

“I know how to behave appropriately in multiple contexts”: Vietnamese L2 learners’ perceptions of intercultural intelligence enhancement via Skype-mediated course

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Abstract

The emergence of technology has facilitated the process of training L2 learners to be fluent in the target language and intelligent in the target culture. Nevertheless, L2 learners in different contexts still fail to function appropriately and effectively in multicultural contexts although they possess a good level of language proficiency. This mixed-methods study aims to explore Vietnamese L2 learners’ perceptions of intercultural intelligence (ICI) enhancement via Skype-mediated course (SMC). One hundred and seventy 170 Vietnamese L2 learners partook in responding to the questionnaire, and ten of them were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview. The questionnaire-based data were processed by the SPSS software in terms of descriptive statistics, while the interview-based data were thematically analyzed. This study unpacked that Vietnamese L2 learners perceived that the SMC was effective in enhancing their ICI. Specifically, they believed that they could improve not only their language competence but also their intercultural metacognition, cognition, affection, and behavior. It is hoped that these preliminary findings would contribute to the body of literature in terms of the use of Skype to enhance learners’ ICI and suggest pedagogical implications for the enhancement of learners’ ICI.

Keywords: intercultural intelligence, L2, language competence, mixed method design, Skype

Introduction

Scholars (e.g., Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Zhang, 2010) have confirmed the strong interconnection between language and culture. For example, Agar (1994) mentions that culture is embedded in language, and language reflects its culture. Likewise, Kramsch (1998) refers to language as a reflection, embodiment, and symbol of cultural reality. Furthermore, Zhang (2010) asserts that language and culture are widely recognized as being interdependent but closely related. Therefore, the teaching and learning of culture cannot be excluded in the second or foreign language teaching and learning. Accordingly, Tomalin (2008) argues that the teaching of cultural competencies should be considered an integral aspect of language instruction. In the same vein, Mahmoud (2015) contends that incorporating cultural knowledge and values into language teaching and learning is an essential prerequisite for developing language proficiency.

Within the context of globalization, the English language has been used and considered an international language or a lingua franca for communication by people of diverse and multilingual

backgrounds (Tran, 2017; Tran & Duong, 2018; Tran et al., 2022; Tran & Seepho, 2016, 2017). That is why English users are supposed to know different cultures in order to interact with others appropriately and effectively in multicultural situations. Tran and Seepho (2017) postulate that the English language teaching and learning is supposed to transcend the teaching and learning of the target cultures, and ESL/EFL learners should learn not only the cultures of English-speaking countries but also those of non-English speaking ones. This means that ESL/EFL learners should be both fluent in English and intelligent in cultures. Therefore, it is important for English language teachers to equip their learners with intercultural intelligence (ICI) so that learners can function appropriately and effectively in different intercultural contexts.

In the context of Vietnam, the English language, one of the foreign languages, is taught as a compulsory subject from the primary level to the tertiary one. As Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training has officially stated one of the objectives of the new general curriculum for English language education is to provide students with (1) a deep knowledge of the target countries/cultures and other countries/cultures worldwide, (2) a better appreciation of cultural differences and diversities; and (3) an initial reflection of the values of Vietnam cultures (MOET, 2018), it is observed that the embedding of different cultures in English language teaching has been prevalent, which aims to train learners to be fluent in English and intelligent in interculture (Tran & Vong, 2021). Nevertheless, with the limitations of the traditional teaching modality in an EFL context like Vietnam, students are instructed on how to use English only in the classroom. It seems that many students are able to communicate with their peers well, but they fail to achieve the communicative goals in real life since what they have gained in terms of English proficiency and culture cannot go beyond the classroom. Additionally, the English language teaching is basically conducted by Vietnamese teachers, and learners do not have many opportunities to interact with foreigners in both class and real life. Therefore, it is noticed that a number of students cannot interact with others appropriately and effectively in multicultural contexts.

The emergence of technology has facilitated the general education as well as the English language teaching and learning (Duong et al., 2021; Tran & Hoang, 2022; Tran & Duong, 2022). E-learning has increasingly become a prevalent teaching and learning modality which transcends the boundary of the traditional classroom. Tamm (2019) identifies that e-learning has enormous benefits over conventional teaching and learning techniques. It gives both teachers and learners the option to create teaching and learning activities in virtual classrooms, allowing them to select their own teaching and learning environments, and it benefits learners from self-paced learning or personalized learning. Furthermore, e-learning is also more affordable since it removes the geographic restrictions which are typically connected to conventional classrooms and education. In the era of technological advances, there are several prominent online educational apps and social networks deployed as effective learning platforms for learning foreign languages in general and the English language in particular, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and so on. The great advantage of these services is that they are free to use and accessible via various gadgets such as computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011). Skype, a Web 2.0 tool, has become a popular and effective application for online communication through video-conferencing tools and information exchange via a chat window, and it has been used in a variety of levels of education (Foote, 2008; Messner, 2010). Other advantages of using Skype are that students are allowed to interact and share different learning items with other students, teachers, or experts like lessons, useful information, bright ideas, and cultural contents (Melnyk, 2016). In addition, Skype is a beneficial and efficient voice communication tool for English teaching and learning (Raman &

Krishnasamy, 2015), and it can help learners communicate with inhabitants from diverse cultural and ethnic contexts, which results in the improvement in learners' English proficiency, awareness and appreciation of cultural differences (Coverdale-Jones, 2000). Within the context of Vietnam, although the use of different social networks has been extensively exploited for the purpose of English language teaching and learning as well as (inter)cultural understanding (e.g., Duong & Tran, 2023; Le & Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020; Nguyen & Phan, 2019), the deployment of Skype to enhance L2 learners' intercultural intelligence is still scarce.

With the aforementioned rationale, a Skype-mediated course (SMC) was designed to enhance Vietnamese L2 learners' ICI. Nevertheless, this study delimits itself to the exploration of learners' perceptions rather than testing the effectiveness of SMC. To that void, this study endeavors to examine Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of ICI enhancement via SMC. It sets to address the following research question:

- What are Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of ICI enhancement via SMC?

It is expected that the preliminary findings of this study may contribute its part to the body of literature in terms of the effectiveness of Skype on L2 learners' ICI enhancement and provide an understanding of the significant effects of Skype in English language teaching and learning, which will shed light on future studies in this area. Besides, this study is hoped to provide stakeholders (e.g., teachers, learners, and administrators) with a useful reference in terms of using Skype to enhance L2 learners' English proficiency as well as intercultural competence.

Literature review

Definition and components of ICI

The definition and components of ICI have been found in the body of literature. For instance, Peterson (2004) describes ICI as the capacity to engage in cultural behaviors by the use of language or interpersonal skills as well as aptitudes like flexibility or ambiguity tolerance which are suitably adapted to individuals' unique perspectives, competences, cultural values, and attitudes toward the world through communicative activities. Likewise, Urnaut (2014) defines ICI as a set of capabilities to work efficiently in various cultural settings, and he asserts that ICI is composed of four components, namely metacognition, cognition, motivation, and behavior. The first component of ICI is the metacognitive dimension which correlates with individuals' cultural understanding and comprehension during contact with diverse cultures and is exclusively seen as a decisive component for fostering critical thinking about people and circumstances in an unfamiliar world (Ang et al., 2007). Secondly, understanding of values, attitudes, tendencies, and customs of other cultures acquired via individual learning and practicing is reflected in the cognitive component (Rose et al., 2010). The third component is the motivational dimension which refers to one's capacity to focus attention and effort on thinking and acting in various cultural contexts (Urnaut, 2014). Individuals need the motivational dimension to adapt to different norms and cultural values and have interest and curiosity to avoid ambiguities and misunderstandings (Tuleja, 2014). Fourthly, the behavioral dimension conceptualizes the ability to express appropriate verbal and nonverbal reactions when engaging with people from diverse cultures (Ang et al., 2007). It is seen that people with a high degree of ICI have a variety of strategies and directions when confronting new viewpoints and unfamiliar behaviors (Sousa et al., 2019). These dimensions have significant relationships. Metacognitive and cognitive components are related to

cultural analysis and judgment, whereas motivational and behavioral features concentrate on cross-cultural adjustment, and metacognitive and behavioral characteristics influence task effectiveness (Urnaut, 2014). Similarly, Portera (2014) delineates ICI as a set of attitudes of openness, curiosity, and respect; the capacity to observe, understand, and learn about one's own culture as well as other cultures; skills of adapting and empathy; and awareness and knowledge about similarities and differences which enable an individual to manage relationships adequately and effectively with people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Within this study, ICI is understood as the capability to get engaged and appropriately and effectively function in multicultural situations, and it has one more component (English English competence) apart from four components, viz. intercultural cognition, metacognition, affection, and behavior. The SMC aims at enhancing L2 learners' ICI in a virtual learning modality in which learners have to interact with foreigners in English; therefore, the purpose of enhancing L2 learners' ICI in the SMC transcends the scope of ICI's components.

Teaching and learning activities for ICI enhancement

Based on the ICI's components, the teaching and learning activities to enhance learners' ICI are created appropriately and flexibly. Noticeably, before offering favorable opportunities for enhancing ICI, it is necessary to generate a secure and pleasant communication setting that fosters honesty, cooperation, protection, and kindness so that all learners will feel more comfortable enough to participate openly and comprehensively (e.g., Lee & Greene, 2004; James & Shammas, 2013; Hiasat, 2019). Here is a summary of some of the activities used in the SMC:

Providing developmentally scaffolded activities is extremely essential. It is acknowledged that based on learners' language and diverse cultural knowledge, they are encouraged to use the English language to explore intercultural information, compare their home cultures with other cultures, and reflect on their own experiences and judgments about what they think (Vo, 2017). Below are examples of scaffolded tasks to explore how students view and appreciate their own and others' cultures.

- *Cultural objects*: Learners will select cultural objects such as flags, languages, money, cuisines, heroic statues, traditional costumes, etc. from their own culture or from other cultures and create a short discussion or presentation to describe the visible and hidden elements based on the iceberg metaphor. This activity aims to reinforce students' sense of national identity and awareness of cultural values (e.g., James & Shammas, 2013; Hiasat, 2019).
- *Intercultural conflicts*: Learners will explore current intercultural conflicts and shock, and analyze them based on their cultural self-awareness and identity. They might choose and analyze some of the topics such as dress code, languages, customs and habits, cultural behavior, intercultural marriages, transport culture, sculpture, heritages, etc.. In addition, based on their knowledge and practical experience, they can recognize and convey intercultural conflicts. Most importantly, they can explore approaches to conflict resolutions that arise from cultural diversity (Hiasat, 2019).
- *Intensive discussion and collaboration*: Learners will get engaged in a variety of collaborative learning tasks and discussions with their teamwork (Hiasat, 2019).

Previous studies

Prior studies on learners' ICI have been found in different contexts. Internationally, James and Shammass (2013) examined a course designed to foster the ICI of business students at Higher Colleges of Technology - Dubai, United Arab Emirates. They conducted a quasi-experiment within 16 weeks, and they employed interviews to collect data. The study findings revealed that research participants could increase their intercultural knowledge, self-consciousness, and comprehension after attending the course. Shomoossi et al. (2019) carried out a study to investigate 136 employees' ICI in interaction with students in the context of Iran. The participants completed the questionnaire. The results were that the level of ICI was various in research participants of different working sections, and their level of education had impacts on their intercultural encounters. Within the context of Vietnam, there is a scarcity of studies on learners' ICI, but some studies on learners' intercultural communication skills have been found. For instance, Cao (2017) conducted a survey with 120 English majors at Hue University of Foreign Languages, Vietnam to investigate students' perceptions and opinions on teaching intercultural competence to EFL students in American culture classes. The findings showed that students were aware of culture's importance in boosting their intercultural competence regardless of their incomplete perception of the correlation between language and culture. Le and Nguyen (2018) undertook a study on Viet-Skype's practical model of virtual conversations via Skype and an initial assessment of its effects on students' intercultural communication competence. Forty participants (including 20 native and non-native English-speaking people who worked in the education field and 20 English majors from a Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam) were chosen to take a 12-week and 12-topic course. All of the students' journals and recorded videos were gathered for assessment and analysis. It was found out that students showed greater improvements in their overall intercultural communication competence thanks to their conversations with foreign participants via Skype. In brief, it is noticed that although ICI has been internationally researched, it is still alien to the context of Vietnam. This is considered a research gap to be filled in. To this end, this study aims to explore Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of ICI enhancement via SMC.

Methodology

Research design

The convergent mixed-methods design, which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, was adopted to collect L2 learners' perceptions of ICI enhancement via SMC. It utilized two research instruments (closed-ended questionnaire & semi-structured interview) for data collection. It is unsatisfactory when the study employs either a quantitative or qualitative approach to solve the study problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, both types of quantitative and qualitative data can triangulate one another for accurate and verified findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Training course

The training course was an SMC which was an extra English class in which Skype was embedded as the main learning modality. This online course took place in the context of Vietnam. The SMC lasted 14 weeks, and learners had to take two 90-minute sessions each week (28 sessions in total). The main textbook was Solutions (Pre-intermediate, Third Edition, Oxford University

Press). The textbook contains nine units featuring vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speaking, reading, listening, and reading. Additionally, apart from the cultural lessons (the British, Robinson Crusoe, Screen exports, the English language, British entrepreneurs, Alcatraz, Wall Street, Sherlock Homes, Computer pioneers) in the textbook, additional cultural materials (greetings, foods, drinks, festivities, customs, religion, family, rules of conduct, & educational systems) about both non-English and English-speaking countries were added. Learners were supposed to learn each unit within three sessions. They learned vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, reading, listening, and reading in the first two sessions, and they learned speaking, culture, and additional cultural material in the last session. Foreigners from different countries (UK, India, South Africa, Philippines, Taiwan, Cambodia, Nigeria, Indonesia, Myanmar, & France) were invited as guest speakers to partake in the last session of each unit. Learners were required to interact with foreigners, and foreigners were asked to present their culture in relation to the learned cultural topic. Besides, learners were required to interact with foreigners using Video chat, and voice and text messaging at their convenient time.

Research participants

The convenience sampling method was adopted to recruit 170 L2 learners who all had taken and finished the SMC and were in their first and second year from one university located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. All learners took English courses at their institution and joined the SMC as an extra English class to improve their English proficiency. Their English proficiency was at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels. Of 170 learners, there were 109 male learners, taking a proportion of 51.9%, and 61 female learners, responsible for 29%. The research participants' age was 18 (26.7%), 19 (17.6%), and over 19 (36.7%). Additionally, only 28.1% and 15.7% of the research participants had experience in learning English for three to seven years and less than three years, respectively, compared to 37.1% who have studied English for over seven years. Regarding English self-study, the majority (67.6%) of participants dedicated less than an hour daily, while 50 (29.4%) participants allocated 1-1.5 hours per day, and only five (3.0%) spent 1.5-2 hours self-studying English. Among 170 learners, ten of them partook in interviews voluntarily.

Research instruments

To collect data, two research instruments, namely questionnaire and interview, were employed. Based on the theoretical framework, the closed-ended questionnaire was designed, and it consists of two main parts: Part A seeks the background information of the research participants; Part B asks for participants' perceptions of the use of the SMC to enhance their ICI. Part B consists of 30 items divided into five sections: English language competence (7 items), intercultural cognition (10 items), intercultural metacognition (4 items), intercultural affection (5 items), and intercultural behavior (4 items). All items were designed with a five-point Likert-like scale from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. As the questionnaire was based on the theoretical framework, the confirmatory factor analysis was run to check the factor structure of ICI's five components (Pallant, 2016). This analysis can help to ensure the convergent validity of the five measured components of ICIC using the AVE (average variance extracted) values (English language competence: .64; intercultural cognition: .75; intercultural metacognition: .66; intercultural affection: .70; and intercultural behavior: .63) which were above .5. This satisfies the recommended values recommended by Hair et al. (2010). Additionally, the reliability of the

questionnaire was very high as its Cronbach's alpha was .89. The questionnaire was translated from English into the respondents' mother tongue in an attempt to help them answer the questionnaire without any language hindrance.

The semi-structured interview was written based on the questionnaire and research purpose, and it consists of five main questions seeking participants' perceptions of ICI enhancement via SMC (English language competence, intercultural cognition, intercultural metacognition, intercultural affection, & intercultural behavior). The interview questions were translated from English into the interviewees' mother tongue to ensure that they could express their ideas smoothly without any language difficulties.

Data collection and analysis

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire and interview were piloted with ten learners who shared similar background information with those in the official study. After being modified, the instruments were officially used in the main study. With respect to the questionnaire, the questionnaire in Google Forms was administered to Vietnamese L2 learners via email and social networks. The duration to collect responses was five days. It took learners approximately 20 minutes to finish the questionnaire. All the responses were checked, and the number of valid responses was 170. Regarding the semi-structured interview, ten learners were invited to take part in online group interviews via Skype. There were three to four learners in each group. It took each interview approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and the recording of all interviews was conducted for the purpose of data analysis with the interviewees' agreement.

This study adopted the ecolinguistic perspective for data collection (Fill, 2001). Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained within this study. The former was gained from the questionnaire responses which were processed by the SPSS software (Version 26.0) in terms of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). The mean values were understood as 1-1.80: strongly disagree; 1.81-2.60: disagree; 2.61-3.40: neutral; 3.41- 4.20: agree; 4.21 – 5.00: strongly agree (Kan, 2009). The latter was garnered from interview responses which were thematically analysed in the following steps. Firstly, all recordings were transcribed into texts. Secondly, all the transcripts were carefully reviewed and categorized in accordance with the purposes of the study. Finally, themes were generated. Besides, ten interviewees were given a code as S1, S2 to S10. So as to assure the trustworthiness of the study, the intra-rating was applied and, the findings were double-checked by the respondents for meaning check and confirmation.

Results and discussion

Results

Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of ICI enhancement via SMC

ICI consists of two five main components, namely English language competence, intercultural cognition, intercultural metacognition, intercultural affection, and intercultural behavior. The average mean score of the deployment of SMC to enhance L2 students' ICI, as can be observed in Table 1, is 3.56 (SD =.80) out of five. As for the components of ICI, the mean scores are 3.60 (SD =.87) for English language competence, 3.57 (SD =.85) for intercultural

cognition, 3.56 (SD =.82) for intercultural metacognition. 3.50 (SD =.82) for intercultural affection, and 3.57 (SD =.85) for intercultural behavior. Such findings imply that Vietnamese L2 learners in this study believed that the SMC could enhance their ICI in terms of English language competence, intercultural cognition, metacognition, affection, and behavior over a period of 14 weeks.

Table 1

Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of ICI enhancement via SMC

No.	Components	N=170	
		M	SD
1	English language competence	3.60	.87
2	Intercultural cognition	3.57	.85
3	Intercultural metacognition	3.56	.82
4	Intercultural affection	3.50	.82
5	Intercultural behavior	3.57	.83
	Average	3.56	.80

Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of English language competence enhancement via SMC

The results in Table 2 reveal that the SMC could enhance L2 learners' English language competence as they reckoned that the course could improve their micro language skills, namely "a wider range of English vocabulary" (Q1: M = 3.56, SD = .95), "English grammatical competence" (Q3: M = 3.55, SD = .91), and "English pronunciation" (Q2: M = 3.62, SD =.94), and boost their macro language skills, viz. reading (Q5: M = 3.63, SD =.93), listening (Q7: M = 3.62, SD =.94), speaking (Q4: M = 3.60, SD =.92), and writing (Q6: M = 3.59, SD = .89). Such findings indicate that SMC was effective in improving L2 learners' English language competence.

Table 2

Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of English language competence enhancement via SMC

No.	By the end of the SMC,	N=170	
		M	SD
Q1	I had a wider range of English vocabulary.	3.56	.95
Q2	my English pronunciation has improved significantly.	3.62	.94
Q3	my English grammatical competence has improved.	3.55	.91
Q4	I have become more confident in speaking English.	3.60	.92
Q5	my English reading skills have deepened.	3.63	.93
Q6	my English writing skills have improved.	3.59	.89
Q7	my English listening skills have improved.	3.62	.94

Regarding the qualitative findings which were in alignment with quantitative ones. Interviewees believed that their English language competence has much improved via the SMC as they had opportunities to interact with foreigners synchronously and asynchronously. Some extracts are as follows:

“From my point of view, I become more and more confident in my English listening and speaking skills.” (S1)

“Personally, I usually message my foreign friends that help my vocabulary and grammatical structures improve significantly.” (S7)

“I often practice my vocabulary and writing skills by chatting with foreign friends... I am now able to read English news and understand it quite well.” (S9)

Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of intercultural cognition enhancement via SMC

It can be noticed in Table 3, a majority of L2 learners reported that the SMC could provide them with knowledge about foreign cultures regarding greetings (Q10: M = 3.61, SD = .92), customs (Q13: M = 3.59, SD = .78), festivities (Q14: M = 3.59, SD = .63), foods (Q11: M = 3.55, SD = .93), and drinks (Q12: M = 3.57, SD = .90). Besides, they could gain knowledge about the rules of conduct (Q16: M = 3.56, SD = .88), family life (Q15: M = 3.59, SD = .89), educational systems (Q17: M = 3.58, SD = .92), values (Q8: M = 3.53, SD = .88) and religious beliefs of other cultures (Q9: M = 3.51, SD = .91) via the SMC. To sum up, L2 learners could enhance their intercultural cognition via the SMC.

Table 3

Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of intercultural cognition enhancement via SMC

No.	By the end of the SMC, I know....	N=170	
		M	SD
Q8	values of other cultures.	3.53	.88
Q9	religious beliefs of other cultures.	3.51	.91
Q10	greetings from other cultures.	3.61	.92
Q11	foods of other cultures.	3.55	.93
Q12	drinks of other cultures.	3.57	.90
Q13	customs of other cultures.	3.59	.78
Q14	festivities of other cultures.	3.59	.63
Q15	family life of other cultures.	3.59	.89
Q16	rules of conduct of other cultures.	3.56	.88
Q17	educational systems of other countries.	3.58	.92

The interview findings supported the questionnaire ones. Many interviewees shared that they could gain different types of cultural knowledge in the SMC. They delineated:

“...I am able to learn more about many countries' cuisines, beverages, celebrations and educational systems in this course.” (S1)

“...now I can confidently interact with people from other countries in English as I know how to behave appropriately in multicultural contexts.” (S3)

“Thanks to this course, I am able to learn more about foreign cultures such as foods, drinks, customs and so on...” (S6)

Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of intercultural metacognition enhancement via SMC

Table 4 illustrates that most L2 learners believed that by the end of the SMC, they were “aware of the cultural insights [they applied] in intercultural conversations” (Q18: $M = 3.56$, $SD = .89$) and “conscious of [their] intercultural knowledge in interacting with foreigners.” (Q19: $M = 3.59$, $SD = .87$). Additionally, they also thought that the SMC could help them be “cognizant of the appropriacy of [their] cultural knowledge” (Q20: $M = 3.52$, $SD = .84$) and “aware of how to adjust [their] intercultural knowledge” (Q21: $M = 3.58$, $SD = .88$) in interacting with foreigners. In short, the SMC was believed to be effective in enhancing L2 learners’ intercultural metacognition.

Table 4

Vietnamese L2 learners’ perceptions of intercultural metacognition enhancement via SMC

No.	By the end of the SMC, I am....	N=170	
		M	SD
Q18	aware of the cultural insights I apply in intercultural conversations.	3.56	.89
Q19	conscious of my intercultural knowledge in interacting with foreigners.	3.59	.87
Q20	cognizant of the appropriacy of my cultural knowledge in interacting with foreigners.	3.52	.84
Q21	aware of how to adjust my intercultural knowledge in interacting with foreigners.	3.58	.88

The qualitative findings were found to support the quantitative ones. Interviewed learners admitted that the SMC could improve their intercultural metacognition. They said:

“...I am aware of cultural sensitivity, which is one of the key elements in maintaining multicultural interactions.” (S1)

“...I am cognizant of the appropriacy of my cultural knowledge to avoid misunderstanding in intercultural communication. Also, I know how to adjust my misunderstandings properly during communication.” (S6)

“Via SMC, I recognize that obtaining a thorough understanding of other cultures is very necessary for us to communicate with foreigners because we can understand their viewpoints.” (S8)

Vietnamese L2 learners’ perceptions of intercultural affection enhancement via SMC

In respect of intercultural affection, a big number of L2 learners reported (see Table 4) that thanks to the SMC, they were confident that they could “interact with foreigners appropriately” (Q23, $M = 3.46$, $SD = .91$), “adapt [themselves] to new cultural environments” (Q24: $M = 3.44$, $SD = .91$), and “manage the pressure when interacting with new foreigners” (Q26: $M = 3.49$, $SD = .87$). Besides, they were “able to tolerate unfamiliar cultures” (Q22: $M = 3.54$, $SD = .87$) and “eager to interact with foreigners” (Q25: $M = 3.55$, $SD = .89$). Therefore, these findings can be interpreted that the SMC could boost L2 learners’ intercultural affection.

Table 4

Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of intercultural affection enhancement via SMC

No.	By the end of the SMC, I am....	N=170	
		M	SD
Q22	able to tolerate unfamiliar cultures.	3.54	.87
Q23	confident that I can interact with foreigners appropriately.	3.46	.91
Q24	confident that I can adapt myself to new cultural environments.	3.44	.91
Q25	eager to interact with foreigners.	3.55	.89
Q26	confident that I can manage the pressure when interacting with new foreigners.	3.49	.87

In alignment with the questionnaire findings, the interview findings revealed that interviewed participants agreed that the SMC could change their intercultural affection positively. Some remarkable extracts are:

“I am tolerant with unfamiliar with foreign cultures when interacting with foreigners.” (S7)

“I initially felt intimidated by a new culture that I was unfamiliar with, but I soon realized that I could handle the pressure, and now I am excited to engage in multicultural conversations.” (S10)

Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of intercultural behavior enhancement via SMC

In respect of intercultural behavior as regards Table 5, many L2 learners admitted that they could adjust their “facial expressions” (Q27: M = 3.55, SD = .90), “verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone)” (Q28: M = 3.59, SD = .85), and “non-verbal behavior” (Q29: M = 3.54, SD = .87) in intercultural interactions. Plus, they could “know to function in different intercultural situations appropriately” (Q30: M = 3.59, SD = .88). In conclusion, Via the SMC, L2 learners' intercultural behavior could be positively improved.

Table 5*Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of intercultural behavior enhancement via SMC*

No.	By the end of the SMC, I can....	N=170	
		M	SD
Q27	alter my facial expressions as necessary in intercultural interactions.	3.55	.90
Q28	adjust my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) in intercultural interactions.	3.59	.85
Q29	adjust my non-verbal behavior in intercultural interactions.	3.54	.87
Q30	know how to function in different intercultural situations appropriately	3.59	.88

As for the qualitative findings, it was found out that L2 learners consented that their intercultural behavior changed in a positive way as they could manage how to avoid

misunderstanding in multicultural situations and know how to ask for clarification in terms of unfamiliar cultures. They said:

“...to avoid misunderstandings regarding different cultures, I am accustomed to asking them to explain any unfamiliar information.” (S5)

“...I strongly say that I am able to know how to deal with misunderstandings in multicultural conversations.” (S9)

Discussion

This study aims to scrutinize Vietnamese L2 learners' perceptions of ICI enhancement via SMC, and it revealed that the research participants within this study had positive perceptions that the SMC was effective in enhancing their ICI in terms of English language competence, intercultural cognition, intercultural metacognition, intercultural affection, and intercultural behavior. Both quantitative and qualitative findings unraveled that Vietnamese L2 learners believed that they could develop their ICI via the SMC in which English language knowledge and skills, cultural lessons, and interactions with foreigners were embedded.

As for the findings of five components of ICI, it was found that Vietnamese L2 learners self-reported that they could gain their English language competence, intercultural cognition, intercultural metacognition, intercultural affection, and intercultural behavior. With respect to English language competence, L2 learners believed that over a 14-week course, they could enhance their English macro and micro language skills. As learners got engaged in the SMC, they could get intensive exposure to the target language and interact with foreigners in both spoken and written forms; therefore, they could gain improvement in their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Additionally, apart from the official interaction with foreigners in class, learners still had opportunities to get involved in Video chat, and voice and text messaging with them at their convenient time. That may be the reason why learners improved their English language competence via a 14-week SMC. Regarding intercultural cognition, L2 learners advocated that they could gain knowledge of both tangible (e.g., greetings, foods, drinks, festivities) and intangible culture (e.g., values, beliefs, family life, rules of conduct, educational systems). This can be explained by the fact that learners could learn intercultural knowledge directly from foreigners' presentations, talks, and interactions. This finding is supported by Rose et al., (2010) who have confirmed that one could gain a good understanding of the values, attitudes, tendencies, and customs of other cultures by learning and practicing. Additionally, this finding resonated with that of Hiasat's (2019) and Shomoossi et al.'s (2019) studies which have discovered that learners could increase their intercultural understanding via different interactions in multicultural situations. With respect to intercultural metacognition, the 14-week SMC was believed to be effective in enhancing L2 learners' intercultural metacognition as learners had a good understanding of the intercultural information and were cognizant of the importance of having accurate intercultural knowledge when they engaged with foreigners synchronously and asynchronously. They were also aware of how to adjust their intercultural knowledge in interacting with foreigners. One of the plausible explanations for this finding can be that the SMC could provide appropriate intercultural activities in which learners could get engaged so that they may get aware of the importance of how to function appropriately and effectively in multicultural contexts. These research findings were backed up by Gooden et al. (2017) who have asserted that learners with a high level of intercultural metacognition will be actively conscious of

their intercultural circumstances, and they will probably change their positive manners to deal with those situations, and they have also postulated that intercultural metacognition and cognition are positively correlated, which implies that the more conscious learners are of differences in their intercultural environment, the more they will perceive and respond to these differences.

As for intercultural affection, this finding revealed that over the course of the SMC, learners could feel confident and eager to interact with foreigners synchronously and asynchronously. In addition, they could tolerate intercultural differences. This could be thanks to the meaningful intercultural learning activities in the SMC. As learners were confident in their intercultural metacognition and cognition, they could gain intercultural affection. Gooden et al. (2017) have stated that intercultural metacognition, cognition, and affections are strongly correlated. This implies that learners may be seen as being emotionally driven by their intercultural metacognition and cognition, so they can be able to adjust and respond to various intercultural circumstances. In respect of intercultural behavior, learners could adjust their verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) in intercultural interactions and change their non-verbal behavior in intercultural interactions. Plus, they also knew how to alter their facial expressions as necessary in intercultural interactions and pause and silence suitably for different intercultural situations. This result can be the result of the positive correlation between intercultural metacognition, cognition, affection, and behavior. Ang et al. (2007) have confirmed that when learners are interested in recognizing and understanding cultural differences, their behavior will be altered to accommodate those differences. Likewise, Gooden et al. (2017) have stated that learners with a high level of metacognition will be actively aware of other people's cultural circumstances, and then they will probably change their positive manners to respond to those situations. This finding is in alignment with that of Sousa et al.'s (2019) study, which has indicated that learners' behavioral perceptions conceptualize the ability to display verbally and nonverbally appropriate activities when engaging with others from different cultures, and those with a higher level of ICI also have a variety of approaches and orientations when dealing with novel perspectives and strange behaviors.

Conclusion

This study unraveled that Vietnamese L2 learners perceived the effectiveness of the SMC on their ICI enhancement. L2 learners' ICI could be achieved via the SMC in which the content of the English language and intercultural content were included, and learners' synchronous and asynchronous interactions with foreigners were carried out. Furthermore, it was found out that ICI's components (English language competence, intercultural metacognition, cognition, affection, and behavior) seemed to be positively interrelated with one another. L2 learners' English language competence could work as a means of communication to achieve other components of ICI. Meanwhile, L2 learners' intercultural metacognition, cognition, affection, and behavior could support one another. L2 learners' intercultural metacognition and cognition could work as the premise for learners' intercultural affection and behavior.

From such findings, pedagogical implications are recommended. Firstly, the English language competence plays a vital role in achieving other components of ICI; hence, it is necessary for L2 teachers to focus more on L2 learners' language proficiency so that learners' language proficiency can serve as a platform for intercultural enhancement (Choudhury, 2013). Secondly, as L2 learners' intercultural metacognition and cognition could positively affect their intercultural affection and behavior; thus, teachers should design a wide range of appropriate and fascinating

cultural materials embedded in the SMC. Since L2 learners can have strong intercultural metacognition and cognition, they will be able to develop their intercultural affection and adjust their intercultural behavior accordingly. Thirdly, the current status of the English language is an international language or a lingua franca, so the teaching of culture has transcended the teaching of the target cultures. It is important to know learners' learning purposes, e.g., why they want to take this English course, where they want to go for their further studies, and so on, so that additional cultural content and foreign speakers should be appropriately selected based on learners' learning purposes. This will assure that learners will get familiar with the culture and people they are going to get involved in and with. More importantly, they will not get culture shock or cultural misunderstanding, and they will be able to adapt themselves to the new cultural environment.

This study cannot avoid the limitations in itself. The first limitation is that this study was a mixed methods design which is to examine the effectiveness of the SMC on L2 learners' ICI enhancement, but it is based on learners' perceptions collected from the questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Secondly, the SMC had 28 sessions, nine of which had guest speakers were invited. Therefore, further studies could employ more research instruments, namely the pre- and post-tests, learners' reflection, and observation, for data collection. Additionally, instead of guest speakers, foreign co-teachers should be recruited for all sections to make sure that learners will be able to get intensive and extensive exposure to both language content and intercultural content.

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