

FOSTERING IC IN VIETNAMESE EFL UNDERGRADUATES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LITERATURE AND AND REAL-WORLD PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines interventions to enhance intercultural communication (IC) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching for university students, focusing on their effectiveness and real-world adoption. Through a systematic review and lecturer interviews, effective strategies like critical incident tasks, reflective writing, project-based assessments, and technology-driven collaboration were identified. While foundational skills are emphasized for non-English majors, English majors benefit from advanced reflective and analytical tasks. Implementation challenges, such as task design and limited resources, hinder progress, especially for inexperienced teachers. Recommendations include scaffolding, integrating AI in teaching writing, professional development, and institutional support to bridge theory and practice. Insights are offered for improving IC education in both Vietnam and global academic contexts.

Keyword: *EFL classroom, intercultural communication, real-world adoption, Vietnamese universities*

1. INTRODUCTION

IC broadly refers to the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves a combination of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable individuals to understand and respect cultural differences, manage intercultural interactions, and establish meaningful relationships (Deardorff, 2006). Therefore, IC is not only about understanding other cultures but also being aware of one's own cultural framework and its influence on communication. This competency plays a crucial role in fostering mutual respect, adaptability, and openness in increasingly diverse social and professional contexts (Bennett, 2009).

When applied to the context of language education, IC integrates linguistic proficiency with cultural awareness and sensitivity. In other words, IC in the language classroom emphasizes the role of language as a medium for cultural exchange. While general perspectives on IC highlight the broad capacity for intercultural interaction, language-based IC adds a layer of focus on how language mediates intercultural communication (Byram, 1997). Both frameworks emphasize the development of empathy, critical cultural awareness, and adaptability. However, IC in language education places a more explicit focus on how learners use language and knowledge of culture of target language to negotiate meaning, making it a dynamic and context-sensitive process. Therefore, IC in the language classroom can be seen as a specific application of the broader concept of IC, with an added emphasis on linguistic and communicative dimensions.

The 21st century has seen unprecedented levels of globalization, making IC an essential skill for learners to navigate diverse social, academic, and professional contexts. Language classrooms serve as platforms for fostering global citizenship by equipping learners with the skills to engage in intercultural communication effectively (Lázár et al., 2019). Teaching IC in language education empowers students to move beyond linguistic proficiency, preparing them to address cultural misunderstandings, appreciate diversity, and collaborate in multicultural environments. Additionally, developing IC aligns with broader educational goals, such as promoting inclusivity, tolerance, and social cohesion (Porto & Byram, 2015).

In Vietnam, where English serves as a critical medium for international communication, the role of IC is particularly significant. With the nation's growing integration into the global economy, Vietnamese learners of

English must be equipped not only with linguistic competence but also with the intercultural skills necessary to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. IC is also vital for fostering cultural sensitivity, which helps students preserve their cultural identity while engaging with global cultures. Furthermore, integrating IC into Vietnamese EFL classrooms can address common challenges, such as ethnocentric perspectives and limited exposure to authentic intercultural interactions, thereby preparing learners for the demands of the 21st-century globalized world (Chau & Truong, 2018).

In a more specific context, IC has become an essential focus in the context of globalized EFL higher education, including in Vietnam, as it equips students with the skills to navigate cultural and educational diversity effectively (Vu, 2019). A number of systematic reviews on IC in higher education have revealed several notable findings. However, challenges persist, including the lack of standardized IC models, insufficient empirical studies addressing comprehensive outcomes, and disparities in IC progress due to cultural and institutional variations (Sabet & Chapman, 2023; López-Rocha, 2020). Research highlights the importance of experiential activities, technology-enhanced collaboration, and interdisciplinary learning in fostering IC, while identifying gaps in assessment methods and long-term program evaluations (Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023). In general, these findings provide a comprehensive overview of IC in higher education, emphasizing its integration as a cornerstone for preparing students to thrive in a globalized world.

However, these studies often lack specificity regarding particular settings. To our knowledge, no systematic review has focused exclusively on IC in higher education in Vietnam, particularly on interventions aimed at fostering IC among Vietnamese undergraduates. Additionally, the nature of systematic reviews as secondary research presents limitations, as they rely on existing studies and often lack direct comparisons with real-world contexts, which are essential for understanding the practical implications of IC development in specific educational environments.

The objectives of this study are to address these limitations by (1) exploring the interventions used to foster IC among Vietnamese EFL undergraduates in existing studies and (2) evaluating their effectiveness in enhancing students' IC. Additionally, it aims to (3) investigate the extent to which Vietnamese EFL lecturers adopt these interventions in their real-world teaching practices and (4) examine whether the outcomes perceived by lecturers align with those reported in the existing literature.

The following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1: What interventions are used to foster IC among Vietnamese EFL undergraduates in existing studies?

RQ2: How effective are these interventions in enhancing the IC of Vietnamese EFL undergraduates?

RQ3: To what extent do Vietnamese EFL lecturers adopt these interventions into their real-world teaching practices?

RQ4: Do Vietnamese EFL lecturers perceive the same outcomes when adopting these interventions as reported in existing studies?

By addressing these questions, the study hopes to provide a deeper understanding of the practical and contextual relevance of IC interventions in Vietnamese higher education.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design

The present study employs a two-phase research design consisting of a systematic review and qualitative interviews with Vietnamese EFL lecturers. The systematic review addresses the first two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2), focusing on exploring the interventions used to foster IC among Vietnamese EFL undergraduates in existing studies and evaluating their effectiveness in enhancing students' IC. This method is particularly suited to the study's objectives as it provides a structured and comprehensive synthesis of the literature, allowing the identification of trends, gaps, and the overall impact of these interventions across diverse studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The systematic review ensures a clear understanding of the effectiveness of various interventions while highlighting best practices and potential areas for further research.

The second phase involves semi-structured interviews, which address the third and fourth research questions (RQ3 and RQ4). These interviews explore how Vietnamese EFL lecturers adopt IC interventions in their real-world teaching practices and examine whether their perceptions of the outcomes align with those reported in the literature. Interviews are an advantageous qualitative method because they allow for an in-depth investigation of lecturers' contextualized experiences and attitudes (Creswell & Poth, 2024). As a result, this approach is particularly beneficial for capturing the complexities and nuances of how interventions are implemented and perceived in specific teaching environments, providing richer and more actionable insights compared to quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

2.2 Phase 1

We established four key inclusion criteria. First, we selected scientific articles written in English or Vietnamese. Second, only English articles indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases were considered and Vietnamese articles in the “List of eligible scientific journals for scoring in 2024” by MOET (2024). Third, we included studies published between 2019 and October 2024 to ensure up-to-date findings. Lastly, articles needed to focus on the development of IC in higher education. The following exclusion criteria were also applied in addition to the inclusion criteria. First, studies were excluded if they lacked a detailed description of the intervention used to foster IC development, as such details are essential for understanding the context and how the intervention was adopted. Additionally, in cases where multiple studies presented similar findings, only the most comprehensive study was included to avoid redundancy and maintain focus on unique contributions. Furthermore, studies that did not involve empirical investigations, such as those relying solely on theoretical discussions or anecdotal evidence, were excluded to ensure that the review is grounded in robust, data-driven research. These inclusion and exclusion criteria, suggested by the recommendations of Chen et al. (2010), allowed the study to maintain a high standard of quality and relevance while addressing its research objectives effectively.

Regarding data source, we prioritized articles from high-impact journals and respected linguistic and language education journals in Vietnam. Drawing on previous experience and the guidelines provided by Chen et al. (2010), Siddaway et al. (2018), and PRISMA framework by Page et al. (2021), we carefully selected online data sources that align with the study's research objectives. The chosen digital libraries and journals were selected to maximize the pool of high-quality, relevant data. These data sources include Taylor & Francis, Sage Publications, Springer Link, Wiley Online Library, Google Scholar. Hence, the study can ensure comprehensive access to impactful and relevant research by using these sources. Boolean operators (see **Table -1**) were used with different purposes to create effective and precise search strings by combining related terms and concepts in these data sources.

Table -1: Boolean operators

General search string	(“IC” OR “cross-cultural competence” OR “cultural intelligence”) AND (“Vietnamese” OR “Vietnam”) AND (“EFL” OR “English as a Foreign Language” OR “English language teaching”) AND (“undergraduates” OR “students” OR “learners”) AND (“interventions” OR “strategies” OR “approaches” OR “methods”)
Alternative focus on development interventions	(“IC development” OR “fostering intercultural skills”) AND (“Vietnamese EFL learners” OR “Vietnamese undergraduates” OR “Vietnamese students”) AND (“teaching practices” OR “pedagogical strategies” OR “educational programs”) AND (“effectiveness” OR “impact”)
Specific to context and empirical evidence	(“IC” OR “cultural competence”) AND (“Vietnamese EFL” OR “Vietnamese English learners”) AND (“teaching interventions” OR “educational practices” OR “instructional methods”) AND (“higher education” OR “university”) AND (“empirical study” OR “research findings”)
Capture broader context or keywords	(“fostering IC” OR “building cross-cultural understanding”) AND (“Vietnamese” OR “Vietnam”) AND (“EFL education” OR “English teaching in higher education”) AND (“student outcomes” OR “learning outcomes”)

After search string results were extracted, we imported the articles into the Excel software program for management and the database cleanup process. The articles with duplicates found in both databases were detected and removed. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were then applied. To ensure the quality and eligibility of the selected papers, a checklist was developed and adapted from Page et al. (2021). After all, nine articles met the requirements and the checklist. The checklist included the following criteria:

- whether the experimental or empirical methods used in the study align with the research questions.
- whether the selected literature provides a detailed description of the participants' context, specifically Vietnamese EFL undergraduates.
- whether the selected studies outline procedures for implementing interventions aimed at fostering IC among Vietnamese EFL undergraduates.
- whether the results of the studies address and validate the research questions.

In the final stage of the review, we conducted a detailed analysis of the selected articles, systematically addressing RQ1 and RQ2. The findings were thoroughly validated, and the conclusions highlighted the most

significant results, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interventions to foster IC of Vietnamese EFL undergraduates.

2.3 Phase 2

The second phase of this study involved structured interviews with a sample of 10 EFL lecturers from a public university in southern Vietnam, selected through convenience sampling. The group consisted of six female and four male participants. Most of the lecturers had been teaching at the university for over two years. Of the participants, seven held master's degrees in TESOL, English Language Teaching (ELT), or Applied Linguistics, while three had doctoral degrees in the same fields. All participants had experience teaching the “Intercultural communication” courses to Vietnamese EFL undergraduate students, including both English-major and non-English-major learners, having conducted such courses at least twice. This diverse and experienced group provided valuable insights into the adoption and effectiveness of IC interventions in their teaching contexts.

Table -2: Participants' information

Code	Gender	Highest degree	Overall teaching experiences (years)	Times of teaching IC courses
P1	Female	Master of TESOL	3	3
P2	Male	Master of ELT	5	6
P3	Female	Master of TESOL	2.5	2
P4	Female	Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics	10	9
P5	Male	Master of Applied Linguistics	6	6
P6	Male	Doctor of Philosophy in TESOL	13	12
P7	Female	Master of TESOL	4.5	2
P8	Male	Master of Applied Linguistics	5	3
P9	Female	Doctor of Philosophy in ELT	14	10
P10	Female	Master of ELT	5	4

The structured interviews were conducted as meetings between the researcher and each of the 10 participants, lasting approximately 20 minutes per session. Before the interview began, participants signed a consent form, confirming their voluntary participation and awareness that their responses would be recorded for further analysis. All participants chose to respond to the questions in English. The interview questions were designed to gather insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions of fostering IC in their teaching practices. The questions included:

- From the list of interventions to foster IC for your students, which interventions do you prefer or frequently use? Why? (The list of interventions from Phase 1 was given to the participants.)
- How effective are the interventions you frequently use?
- In the list, which interventions do you rarely use or have never heard of before? Why do you rarely use them?
- If you had the chance to adopt the interventions you rarely use or have never heard of before, how would you implement them in your classroom?

The interview responses were analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover patterns and insights related to the adoption and effectiveness of IC (IC) interventions. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, with responses in Vietnamese translated into English for consistency. Key phrases and ideas were coded into categories such as “preferred interventions,” “effectiveness,” “lesson outcomes,” and “barriers to adoption.” These codes were then organized into broader themes, including “teaching practices,” “perceived effectiveness,” and “challenges with underutilized strategies.”

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Interventions and their effectiveness to foster IC among Vietnamese EFL undergraduates

Table -3: The interventions and their outcomes

Participants	Study	Interventions	Outcomes
Non-English-major students	Tran et al. (2019)	critical incident tasks (i.e. tasks with supplementary materials) with open-ended questions for pair or individual discussions	improved understanding of miscommunication and intercultural communication.
	Vu and Tran (2022)	TED Talks, accompanied with group discussion, and reflective writing	significant improvements in cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement.
	Ha and Nguyen (2022)	Experiential learning (plan → do → review model)	enhanced cultural awareness, improved English communication skills, and increased confidence in interacting with foreigners.
	Mai et al. (2020)	asynchronous video-based discussion via Flipgrid	increased respect for otherness, tolerance for ambiguity, improved behavioral flexibility, and enhanced communication strategies.
English-major students	Thieu (2019)	process-oriented Intercultural Teaching Mode	significant improvement in IC and post-test scores.
	Nguyen (2021)	project-based assessment	enhanced IC, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, group working skills, and motivation.
	Vu (2021)	reflective writing with feedback	improved reflective thinking, though levels varied among students.
Both	Vu and Dinh (2021)	the combination of task-based, project-Based, and content language integrated learning	improvement in all IC dimensions, especially skills of discovery and interaction.

The rationale for adopting interventions for non-English majors, English majors, and both groups shares similarities in their focus on enhancing IC but differs in their alignment with the linguistic and cognitive needs of each group. Across all groups, the primary goal is to improve cultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills, with an emphasis on preparing students for effective communication in diverse cultural contexts. For instance, Tran et al. (2019) and Thieu (2019) both aim to develop students' understanding of cultural dynamics and communication through structured frameworks. Experiential and reflective learning is also a common theme, as seen in Ha and Nguyen's (2022) plan → do → review model for non-English majors, which fosters cultural awareness and confidence, and Vu's (2021) reflective writing for English majors, which encourages cultural introspection. Additionally, multimodal approaches, such as the combination of task-based, project-based, and content-language-integrated learning by Vu and Dinh (2021), are used across both groups to address cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement.

However, differences arise in the level of cultural and language proficiency targeted by the interventions. For non-English majors, the focus is on foundational skills, with activities like critical incident tasks (Tran et al., 2019) and TED Talks combined with group discussions (Vu and Tran, 2022) designed to build basic intercultural awareness and communication strategies. By contrast, interventions for English majors often prioritize advanced reflective and cognitive processes. Thieu (2019) employs a process-oriented intercultural teaching framework to guide English majors through cultural exploration, while Nguyen (2021) uses project-based assessments, such as cultural knowledge competitions and situational judgment tasks, to develop critical thinking and collaborative skills. Furthermore, the type of learning activities differs, with non-English majors engaging in real-life applications and technology-integrated platforms like Flipgrid (Mai et al., 2024) to provide accessible, asynchronous learning environments. Meanwhile, English majors participate in tasks that require deeper cultural analysis, such as reflective writing (Vu, 2021) and competitive activities (Nguyen, 2021). These distinctions highlight the tailored approaches

required for each group, with shared goals of enhancing IC through methods that cater to their specific language abilities and academic contexts.

Overall, the interventions for non-English majors, English majors, and both groups collectively demonstrate significant improvements in IC across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The outcomes of interventions show similarities in their overall success in improving IC but differ in the specific skills and dimensions enhanced, reflecting the unique needs and capabilities of each group.

One common outcome across all groups is the significant improvement in various dimensions of IC, including attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. For instance, non-English majors participating in TED Talk-based interventions (Vu and Tran, 2022) and English majors engaged in process-oriented intercultural teaching (Thieu, 2019) both demonstrated enhanced intercultural knowledge and communication abilities. Similarly, both groups benefited from interventions that fostered cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement, as seen in Mai et al. (2020) for non-English majors and Vu and Dinh (2021) for both groups. Another shared outcome was the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, with interventions like Ha and Nguyen (2022) for non-English majors and Nguyen (2021) for English majors demonstrating measurable improvements in these areas. Across the board, students reported increased confidence in interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Despite these overarching similarities, the outcomes diverged in terms of the depth and scope of skills developed. For non-English majors, the focus was primarily on foundational intercultural skills, such as understanding miscommunication (Tran et al., 2019) and enhancing communicative awareness (Mai et al., 2024). These interventions aimed to build essential communication strategies and openness, with outcomes reflecting a growth in empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, and confidence in cross-cultural interactions. In contrast, the outcomes for English majors often extended beyond foundational skills to more advanced competencies, such as cultural identity exploration and reflective thinking. For example, Vu's (2021) reflective writing intervention for English majors revealed varying levels of introspection, with some students achieving deeper cultural understanding, while Nguyen's (2021) project-based assessments improved not only IC but also collaborative and eloquence skills, showcasing a broader range of advanced outcomes.

For both groups, as in Vu and Dinh's (2021) combined approach, the outcomes highlighted improvements across all IC dimensions, with particular progress in the skills of discovery and interaction. These results indicate that interventions tailored for both groups can successfully address diverse levels of proficiency, yet the outcomes for each group remain reflective of their specific linguistic and cognitive capabilities. Non-English majors tend to benefit most from interventions that establish a solid foundation in intercultural engagement, while English majors achieve more nuanced and reflective outcomes that build upon their advanced language skills and prior knowledge.

3.2 The interventions Vietnamese EFL lecturers adopt in their real-word teaching context

Participants adopted diverse interventions to foster students' IC, tailored to their teaching experiences and student groups. P1, with limited experience, employs "critical incident tasks" for non-English-major students. P2 usually utilizes some videos on Youtube like "TED Talks" for non-English-majors and "reflective writing with feedback" for English majors, aiming to "inspire cognitive engagement in the former and enhance critical thinking in the latter". Similarly, P3 normally focuses on non-English-major students by using "experiential learning"

For both English-major and non-English-major groups, P4 incorporates "task-based and project-based learning" with "asynchronous video-based discussions" for her lessons. P5 sometimes employs "project-based assessments" for English-major students, while using "experiential learning" for non-English-majors. Similarly, P6 integrates "process-oriented teaching modes" for English-majors and "asynchronous video discussions" for non-English-majors.

Participants with moderate experience, P7 rely on "TED Talks with group discussions" for non-English-majors and "reflective writing" for English majors. P8 employs "critical incident tasks" for non-English-majors and "project-based assessments" for English majors. P9, with extensive experience, combines "task-based approaches" for both groups and "reflective writing" for English majors to promote in-depth critical thinking. Participant 10 favors "experiential learning" for non-English-majors and "process-oriented teaching modes" for English majors, balancing practicality with structured learning.

Overall, across both groups, task-based learning and experiential learning were commonly employed, while reflective writing with feedback and project-based assessment were favored for English-major students due to their advanced proficiency and critical thinking focus. In addition, the frequencies of adopting these interventions vary from participant to participants.

The participants expressed varying perceptions of the effectiveness of their interventions P1 found her use of critical incident tasks a little bit effective, citing her limited teaching experience as a factor that made it difficult to

guide students toward meaningful, in-depth discussions. This limitation often reduced the potential impact of the tasks on students' IC. Similarly, P3 rated experiential learning a little bit effective in some occasions, explaining that her struggles in creating culturally diverse and engaging scenarios often resulted in surface-level student participation rather than the deeper engagement necessary for effective IC development. P5 also shared this view, noting that while project-based assessments for English majors had potential for enhancing IC skills, students often found the tasks overwhelming without adequate scaffolding. For non-English majors, his use of experiential learning was hindered by students' limited cultural exposure, making the activities less impactful. P8 likewise described critical incident tasks and project-based assessments as a little bit effective. Although these methods introduced basic IC concepts, they often failed to elicit the depth of critical thinking or engagement necessary for meaningful intercultural learning.

On the other hand, some participants viewed their interventions as moderately effective. P2 found "authentic videos" in general, and TED Talks, with group discussions and reflective writing with feedback moderately effective, emphasizing their ability to engage students cognitively and inspire critical thinking. However, he acknowledged challenges in maintaining consistent student interest and providing comprehensive feedback on reflective writing tasks. P7 similarly rated TED Talks with group discussions and reflective writing as moderately effective, "while these methods were engaging and provided opportunities for cognitive and reflective development, their success often depended on supplementary activities and students' baseline skills." P10 also rated her interventions as moderately effective, including experiential learning for non-English majors and process-oriented teaching modes for English majors. She appreciated the structured nature of these interventions, which provided systematic learning opportunities, but noted that they sometimes lacked flexibility and creativity, limiting deeper student engagement and innovation.

Overall, participants with less teaching experience were more likely to rate their interventions as a little bit effective, often due to difficulties in task design, facilitating discussions, or addressing students' diverse cultural experiences. Conversely, participants with moderate teaching experience tended to find their interventions moderately effective, appreciating their structured and engaging nature while acknowledging limitations in sustaining interest, fostering creativity, or providing deeper learning opportunities. Common challenges across the responses included student engagement, the practicality of task implementation, and the ability to adapt interventions to varying student proficiency levels.

The participants identified several interventions that they rarely use. P3 finds task-based learning difficult to implement, as it requires extensive planning and often leads to student confusion about the tasks. P4, while familiar with critical incident tasks, rarely uses them, as she finds them less dynamic and engaging compared to task-based and project-based approaches. Some participants avoid interventions due to concerns about practicality or resources. For example, P8 rarely uses asynchronous video discussions, as his students often lack the technical skills and resources needed to participate effectively. Similarly, P9 avoids experiential learning, citing the logistical challenges of supervising such activities in large classes. P7 avoids process-oriented teaching modes, explaining that their long-term and detailed nature is difficult to manage with limited class time. P7 rarely uses TED Talks with group discussions, finding them too generalized and difficult to align with specific intercultural communication objectives. Finally, P5 avoids critical incident tasks, as he perceives it to lack structure and measurable outcomes, which are important for achieving his teaching goals. Overall, participants rarely use interventions they perceive as too complex, resource-intensive, or misaligned with their teaching contexts, highlighting the importance of feasibility and relevance in their choices.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis of interventions aimed at fostering IC (IC) among Vietnamese EFL undergraduates reveals a rich and complex interplay between the theoretical designs presented in academic studies and their practical application in real-world teaching contexts. These interventions reflect a concerted effort to address cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of IC, but their implementation and outcomes vary widely depending on the target group (non-English majors, English majors, or mixed groups), the intervention type, and the context in which they are applied.

Across the board, there is a shared emphasis on the importance of engaging students in reflective and experiential learning. Reflective practices, in particular, emerge as a prominent feature in interventions targeting English majors, who are generally better equipped with language proficiency and critical thinking skills. For example, Vu (2021) highlights the use of reflective writing to promote cultural introspection, an approach that aligns well with real-world practices by teachers like P2 and P7. These teachers report using reflective writing tasks to deepen students' understanding of cultural issues while also fostering analytical and evaluative skills. Similarly, task-based and experiential learning methods are emphasized for non-English majors, as seen in Ha and Nguyen's

(2022) “plan → do → review” model. This structured approach allows students to actively engage in intercultural scenarios, reflecting on their experiences to enhance cultural awareness and confidence. Teachers such as P3 and P5 adopt similar methods in their classrooms, designing interactive activities to expose students to real-world intercultural communication scenarios.

Multimedia-supported interventions also play a central role in both studies and classroom applications. Vu and Tran (2022), for instance, utilize TED Talks combined with group discussions to stimulate cognitive engagement and encourage behavioral flexibility. These interventions are particularly effective for non-English majors, who may lack prior exposure to diverse cultural contexts and benefit from multimedia inputs that present relatable, real-world examples of intercultural interaction. In practice, teachers like P2 and P7 similarly incorporate TED Talks into their lessons, noting that they help to captivate students’ attention while simultaneously promoting critical reflection and open-mindedness. These methods demonstrate the practical and theoretical alignment in leveraging multimedia tools to foster IC.

Despite these shared objectives, the design and implementation of interventions reveal key differences between non-English majors, English majors, and mixed groups. For non-English majors, the focus is primarily on building foundational intercultural skills. Tran et al. (2019), for example, employ critical incident tasks to help students recognize and address miscommunication in intercultural contexts, fostering basic awareness and communication strategies. Similarly, Mai et al. (2020) use asynchronous video-based discussions via Flipgrid to create accessible, low-pressure environments where students can practice intercultural communication at their own pace. These methods resonate with the practices of teachers like P1 and P3, who prioritize straightforward, relatable interventions to suit their students’ lower levels of cultural exposure and language proficiency. However, the effectiveness of these approaches often hinges on the ability of teachers to design engaging scenarios and facilitate meaningful discussions, which can be a challenge for less experienced educators.

In contrast, interventions for English majors aim to build on their advanced language skills and critical thinking abilities, enabling them to explore more complex cultural dynamics. Nguyen (2021) employs project-based assessments to foster collaboration, problem-solving, and critical analysis, while Thieu (2019) uses process-oriented intercultural teaching modes to guide students through structured explorations of cultural issues. These interventions align with the practices of teachers like P9 and P10, who focus on reflective writing and project-based tasks to encourage deep cultural introspection and collaborative skills development. However, these methods also present challenges, as they often require significant scaffolding, feedback, and time to achieve their intended outcomes. Teachers report that without adequate support, students may struggle to fully engage with these complex tasks, limiting the overall effectiveness of the interventions.

For mixed groups, interventions such as Vu and Dinh’s (2021) combined approach offer a comprehensive framework that addresses the diverse needs of both non-English and English majors. By integrating task-based, project-based, and content-language-integrated learning, this multimodal strategy aims to foster improvements across all dimensions of IC. In practice, teachers like P4 and P9 attempt to implement similar approaches, but logistical challenges, such as the need for extensive planning and the difficulty of addressing varied proficiency levels, often hinder their efforts. Additionally, while asynchronous learning platforms like Flipgrid have proven effective in studies, they are less commonly used in real-world classrooms due to resource constraints and technical limitations, as reported by teachers like P8.

The challenges faced in real-world teaching contexts highlight a gap between the theoretical potential of interventions and their practical implementation. Teachers with limited experience, such as P1 and P3, often find methods like critical incident tasks or experiential learning to be “a little bit effective.” These challenges frequently stem from difficulties in designing tasks that are both engaging and culturally diverse, as well as in facilitating discussions that go beyond surface-level participation. For non-English majors, the lack of prior cultural exposure further complicates efforts to develop intercultural skills, as students may find it difficult to relate to or internalize abstract concepts. Meanwhile, interventions for English majors, though theoretically promising, require substantial scaffolding and feedback to achieve their full potential, as noted by teachers like P9 and P10. These methods often demand significant time and effort from both teachers and students, which can be challenging to sustain in large classes or under tight academic schedules.

To enhance the effectiveness of these interventions, several recommendations can be made. For non-English majors, simplifying task design and incorporating more structured scaffolding can make activities like critical incident tasks and TED Talk discussions more accessible and impactful. Teachers should focus on creating culturally relevant scenarios that students can easily relate to, ensuring greater engagement and comprehension. For English majors, interventions should continue to emphasize advanced outcomes such as cultural introspection and collaborative problem-solving, but with added flexibility to accommodate diverse student needs. This could include offering optional activities or alternative pathways for students who may struggle with more demanding tasks.

Multimodal approaches, such as Vu and Dinh's (2021) combined framework, have significant potential for mixed groups but should be introduced gradually. Teachers can begin by focusing on shared IC goals before expanding to group-specific activities that address linguistic and cognitive differences.

The integration of AI tools into teaching intercultural communication, particularly in writing, holds transformative potential. AI-powered platforms can provide immediate feedback on students' writing, highlighting cultural nuances and offering tailored suggestions for improvement. Tools like machine translation, chatbots, and automated writing assistants enable students to simulate intercultural dialogues, practice contextual language use, and refine their communication strategies (Klimova & Chen, 2024; Sarwari et al., 2024;). Additionally, AI can analyze large-scale student data to identify common challenges and recommend personalized learning paths, making interventions more efficient and impactful. By leveraging AI, educators can foster deeper cultural understanding and enhance students' IC development through adaptive and interactive learning experiences (Dai & Hua, 2024; Dai et al., 2024).

Professional development for teachers is also essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Workshops and training programs on task design, scaffolding techniques, and cultural sensitivity can equip teachers with the skills and confidence needed to implement these interventions effectively (Othman & Ruslan, 2020). Furthermore, institutional support in the form of resources, smaller class sizes, and technical training can help alleviate some of the logistical challenges faced by educators. Encouraging collaboration among teachers to share best practices and adapt interventions to their specific contexts can also foster more effective implementation (Alaei & Nosrati, 2018).

In conclusion, the interventions described in the studies and implemented in real-world classrooms demonstrate significant potential to enhance IC among Vietnamese EFL undergraduates. However, their success depends on careful design, adequate resources, and the ability to adapt to the diverse needs of students. By addressing these challenges and building on the strengths of existing approaches, teachers and researchers can ensure that interventions achieve their full potential in fostering IC across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. This dual focus on theoretical rigor and practical feasibility will be critical in preparing students for effective communication and engagement in an increasingly globalized world.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The insights and findings of this study highlight the importance of fostering intercultural communication (IC) in Vietnamese EFL higher education. A thorough exploration of literature and real-world teaching practices reveals the multifaceted nature of IC development and its integration into language education. Interventions targeting IC, such as critical incident tasks (Tran et al., 2019), reflective writing (Vu, 2021), project-based assessments (Nguyen, 2021), and technology-enhanced collaboration (Mai et al., 2024), show promise in enhancing students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. These methods have demonstrated effectiveness in improving cultural awareness, communication strategies, and critical thinking skills across diverse learner groups.

For non-English majors, interventions tend to focus on foundational intercultural skills, emphasizing activities like experiential learning (Ha & Nguyen, 2022) and TED Talk discussions (Vu & Tran, 2022) to build basic awareness and confidence. For English majors, advanced outcomes such as reflective cultural introspection and collaborative problem-solving are prioritized, leveraging their higher language proficiency and analytical capabilities. Mixed-group interventions, such as task-based and project-based approaches (Vu & Dinh, 2021), attempt to bridge these diverse needs, combining multiple methods to achieve broad IC outcomes.

To bridge the gap between theoretical potential and practical application, this study underscores the need for tailored scaffolding, professional development for educators, and institutional support. By addressing these challenges and drawing on frameworks such as Bennett and Bennett's (2004) DMIS and Byram's (1997) ICC model, the study contributes valuable insights into enhancing IC among Vietnamese EFL undergraduates, preparing them for effective interaction in a globalized world.

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