & Nugent, 2014). More specifically, they should integrate into their curriculum the exposure to various cultures, the fostering of an environment of curiosity and inquiry, and the guidance of learners toward IC via various online or face-to-face intercultural exchange activities to train them in terms of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and both discourse and intercultural competence. We advise educators to familiarize themselves with and take advantage of the myriad of opportunities for IC provided by online platforms because such innovations enable virtual contact when face-to-face contact is not feasible. Our ACV Exchange was designed to include the nationals of three distinct linguo-cultural groups. We recommend the inclusion of three such groups because it counteracts the possibility of an 'us versus them' reaction which might result from an exchange between only two groups. Due to differences in time zones, academic schedules, and other, perhaps unforeseeable issues, platforms built for asynchronous rather than a synchronous exchange, such as Flipgrid, seem most suited for such exchanges leading to enhanced IC among students.

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## Note

Thao T. P. Mai  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5338-9572>  
 Gunther M. Wiest  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2907-4893>  
 Ngoc D. Nguyen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9452-9156>  
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Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Thao T. P. Mai, Lecturer of English, English for Specific Purposes Section, University of Economics, The University of Danang, 71 Ngu Hanh Son St., Danang, Vietnam, 50000. Email: thaomtp@due.udn.vn

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