Integrating "Intercultural Awareness" with Thailand's Tertiary General English Instruction: Concepts, Guidelines and Advantages

Krich Rajprasit[1,*]

Abstract

Globalization has changed the way people interact due to the rise of intercultural communication, the increased number of interactions among non-native English users, and the diversity of the cultural backgrounds of non-native English users. However, intercultural awareness (ICA) which is a part of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is typically neglected in English language courses. In addition, English language teaching (ELT) seems to emphasize mastery of features such as lexis, phonology and syntax, as well as expanding the vocabulary of the students. This article aims to review and discuss the concepts of ICC and the current situation of ELT; to describe how to integrate ICA into English language courses, and reasons to do so; provide guidelines on how to design such a course, and to outline the learning advantages in accordance with the suggestions. The guidelines herein would be beneficial to course designers who need to develop and provide their students, in particular, Thai students at the tertiary level, with the qualifications which meet the urgent needs of the present century.

Keywords: intercultural awareness, communicative competence, general English, teaching, Thailand's Tertiary Education

---

[1] Language and Academic Services Center, International College for Sustainability Studies, Srinakharinwirot University

* Corresponding author. E-mail: krich@g.swu.ac.th

ารบูรณาการ "ความตระหนักรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรม" กับ การเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐานระดับมหาวิทยาลัยของไทย: แนวคิด แนวทาง และประโยชน์

กริช ราชประสิทธิ์[1,*]

บทคัดย่อ

โลกในยุคโลกาภิวัตน์ได้เปลี่ยนแปลงรูปแบบการปฏิสัมพันธ์ของมนุษย์ เนื่องจากมีการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมและปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างผู้พูดภาษาอังกฤษที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษาที่เพิ่มขึ้น และความหลากหลายของพื้นหลังทางวัฒนธรรมของผู้พูดภาษาอังกฤษที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษา อย่างไรก็ตาม ความตระหนักรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมซึ่งเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของสมรรถนะการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม มักจะไม่ได้รับความสำคัญในรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ นอกจากนี้ การสอนภาษาอังกฤษมักให้ความสำคัญกับการสร้างความเชี่ยวชาญทางภาษา เช่น คำศัพท์ ระบบเสียงในภาษา ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างถ้อยคำในประโยค รวมทั้งการขยายวงคำศัพท์ให้กับนิสิต นักศึกษา บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อทบทวนและอภิปรายแนวคิดของสมรรถนะการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม และสภาพการณ์ของการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ อธิบายวิธีการการบูรณาการความตระหนักรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมกับรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษและเหตุผลในการบูรณาการดังกล่าว และนำเสนอแนวทางในการออกแบบรายวิชา รวมทั้งกล่าวถึงประโยชน์จากการเรียนรู้ตามแนวทางที่นำเสนอ แนวทางนี้อาจเป็นประโยชน์กับผู้ออกแบบรายวิชาที่ต้องการพัฒนานิสิต นักศึกษา โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในประเทศไทย ให้มีคุณลักษณะอันพึงประสงค์ในศตวรรษที่ 21

คำสำคัญ: ความตระหนักรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรม สมรรถนะการสื่อสาร ภาษาอังกฤษทั่วไป การสอน อุดมศึกษาของไทย

---

[1] ศูนย์ภาษาและบริการวิชาการ วิทยาลัยนานาชาติเพื่อศึกษาความยั่งยืน มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ

[*] Corresponding author. E-mail: krich@g.swu.ac.th

Introduction

Apart from the domain specific knowledge in which an individual can have expertise, English language proficiency, even at a satisfactory level, is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of the globalized era (Hülmbauer, Böhringer, & Seidlhofer, 2008). Borderless communication now dominates and has a direct influence on the daily lives of individuals, contributing to the urgent need for the development of what could be called 21st century skills – learning, literacy and life skills. One of the most important of these skills is learning, which includes critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. With regard to the definition of communication in this article, it is integrally related to language skills, with an emphasis on determining the key role of 'communicative competence' (i.e., grammatical competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and sociocultural competence). All five of these competencies are equally essential in order to be communicatively competent in any communicative situation.

Additionally, it seems even more challenging to develop the level of sociocultural competence equally in relation to the other four competencies, because at present the context has changed and tends to be the 'intercultural context'. The significance of this competence implies that there is a relationship between language and culture, and plays a vital role in achieving communicative goals in any intercultural context. In addition, the concepts of 'intercultural communicative competence' and 'intercultural awareness' have become an aspect of intercultural communication, introduced to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) as a reaction to this phenomenon by a number of scholars such as Alptekin (2002), and Byram, Holmes and Savvides (2013). The ultimate goals of such concepts are to emphasize the role of 'cultures' in English language education, raise the level of awareness of language educators and instructors in terms of developing well-designed language courses with a visible focus on the concept of cultural diversity and to develop the abilities of their students in order to achieve the appropriate qualifications required by the globalized community.

However, in reality, the development of sociocultural competence and raising intercultural awareness are often ignored in English language classrooms, or not explicitly taught at all. In the Thai ELT context, which employs the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, the development of semantic, lexis and phonology is typically prioritized at all educational levels. This is true even at the tertiary level, which is the final stage in the development of the communication and language skills of students before they enter the labor market. With regard to the ELT textbooks

used by tertiary students in GE courses; the learning goals include developing all four language skills, teaching a range of vocabulary and enhancing autonomous learning. Even though the contents of the ELT textbooks cover the everyday activities of people of all ages, and aspects such as current affairs, foods, hobbies, and aspects of culture and language (Clandfield & Benne, 2011; Clare & Wilson, 2011; Kerr, 2012), The concept of intercultural awareness is rarely the main focus, due to the fact that learning activities heavily emphasize skills such as the mastery of structure, pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition. As a result, native English speaking cultures are dominant, while local and regional cultures vanish completely. In the past, this type of cultural imperialism was far more acceptable, but in the contemporary world this attitude is outmoded due to the fact that the way in which people communicate with each other has changed.

As a result, Thai students are mainly trained to be 'fluent and accurate English language users' as they aim to master grammatical competence as well as to enlarge their vocabulary. However, they may become 'inappropriate' users or 'fluent fools' if they have fluency in the language but lack an appropriate understanding of the intercultural communicative context. According to Bennett (1997), in order to avoid becoming a fluent fool, students must have a more profound understanding of the cultural context, as well as the dimensions of the language. In other words, a language is not merely a communicative tool, and also a guideline for learners to understand concepts and how people experience reality. Thus, students are required to balance 'fluency, accuracy and appropriacy' in their English communication in order to become a 'fully communicatively competent learner of English and a global citizen.'

With reference to the aforementioned, this article aims (1) to review and discuss the role of intercultural communicative competence in English language education, the integration of intercultural awareness into English language courses, and the reasons why GE courses should be taught to Thai tertiary students with ICA integration; (2) to suggest guidelines on how to design a syllabus with ICA integration; and (3) to provide an explanation of the advantages, particularly for Thai students at the tertiary level. All of the examples e.g. learning activities mentioned herein are derived from the teaching experience of the author at the tertiary level. Some of these examples are not applied to a specific context, and may be adapted to an individual learning environment.

Role of Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Language Education

1. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Intercultural Awareness (ICA)

The innovative model of ICC, proposed by Byram for over a decade, was different from the traditional model of communicative competence in terms of the emphasis of the awareness that language learning requires cultural understanding and an awareness of the cultures of others due to the fact that multicultural and multilingual communities are commonplace in the present century (Byram, Holmes, & Savvides, 2013). Thus, language teaching and learning have become more complex due to the intercultural dimension. According to the model, there are five *saviors* that refer to dimensions of knowledge, skills and attitudes: (1) savoir être (i.e. attitudes of curiosity and inquisitiveness), (2) saviors (i.e. knowledge of different aspects of life in a certain society), (3) savior comprendre (i.e. involving the skill of interpreting and relating those saviors), (4) savior apprendre/ savoir faire (i.e. involving the skills of discovery and interaction), and (5) savior's engage (i.e. critical cultural awareness).

The concept of ICA originated from the idea of 'cultural awareness', which was then redefined as intercultural communication, particularly amongst non-native English speakers who used the language in the context of a *lingua franca*. Therefore, it refers to the conscious understanding of the role of culturally based forms, practices and frames of understanding, as well as the ability to put these concepts into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication' (Baker, 2012).

2. New Facets of ELT in the Present Century

The interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds has increased and the English language is the most commonly used medium of communication. This is something that English language educators and instructors should keep in mind, particularly those from non-native English speaking countries, in order to improve and revise their language courses. According to Baker (2012: 70), "the ELT classroom should create a learning environment engaged in multilingual and multicultural practices to develop ICC, and prepare users of English to communicate in global settings." That is to say, students as global citizen should experience in a challenging way of learning English which not only develops their English language proficiency, but also raises their awareness of cultural diversity with specifically designed learning activities. This reflects the reality that English language

educators and instructors must be willing to adapt in response to the demands of an ever-changing world with the aim of developing both the language proficiency and the intercultural communicative competence of their students (Porto, 2013). If not, their students may not succeed as global citizens in new communicative situations, even if they have expertise in their future profession.

In addition, the traditional approach to ELT should be replaced with a method focused on the use of linguistic and other communicative resources to negotiate meaning, roles, and relationships in the diversity of sociocultural settings. The idea of a non-native English speaker using the English language at a level approaching that of a native-speaker level does not appear to be a realistic goal for the global citizens of this era (Baker, 2012). The emphasis should be placed on mutual understanding between interlocutors in clear, comprehensible language and employ the use of communication strategies (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995) in order to achieve success in terms of communicative goals. This is supported by the argument provided by Baker (2012), that in order to 'understand the sociocultural contexts of English as a global *lingua franca*, it is essential to move between and across local, national, and global contexts'. In addition, in terms of language learning, culture is inseparable from the instruction of speaking, listening, reading and writing, and is always in the background (Kramsch, 1993).

Integration of ICA into the English Language Courses

With regard to the idea of integrating culture into English language courses, the concept of culture is more than just information about a particular nation. In fact, this concept of culture is more concerned with action and an understanding of cultural diversity. The ultimate goals of teaching such courses are to inform language learners about the similarities and differences between diverse cultures, different methods of interaction, and the diversities of 'Self and Other', as well as the development of language knowledge and skills (Cakir, 2006). Therefore, teaching ICA is a challenge for language instructors, as there are a range of hidden or invisible aspects in terms of effective communication in interactions. Additionally, one way in which to increase the cultural knowledge of language learners is to go beyond the focus on the different aspects of cultures, and provide a clear explanation of how language(s) and culture(s) have an effect on everyday conversation and communication (Alptekin, 2002; Byram, 2011; Byrnes, 2010; Ho, 2009).

In order to successfully integrate ICA into language courses, a set of suggestions, presented in six strands, are recommended,

as follows: (Baker, 2012).

1. Exploring local cultures (the diversity and complexity of different local and national cultural groupings)

2. Exploring language-learning materials (a critical survey of the images of cultures in local and imported ELT textbooks, comparing how well their own cultures are represented)

3. Exploring traditional arts and media in English (a critical survey of images from local and other cultures taken from film, radio, television, newspaper, novels, etc., for the purpose of assessing how a culture has been represented or misrepresented)

4. Exploring IT/electronic media in English (a critical survey of images from local and other cultures taken from the internet, emails, instant messages and conversations in chat rooms, etc., for the purpose of assessing how a culture has been represented or misrepresented)

5. Cultural informants (the sharing of the experiences of teachers from different cultures as part of the academic content)

6. Face-to-face intercultural communication (often with non-local, native speaking English teachers)

Regarding the six strands, English learning activities with ICA integration may be designed as suggested in Table 1. The sample provided is tentatively drawn and the specifically designed learning activities are shown in section 5.3 with detailed explanations.

Table 1 ICA-integrated English Learning Activities Outlined according to Baker's Six Strands

Strand	Activity	Explanation
1. Exploring local cultures	1.1 Talk about local Thai food and compare it with national one 1.2 Talk about local Thai costumes and compare them with national ones 1.3 Talk about the local way of living of Thai teenagers and comparing it with the national one	Local and national cultures are broad terms, and need a clear definition and focus to design activities. At this stage, food, costumes and way of living e.g. teenagers may be suitable for Thai university students as those three topics are seen in everyday life. The students are likely to identify the similarities and differences of local and national cultures regarding such topics with ease and their own background knowledge.
2. Exploring language-learning materials	2.1 Search the images of Thai culture in the ELT textbooks and the online ELT materials 2.2 Discuss whether such images in the two sources accurately represent their own culture	In the language teaching materials, images of cultures are easily found. Unfortunately, there are only some countries and their cultures shown which most people know e.g. the UK, the USA, China, Japan, Brazil, and South Africa. For example, the commercial textbooks are used in the author's institution. The representation of Thai culture is rarely found in comparison to those six countries. Thus, the tailor-made teaching materials are needed, and it is possible to design such materials, accessing to the Internet.
3. Exploring traditional arts and media in English	3.1 Search the images of Thai culture taken from, YouTube, series, films, international news channels 3.2 Discuss whether such images have been accurately represented or misrepresented	Searching the images form some media like YouTube, series, films and international news channels, not from radio, newspaper, or novels may, seems to be the fastest and easiest way for Thai university students at present. This is because those students' way of living has been affected by globalization, and accessing information online or digitally is a better alternative.

Table 1 ICA-integrated English Learning Activities Outlined according to Baker's Six Strands (Continued)

Strand	Activity	Explanation
4. Exploring IT/ electronic media in English	4.1 Search the images of Thai culture taken from social networks like Facebook, Line and Instagram 4.2 Assess how their culture has been represented or misrepresented	It can be said that nowadays social networks such as Facebook, Line and Instagram is one of the key communication ways of people, particularly university students. Thus, contents or information, including cultural images are available and easy to assess. They can see only their own cultural images, but also others. As for emails, instant messages and conversations in chat rooms, it seems that many Thai students may not use them often and cultural images are rarely found in such media.
5. Cultural informants	5.1 Invite Thai students or people who study or work in other countries to share their own intercultural experiences 5.2 Hold a panel discussion about intercultural experience with the invited students or people, and students in a course	Sharing teachers' experiences may be not sufficient and draw students' attention. Inviting students or people with intercultural experiences is a better choice. However, invited students or people should have experiences in living in different countries and cultures, and also use English as a medium of communication e.g. in Singapore, Germany, India the UK, the USA. At present, many Thai students at the secondary and tertiary levels have more opportunities to be an exchange student, or to take short English courses during the school break. Then, those students will be able to share their direct experiences to other students. For instance, in the author's institution, many students have such experiences, and It is possible to invite them as a guest speaker in the classroom.

Table 1 ICA-integrated English Learning Activities Outlined according to Baker's Six Strands (Continued)

Strand	Activity	Explanation
6. Face-to-face intercultural communication	6.1 Invite native and non-native speakers of English to a classroom 6.2 Hold a workshop on enhancing intercultural communication	Having effective face-to-face intercultural communication in English is an ultimate goal of integrating ICA in a course. The more opportunities for face-to-face communication students have, the more effective intercultural communicators they will become. In the Thai university context, many students, except for ones having friendship or relationship with foreigners, may only expose to English in the classroom. Therefore, a workshop run by invited native and non-native speakers of English as a trainer seems to be beneficial to them. The activities should involve intercultural communicative situations, and problematic tasks which require intercultural communication and language skills.

The activities in the table above are suggested according to Bakers' six strands. Each activity can be added in the lessons to raise ICA, together with developing English language proficiency. However, the specific learning activities should be designed or adapted to the nature of individual classroom.

To sum up, according to the recommendations made by Baker, learning and teaching should now be different from the more traditional pedagogies previously used to teach languages. There should also be a single educative approach which blends the more visible aspects of language and less visible aspects of culture. In this way, students are encouraged to acknowledge the necessity of interaction with people from other cultures through English language communication, while maintaining their own cultural identity.

Reasons to Teach GE Courses with ICA Integration to Thai Tertiary Students

The primary reason of designing such courses for tertiary students is that they are young adults who are mature to use critical thinking skills e.g. comparison, suggested solutions, evaluation, and learn independently

e.g. online information search and collaboratively with their classmates e.g. oral presentation, group discussion. In other words, teaching English and the cultivation of cultural knowledge, especially at the primary and secondary levels, is probably difficult for students to acquire learning goals such as language acquisition requires some cultural understanding, thinking skills and satisfactory level of English language proficiency, particularly in courses requiring speaking and writing skills.

More significantly, if students – particularly Thai university undergraduates – are to participate in the labor market after graduation, at either the national or the international level, they need to find more opportunities to engage in face-to-face intercultural communication in their everyday lives, whether in the workplace or on social media (Boonpattanaporn, 2015; Gibson, 2008; Neuliep, 2012; Oetzel, 2009).

In addition, ICA integration is supposed to take place during GE courses, as the nature of such courses is to develop the English language and communication skills of students in general. The main reason for conducting these courses is completely different from courses such as of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which students are required to take after a GE course. While the latter aims to develop language and communication skills, particularly in domain specific areas such as English for Scientists and English for

Engineers, there is rarely a focus on or any promotion of ICA.

Suggested Guidelines to Design GE Courses with ICA Integration

The following guidelines are made for teaching GE to Thai tertiary students at the pre-intermediate and intermediate level of English language proficiency. In terms of the ultimate learning outcomes, it is up to the discretion of the instructors to design specific learning activities which match the characteristics of their students and conform to institutional policy.

1. Understanding the nature of students

Who to be taught should be first considered. Normally, GE courses are provided to students who are first and second-year students. Their level of English language proficiency is at either pre-intermediate or intermediate level. It means that they are supposed to communicate in English at a satisfactory level, despite the fact that some of them may lag behind due to factors, such as their individual backgrounds. In the Thai educational context, students who have studied in English or in an international program at the secondary level seem to perform better in the language classroom in terms of responding immediately to questions, participating in discussions, having a wide

range of vocabulary, realistically using expressions in any communicative situation, and obviously, having confidence. This is because they have had more exposure to the language in a learning environment.

On the other hand, the students who attended a regular program lack fluency in English communicative situations or participating in classroom conversations. Ironically, many students from such programs are able to use grammar correctly and understand more complicated vocabulary in terms of paper-based examinations. Due to this fact, course designers should create courses which provide opportunities to equally develop the language skills of both groups. Typically, students in the tertiary language classroom have mixed abilities, and it seems difficult for instructors to effectively handle the classroom in terms of selecting learning activities which are appropriate for the entire class.

2. Selecting which English Language Skills to focus on

The language skills mainly used to develop the English language skills of students should be focused of two of four skills, for example, listening and speaking or reading and writing. The integration of all four skills in a course would allow learners to develop these skills holistically. However, a focus on practicing two skills seems to be a good alternative as students

will have more opportunities to learn these skills step by step. For example, according to author's institutional policy, a listening and speaking course are taught in the first semester in order to expose the students to vocabulary and the common expressions used in communicative situations to deal with a variety of topics and to practice and produce their responses, and the discussion of stimulating topics. The students will also increase their confidence when communicating in person. The students should be provided with a reading and writing course in the following semester. In such courses, students will practice reading for main ideas, details, references, inferences, etc., as well as understanding the steps of how to write accurately in English and with effective organization. It will also help students to read in order to search for knowledge as autonomous learners. However, the author would suggest that it is up to the discretion of the course designers whether or not to teach all four skills, rather than two sets of skills, which may be beneficial to students being taught with a different focus or different outcomes.

3. Selecting Contents which Promote ICA

ICA as part of a sociocultural competence is commonly neglected, despite the fact that now more than ever, it is essential for students to become global citizens (Chlopek, 2008). As previously mentioned, students should

have a good balance of fluency, accuracy and appropriacy. This can be defined as the most appropriate way to communicate in English in any intercultural communicative situation. Therefore, knowledge of a diverse number of cultural backgrounds may be useful in terms of communicative situations (Kourova & Modianos, 2013). The type of content to promote ICA includes the following cultural themes (Cakir, 2006): family, home, eating, clothing, holidays, language, social interactions, history, education, health, marriage, etc. For example, the author selected a topic of 'lifestyle' as the setting of the first unit. A warm-up and 4 main learning activities were designed according to the contents which aim to raise ICA as shown in the following table. Besides, it has been divided into two sessions in this unit, and each session lasts two hours or 120 minutes.

Table 2 Sample of Lesson Plan "Lifestyles" with ICA Integration

Instructor's task	Students' tasks	Teaching aids	Rationale
Warm-up activity - Showing photographs of *"Teenagers and Social Networks"* - Asking students to share their own experiences in using social networks	- Looking at the photographs and sharing their own experiences with partners	- Photographs of *"Teenagers and Social Networks"*	- To get students' attention, and lead to the contents
Activity 1: Listening for main ideas - Dividing students into a group with five students - Asking students why they need to listen and how they listen for main ideas - Using a video clip *"Leisure in Britain"* to improve students' listening skills	- Discussing the reasons why they have to listen for main ideas and the ways they can get main ideas from listening - Watching a video clip, and answering questions about the clip - **Sharing an idea of different cultural**	- Video clip 1: *"Leisure in Britain"* - Task sheet	- To practice listening for main ideas with various communicative situations - **To raise intercultural awareness by sharing an idea of different cultural aspects of leisure between British and Thai teenagers**

Table 2 Sample of Lesson Plan "Lifestyles" with ICA Integration (Continued)

Instructor's task	Students' tasks	Teaching aids	Rationale
	aspects of leisure between British and Thai teenagers		
Activity 2: Listening for detail - Dividing students into a group with five students - Asking students why they need to listen and how they listen for detail - Using a video clip *"India Rich vs Poor"* to improve students' listening skills	- Discussing the reasons why they have to listen for detail and the ways they can get detail from listening - Watching a video clip, and answering questions about the clip - **Sharing an idea of different cultural aspects of lifestyles between Indian and Thai rich and poor people**	- Video clip 2: *"India Rich vs Poor"* - Task sheet	- To practice listening for detail with different interviews - To raise intercultural awareness by sharing an idea of different cultural aspects of lifestyles between Indian and Thai rich and poor people
Activity 3: Doing a survey - Dividing students into a group with five students - Showing a video clip *"Think Time: Teens and Social Networks"* - Giving an introduction to doing a survey, and designing a questionnaire	- Discussing how Thai teenagers use social networks in comparison with how American teenagers do according to the video clip - Designing a questionnaire on *"Thai Teens and Social Networks"*	- Video clip 3: *"Think Time: Teens and Social Networks"* - Power-point slides - Ideas map - Task sheet	- To develop their critical thinking skills - To raise intercultural awareness by discussing how Thai teenagers use social networks in comparison with how American teenagers do according to the video clip

Table 2 Sample of Lesson Plan "Lifestyles" with ICA Integration (Continued)

Instructor's task	Students' tasks	Teaching aids	Rationale
- Giving an idea map to each group for a brai nstorming discus- sion o n Thai teenagers' lifestyle - Giving a guideline to prepare and do an oral presentation	- Preparing and doing an oral presentation		- To learn how to design a questionnaire for a survey - To practice doing an oral presentation
Activity 4: Grammar review (present simple) - Asking students which tense is needed when they want to talk and report the facts - Review grammatical rules of the present simple - Asking students to watch a video clip *"Getting to School and School Life in Japan"*, and describe the story	- Doing a review exercise - Sharing their common mistakes when they use the present simple - Watching the clip and writing a summary of the story with the present simple - **Sharing an idea of different cultural aspects of school life between Japanese and Thai students**	- Video clip 4: *"Getting to School and School Life in Japan"* - Task sheet	- To review grammatical rules of the present simple - To practice writing a short paragraph - **To raise intercultural awareness by sharing an idea of different cultural aspects of school life between Japanese and Thai students**

Regarding Table 2, the author has designed the lesson plan with ICA integration according to Baker's six strands, starting from knowing students' own culture and comparing it to other cultures such as British, American, Indian and Japanese cultures relating to leisure activities, social problems, teenagers' lifestyles and school life in Lesson 1. All contents and designed tasks have covered the strands 1-4 (i.e. exploring local cultures, exploring language-learning materials, exploring traditional arts and media in English, and exploring IT/electronic media in English). Moreover, the contents have been extended with a primary focus on the similarities and differences of students' own cultures and other cultures which belong to ASEAN, Asian, and western countries using Video clips, photographs and an ideas map – a visual representation of information including a central idea surrounded by connected branches of associated topics-as main teaching aids. However, the strands 5 - 6 (i.e. cultural informants and face-to-face intercultural communication) have not been integrated in the author's present lesson plan. This is because the author intended to initially conduct a preliminary study on how to design a GE course with ICA integration, and to examine any possibility of designing students' tasks and teaching materials. In addition, an emphasis of the lesson plan is on only the strands 1–4 because the author meant to familiarize students with topics or issues regarding ICA,

with practices in thinking critically. In doing so, students may need a plenty of time in order to raise ICA and develop their English language proficiency at the same time in a GE course. Integrating the last two strands is probably more beneficial for students in the following GE course as they will have developed thinking and language skills with ICA from the first one and be ready to achieve learning tasks according to those two strands.

4. Selecting Instructional Materials with an ICA Focus

As usual, both commercial and in-house textbooks are used in these courses. The former tend to be preferred by instructors because they are able to individually decide which textbooks support the learning process and the outcome, as well as meeting the objectives of each course. However, the latter seem to be more challenging to course designers, in particular, content that promotes ICA because it is rare to find textbooks which pay equal attention to local, regional and international cultures, along with the development of their communication and language skills (Andarab, 2015; Peng & Byram, 2002). While textbooks are frequently employed as primary teaching materials, multi-media materials such as web courses, YouTube, video clips, and websites are also useful resources (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010). Obviously, the delivery of the content is also important as the teacher should be

able to encourage the students to participate in each of the learning activities (Cotterall & Reinders, 2008).

5. Selecting a Variety of Learning Activities which Promote ICA

The most suitable teaching method for teaching GE courses with ICA integration should be based on a CLT approach as it attempts to get students involve in all learning activities (Kourova & Modianos, 2013). In other words, learning activities should involve communication which promotes language learning, such as the completion of real-world tasks. The students must also engage in authentic and meaningful language use in order for learning to truly take place. Besides, students should be actively exposed to English, with the teacher facilitating their learning in the classroom.

Some useful techniques to promote ICA are as follows: attending mini lectures; studying authentic materials; joining group discussions; making oral presentations; using music, songs or dances; creating bulletin boards; using mini dramas; turning students into cultural detectives; using cartoons; and inviting a native English speaker to interact with them (Seelye, 1968). More significantly, learning activities should consist of many forms, for example, individual, pair and group work. Thai students tend to be passive and often remain quiet, even when asked to respond to questions or to express their opinions in the classroom because of the influence of their culture (Wangkijchinda, 2011). Other examples of this phenomenon include the tendency of Thai students to value harmony, to pay respect to older people or to those in authorities and to avoid losing face (Laopongharn & Sercombe, 2009). Even though these students may wish to express their ideas or share their opinions, they will remain silent until they are forced to speak, especially in a public setting. As a result, pair or group work may be more suitable for many Thai students (Wangkijchinda, 2011), and instructors should be aware of this. The following figure is a learning environment in a GE course conducted by the author with a focus on developing listening and speaking skills and ICA integration.
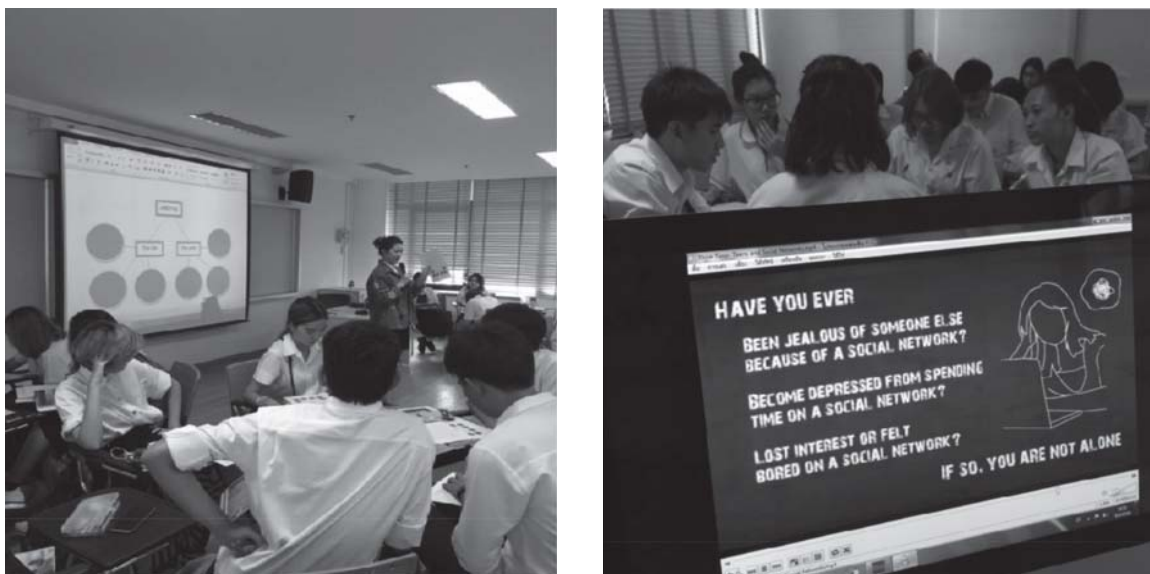
Figure 1 Learning Environment in a GE Course Conducted by the Author

6. Selecting an Assessment and Evaluation Procedure for ICA

In order to assess or evaluate whether or not these students are well developed in such specifically designed courses, both a formative assessment e.g. self-assessment, teacher assessment, student rating of teaching, and a summative assessment e.g. mid-term examination and final examination should be employed. This is because both help learning, summarize achievement during learning period, and monitor levels of achievement (Harlen, 2005). However, the grading of such assessments and evaluations are often different between individual institutions, as well as depending on the discretion of the instructor.

As one of the ultimate goals is to promote ICA, the students should have their level of ICA assessed. A variety of assessments have been created to gauge such awareness. It is recommended to let students self-report or use feedback to promote student reflection after the course completion (Quinton & Smallbone, 2010), as instructors need to know how well their students are aware of their own level of intercultural communication, and to evaluate core strengths and weaknesses of their learning achievement. Even though many of these students lack direct experience of this kind of communication, their perceptions should be identified, and would be useful for course improvement.

Advantages for Thai University Students taking GE Courses with ICA Integration

One of the advantages of this method is that students have the opportunity to raise their awareness of cultural diversity. The contents of the course consist of topics which reflect typical aspects of the culture, such as life styles, occupations, places and types of food. As a result, students should be more aware of the aspects of other cultures, which may be similar or different from their own. The promotion of ICA may help these students to understand that they are global citizens who should try to live harmoniously in the global community and should understand cultural diversity, as shown in the lesson plan. In reality, students may have to deal with more intercultural communicative situations outside the classroom, especially when they enter the labor market. This is particularly true in Thailand, due to the fact that it is a member of the ASEAN Economic Community and interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds are inevitable.

Besides, students are enhanced to think critically. Due to the fact that the similarities and differences between cultures occur at the national, regional and international levels, this is reflected in the contents, as well as the learning activities related to culture are used throughout the suggested course. Then, students are stimulated in order to think critically in terms of cultural comparison. For example, the students will be asked to analyze the differences between the lifestyles of the rich and the poor in either their own country or whichever country is assigned to them. They have to use an ideas map to differentiate such lifestyles from their own experience and worldview.

Conclusion

This article has reviewed and discussed the key role of intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching in the contemporary era, and pointed out the urgent need for the revision of language courses. The ignorance of intercultural awareness was demonstrated and discussed, and guidelines to promote intercultural awareness in General English courses were suggested. Furthermore, the advantages of the integration of intercultural awareness for Thai tertiary students were also clearly explained.

Acknowledgments

References

Alptekin, C. (2002). Towards intercultural communicative competence in ELT. *ELT Journal*, *56* (1), 57-64.

Andarab, M. S. (2015). Representation of the characters in the claimed English as an international language-targeted course books. *Studies in English Language Teaching, 3* (4), 294-305.

Baker, W. (2012). From cultural awareness to intercultural awareness: Culture in ELT. *ELT Journal, 66*(1), 62-70.

Bennet, M.J. (1997). How not to be a fluent fool: Understanding the cultural dimension of language. In A. Fantini (Ed.), *New ways in teaching culture* (pp 16-21). Alexandra, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Boonpattanaporn, P. (2015). Communication in AEC multicultural workplaces. *University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce Journal*, *35*(3), 216-234.

Byrnes, H. (2010). Revisiting the role of culture in the foreign language curriculum. *The Modern Language Journal*, *94*(2), 315-317.

Byram, K. (2011). Using the concept of perspective to integrate cultural, communicative, and form-focused language instruction. *Foreign Language Annals, 44*(3), 525-543.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communication competence.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., Holmes, P., & Savvides, N. (2013). Intercultural communicative competence in foreign language education: Questions of theory, practice and research. *The Language Learning Journal, 41*(3), 251-253.

Cakir, I. (2006). Developing cultural awareness in foreign language teaching. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, *7*(3), 154-161.

Celce-Murcia, M., DÖrnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1995). Communicative competence: A pedagogically motivated model with content specifications. *Issues in Applied Linguistics, 6*(2), 5-35.

Chlopek, Z. (2008). The intercultural approach to EFL teaching and learning. *English Teaching Forum*, *4*, 10-19.

Clandfield, L., & Benne, R. (2011). *Global (Upper intermediate).* Spain: Macmillan.

Clare, A., & Wilson, J. (2011). *Speakout (Intermediate)*. Slovakia: Pearson.

Cotterall, S., & Reinders, H. (2008). *Learner strategies: A guide for teachers*. RELC Portfolio Series 12. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

Gibson, R. (2008). *Intercultural business communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harlen, W. (2005). Teachers' summative practices and assessment for learning – tensions and synergies. *The Curriculum*

Journal, *16*(2), 207-223.

Ho, S.T.K. (2009). Addressing culture in EFL classrooms: The challenge of shifting from a traditional to an intercultural stance. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, *6*(1), 63-76.

Hülmbauer, C., Böhringer, H., & Seidlhofer, B. (2008). Introducing English as a Lingua Franca (ELF): Precursor and partner in intercultural communication. *Synergies*, *3*, 25-36.

Jacobs, G.M., & Goh, C.C.M. (2007). *Cooperative learning in the language classroom.* Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Center.

Kerr, P. (2012). *Straightforward (Pre-intermediate).* Thailand: Macmillan.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kourova, A., & Modianos, D. (2013). Intercultural awareness and its role in enriching students' communicative competence. *The International HETL Review*, Special issue, 60-70.

Laopongharn, W., & Sercombe, P. (2009). What relevance does intercultural communication have to language education in Thailand. *Annual Reviews of Education Communication and Language Sciences*, *6*, 59-83.

Neuliep, J. W. (2012). *Intercultural communication: A contextual approach*. London: SAGE Publication.

Peng, A., & Byram, M. (2002). Authenticity in college English textbooks – An intercultural perspective. *RELC Journal*, *33*(2), 58-84.

Porto, M. (2013). Language and intercultural education: An interview with Michael Byram. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, *8*(2), 143-162.

Oetzel, J. G. (2009). *Intercultural communication: A layered approach.* New York: Pearson.

Quinton, S., & Smallbone, T. (2010). Feeding forward: using feedback to promote student reflection and learning – a teaching model. *Innovation in Education and Teaching International*, *47*(1), 125-135.

Seelye, H. N. (1968). Analysis and teaching of the cross-cultural context. *The Britanica Review of Foreign Language Education*, *1,* 37-81.

Tomlinson, B., & Masuhara, H. (2010). *Developing language course materials.* RELC Portfolio Series 11. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

Wangkijchinda, K. (2011). *Developing intercultural communicative competence: A guide for English foreign language teachers in Thailand* (Unpublished master's thesis). California State University.