How to Help EFL Students Gain Confidence in Intercultural Communication:
A Case in Vietnam

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Abstract
The article reports on action research on promoting English- major students' confidence
in intercultural communication through the social interaction project at a university in
Vietnam. The aims of the research are to examine Vietnamese students' difficulties they
encounter in intercultural communication, including the reasons they ascribe for these
communication problems. Also their face-to-face cross-cultural interaction experience is
described and their expectations to intercultural integration in language learning are
indicated. 34 Vietnamese college students were engaged in an investigation and the data
were collected from questionnaires and se-mi structured interviews with the participants.
The findings revealed that through the "Social Interaction Project" Vietnamese English-
major students were provided more opportunities to communicate with foreigners face to
face, then gained a significant amount of cross-cultural communication experience and
acquired more communication strategies, which all promoted their confidence in
intercultural communication. They seemed to be aware of the importance of intercultural
competence in actual interactions as well as they had a strong desire to be developed
intercultural communicative competence in their EFL classes. The findings also yield
some significant implications including the need to create an intercultural curriculum,
textbooks and teacher training programs to enhance intercultural awareness in order to
help EFL students gain confidence in intercultural communication in English learning
and teaching process.

Keywords: cultural awareness, intercultural communication, intercultural communicative
competence, confidence in oral communication

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and integration the increasingly intercultural realities of our world signify the need for fostering global citizens with effective intercultural communication skills (Jandt, 2004; Hampel, 2009; Hinner, 1998; Nunan, 2003; Teng, 2005). In language education, foreign language teaching (FLT) in general and English as a foreign language (EFL) learning in particular have received more and more attention from educators, teachers and policy makers of how EFL teaching can equip learners with sufficient and effective communicative competence and skills so that that they can survive in the global village (Nunan 2003; Matthew & Thakkar, 2012; Lustig & Koester, 2006). In Vietnamese educational settings, EFL learning and teaching process has gained the critical status at tertiary level since the government introduced educational reforms 30 years ago (Bui, 2006; Hoang, 2008; Ho, 2002; Le, 2004; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2002; Nguyen, 2015; To, 2010; Truong & Tran, 2013; Vu & Nguyen, 2007) . Academic researchers mention the increasing important role of EFL in colleges and universities as a powerful tool to guarantee well-paid jobs for any Vietnamese graduates who are looking for to work with multinational companies (MOET, 2007; Truong & Tran, 2013; Vu & Burns, 2014; Vu & Nguyen, 2007). However, the aims and objectives of these language policies in Vietnam seem to be impossible because the majority of Vietnamese graduates are unable to perform well in English due to their terribly poor communication with other speakers of English (Bui, 2006; Le & Phan, 2013; Nguyen, 2008; Nguyen, 2013; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2002; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2016; Vu & Burns, 2014). Hoang (2008) emphasizes on the unsatisfactory learning outcomes in EFL classroom. Vietnamese learners of English cannot communicate well in English in both daily and professional situations. Several studies found that Vietnamese students of English, like many Asian students of EFL, are often reticent learners with passive language learning style. This might be considered the main impedance to successful intercultural communication (Cheng, 2000; Jackson, 2003; Le, 2004; Le & Barnard, 2009; Nguyen, 2003; Nguyen & Tran, 2007; To, 2010; Tran, 2013; Vu & Burns, 2014).

In my teaching experience, many of my Business English major students came to see me with the same story: they could not manage to communicate effectively with foreigners in real-life situations. For instance, they were very timid and reluctant to start an informal talk with foreign visitors they met. They said they were unable to keep the communicative channel open; they felt uncomfortable and unconfident to converse with both native and non-native persons. In many cases they felt it really hard to maintain the conversations or to manipulate communicative skills in order to fully understand or clearly interpret the interlocutors' messages in actual interactions. They reported that they did not know how to cope with communication problems and difficulties in speaking with foreign people. Also, due to their loss of communication motivation, they had a tendency to avoid making oral contacts with foreigners. Therefore these students asked me how they could build up confidence and improve communicative skills which enabled them to be a successful communicator. Then from my observations in several speaking classes, I recognized that those who usually showed their worries and tensions in doing communication tasks or performing role-plays were on account of the deficiency of both linguistic and cultural knowledge.

My students' stories and my observations in EFL class had alerted me that my current teaching method was not completely suitable to my Business English majors. I realised it was not effective and sufficient for my students to be taught language structures, functions, or roleplays in the classroom. Particularly, I assumed that classroom speaking activities did not work appropriately well in order to accommodate my students' communicative needs. As a result, a number of questions had come up related to how I could make my language teaching successful in EFL contexts. Was the process of language teaching really the focus of Communicative Language Teaching (Canale, 1983; Savignon, 2001, 2003)? Did CLT really happen in my EFL classes? Did I provide an adequately communicative language environment to my students? How could I help my students overcome communicative barriers and gain confidence as intercultural communicators?

With all above problems arose in my specific teaching context, I started looking back my credo of teaching and decided to conduct an action research on my students' communication problems so that I would have a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons why my students lack confidence and motivation in genuine face-to-face communication. The aims of the research are to examine Vietnamese students' communication difficulties facing Vietnamese students of Business English at a university in central Vietnam, including the difficulties they encounter and the reasons they ascribe for these communication problems. The paper then investigates on the participants' perceptions toward a task-based project outside classroom. And the study also focuses on their expectations to intercultural integration in EFL classroom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Language, culture and communication

The fact that language and culture are inseparable is confirmed by a number of researchers and educators (Brown, 1994; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Jandt, 2004). Culture is defined as a pattern of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors socially constructed through communication in social communities (Jandt, 2004; Gay, 2010; Hanson & Fox, 1995). Researches on culture and communication state that culture is considered as a context for communication and communication is implicitly as a part of culture (Frank, 2013; Jandt, 2004). This implies language learners have to learn various concepts of culture and learn how to explore cultural barriers to communication, including nonverbal communication and language (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Levine & Adelman 1993). The term "cultural awareness" means the ability to acknowledge and respect differences between diverse groups of people from different cultures. Several researchers confirm that cultural differences are barriers and impede communication and interactions (Byram, 2008; Lustig & Koester, 2006; Matthew & Thakkar, 2012; Paige, 2013). To overcome these barriers learners need to be trained in order to understand the differences between one's own culture and another's (Paige, 2013; Xiao & Patreki, 2007). In other words, language learners are in need of being developed cultural awareness in EFL context.

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in foreign language teaching (FLT)

The term 'intercultural communication' refers to communication and interactions between persons and groups from different cultural communities, who have different cultural identities, social values and behaviours (Byram, 1997; 2008; Hanson & Fox, 1995; Jandt, 2004; Jarodd, 2013; Kourova, 2013; Paige, 2013). A review of relevant literature in intercultural communicative competence (ICC) indicates that ICC is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts (Frank, 2013; Hammer, 2012; Sellami, 2000). All cross-cultural communication skills can be learned when the teacher help students learn how to show respect, empathy, tolerance and non-judgment in communicating with foreigners (Jandt, 2004; Lustig & Koester, 2006; Samovar & Porter, 2004; Zhang, 2010). In particular, researchers propose the idea of teaching communication strategies in EFL classroom in order to develop learners' strategic competence "*which is defined as the ability to cope in authentic communicative situation and to keep the communicative channel open*" (Alptekin, 2002, p.58). In the globalised or internationalised world, teachers therefore should equip their students with communication strategies or compensation strategies by providing training on how to apply these strategies into real-life situations for more effective communication (Alptekin, 2002; Dornyei, 1995, 1997; Le, 2006; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2016; Oxford, 1990). According to Alptekin (2002) "*intercultural communicative competence should be developed among EIL learners by equipping them with linguistic and cultural behavior which will enable them to communicative effectively with others, and also by equipping them with an awareness of difference, and with strategies for coping with such difference*" (p.63).

2.3 Previous studies on EFL learners' confidence in intercultural communication

Within the literature several researches have been done to examine underlying factors affecting to students' confidence in intercultural communication for over the past twenty years. Empirical evidence in the field of FLT showed learners' communicative ability depends mostly on teaching practices of the teachers in the classroom (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993; Frank, 2013; Cheng, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Rabahah, 2002, Teng, 2005; Zhang, 2005). Nguyen (2007) and Le (2001) said one of the major causes that impede students' communicative confidence is that they have no communication experience due to the lack of the opportunity to pratise English in an authentic English environment or to have actual interactions in daily life. Another culprit for the students' low degree of confidence is the lack of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) or communicative skills training in EFL classroom (Kourova, 2013; Paige, 2013; Teng, 2005; Zhang, 2010). Zhang (2010) states that communication skills can be enhanced through various activities outside the classrooms, such as going to English corners, tours, exhibitions to learn Western etiquette and these activities will help them avoid misunderstandings in face-to-face communication with native speakers and resulted in the improvement of their communicative confidence. Teng (2005) found that Taiwanese students of English gained more confidence in cross-cultural communication activities with American partners through a virtual cross-cultural project. The findings showed the

positive correlations between the students' confidence and their motivation to succeed in the project as well as their acquisition of intercultural communication skills. Songsiri, (2007) reported that "*students' increased confidence in speaking English was influenced by teaching learning strategies, using authentic materials and presenting the activity in non-threatening terms*" (p.xvi). Kubo (2009) reported his action research study on English majors in a Japanese junior college using pair taping activities. The results showed that the students gained more confidence in spoken English and the sense of confidence in turn allow them to learn autonomously in EFL context. Doqaruni's findings (2014) indicated that Iranian students' security and self-confidence were enhanced due to communicative experience and strategies gained through additional speaking activities and cooperative learning created by the teacher in the EFL classroom.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The context

The move from teacher- centeredness to learner-centeredness in EFL learning and teaching process has received much attention from language teachers in Vietnam for a long time (Bui, 2006; Dang, 2006; MOET, 2007; Nguyen, 2003; Nguyen, 2015). As a result, learner expectations and attitudes have increasingly come to be recognized in accordance with CLT (Phan, 2008; Vu & Burn, 2014) which was introduced to University of Foreign Language Studies (UFLS) more than ten years ago. In reality, however, it is hardly possible for English teachers to strictly follow this new teaching method on account of several constraints and limitations. As a teacher of English at the Department of English for Specific Purposes at UFLS, I had been teaching speaking courses (namely SPEAKING 01, 02, and 03) in Business English (BE) classes for more than ten years. In spite of learning three speaking courses of 12 credits, the students' speaking skills seemed not to be improved much. Particularly, their communicative skills were neglected due to many unfavourable teaching conditions such as the class size of 40 -50 students or the lack of studying facilities.

3.2 Action Research in language education

Action research is considered as a sophisticated method for classroom research. For instance, Efron & Ravid (2013) suggested it is an inquiry conducted by teachers "*in their own settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students' learning*" (p.2). This type of classroom research is usually considered as a vital and feasible tool for adapting, changing, and enhancing the process of language learning and teaching and then it is necessary for professional growth in education (Denscombe, 2007; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Somekh, 2006). In other words classroom research will help the practitioners self-evaluate and take responsibilities for their own performances in educational settings (Glanz, 2014; Ryan, 2013). Also, Efron & Ravid (2013) indicates that it is the role of language teachers to investigate and understand language learners' social and historical circumstances such as their students' past and present successes, failures, fears or dreams in order that the teacher can "*gain insight into students' world*" (p.4). According to Ryan (2013) in action research the teachers carry out their

investigation systematically, reflectively and critically into their students' problems; using practically appropriate strategies to develop new skills so that they are able to improve their teaching process and foster their career development in language classrooms. It is argued that education and learning are social and interactive processes and the teachers should offer true learning situation for their students (Dewey, 1997; Efron & Ravid, 2013). Efron & Ravid (2013) suggest the 6 cyclical steps in action research as follows (a) identifying a problem that needs to be studied, (b) gathering background information through a review of literature and previous studies on the topic, (c) designing the study and planning the methods of collecting data, (d) collecting data, (e) analyzing and interpreting, (f) writing and sharing.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 The "Social Interaction Project"

As all above studies mentioned, learning through the cross-cultural communication project seemed to be an appropriate task-based teaching method for intermediate and upper-intermediate students in EFL classroom (Bailey, 2005; Bender, 2012; Kourova, 2013; Markham, 2011). The Social Interaction Project started from mid-November to the beginning of December 2013 and lasted for five weeks due to the constraints of time and resource availability. A detailed description of the procedures was as follows:

1. Foreigner interview: Firstly, the students were introduced about the project, its aims and target and its requirements. A reward scheme was also announced at this stage as a motivating factor to the task performers. Some instructions and guidelines were supplied and explained if any question arose. Then the participants were assigned to work in groups to conduct oral surveys with as many foreigners they met as possible. They were given enough time to prepare and schedule their project; including the place, the topics and the procedures they should follow. The surveys and recorded interactions were handed in to the teacher at the end of the fifth week. The purpose of the interview task was to achieve two aims: the students were firstly given chances to experience actual interactions with foreign visitors who used English as a communicative language (Bailey, 2005; Bender, 2012). They would learn how their utterances are produced and understood appropriately in real-life situations, and adapt any social skills they know to do their job. They had to learn how to use communication strategies deal with problems happening in the process of interactions due to limited psychological and environmental conditions such as memory, nervousness, and distractions and interfering background noises (Canale, 1983). Secondly the pair work or group work would give them more confidence in talking to foreigners and help them learn how to cooperate with each other to repair communication mistakes as well as to maintain a successful conversation (Alptekin, 2002; Bern, 1990).

2. Discussion with peers and the teacher: There were informal talks between the teacher and different groups of students for checking their progress after the field practice every week at a coffee shop. The purpose of this task was that throughout the discussion the teacher would find out the students' problems or difficulties in conversing with

foreigners in authentic contexts. Then the teacher would suggest some language- and culture-related solutions. For example the teacher advised them on their use of communication strategies, both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Moreover based on the feedback from the participants the teacher adjusted some lesson plans in EFL classrooms in the future.

4.2 The participants

The participants in this action research study were 34 second-year Vietnamese students whose English was intermediate and aged from 19 to 20 years. 33 female and 1 male students enrolled in my 15-week speaking course 03 (SP03) at ESP Department in University of Foreign Language Studies in September 2013. All of them voluntarily registered to participate in the "Social Interaction Project" as an extracurricular speaking activity beyond the classroom. These students had to pass the exams of Speaking Course 1 and 2 before being allowed to register the course SP03.

4.3 Data collection

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed in this study. Data were collected through (a) a set of two attitudinal questionnaires adapted from Teng (2005), Songsiri, (2007) and Xiao & Petraki (2007); (b) the semi-structured interviews and (c) student reflective journals. Descriptive analysis was used to describe and sunmarise the data. A pre-task survey was conducted when the questionnaire 1 was administered to 34 Business English majors. The questionnaire 1 consisted of 15 Likert scaled and 5 opened-ended questions. A post-task survey was carried out with seven groups of these students through the questionnaire 2 and the semi-structured interviews with guided questions after the five-week project. The questions in the interviews were developed based on the students' responses to the questionnaire 1. The data gathered from the questionnaires were then analyzed via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0. The data collected from the transcription of the interview recordings, the responses from the open-ended questions in the questionnaires and reflective journals-were imported into word processor. Then the information was organised and generated under the themes or categories or patterns. The language used in the questionnaires, the interviews and reflective journals was Vietnamese because the students felt more confident to communicate ideas in their mother tongue (Dang, 2006). All the quotes were therefore translated into English.

5. THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-task Survey: The data collected through the questionnaire 1 were used to analyze the students' communicative frequency and opportunities, communicative confidence in EFL class and their difficulties or barriers to intercultural communication.

Figure 1 presents the participants' frequency of intercultural communication. Approximately 88% of the students reported they had only a few opportunities to speak with foreign people when they studied at school whereas less than 12% of the reporters said they had good chance to communicate with foreigners.
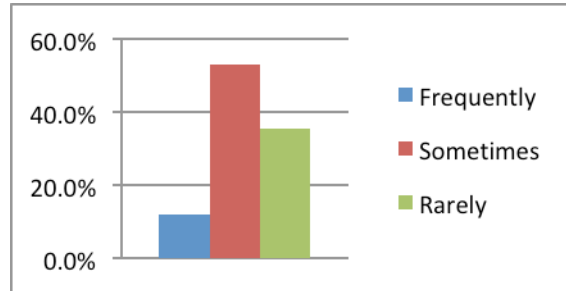
**Figure 1:** The frequency of intercultural interaction

Figure 2 presents the degree of confidence in cross-cultural communication among the students. The findings indicated that nearly 91% agreed that they were highly unconfident and reluctant to speak with foreigners whereas only 6% said they could converse with people from other countries in a comfortable manner.
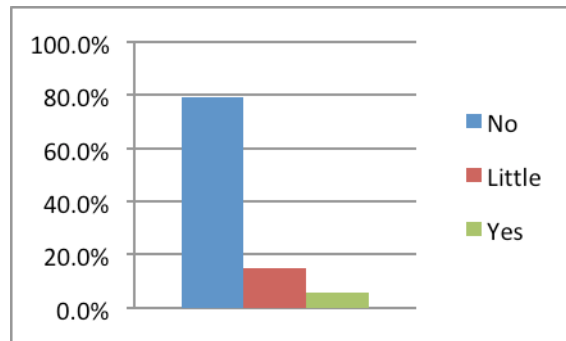
Figure 2: The degree of confidence in cross-cultural communication

Figure 3 shows the reasons why the students felt uncomfortable and were not self-confident enough in communicating with foreigners. The findings presents the students' (N=34) answer to the question of what demoting factors made them unconfident in intercultural communication. 100% of the students agreed that due to their poor linguistic competence as well as little or no exposure to actual interactions, they failed to be a good communicator. Besides approximately 90% reported that as they had little or no practical experiences to cope with communication problems happened during the conversation, they became reticent and reserved. More than 80% of the participants answered it was the conventional teaching method and textbook-based materials that impeded their learning outcomes in the EFL class. Otherwise, 45% said they seemed passive and feared of failure in communication
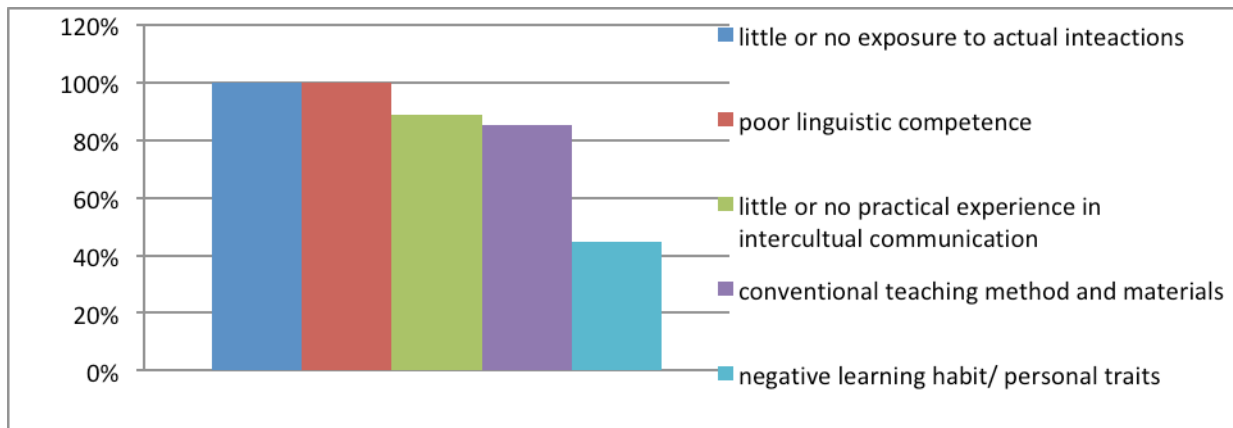
Figure 3: The barriers to students' confidence in intercultural communication

Post-task survey: The data collected from the questionnaire 2, the interviews and the reflective journals about the students' opinions and attitudes to the Social Interaction Project.

Table 1: indicates the average time for intercultural encounters, the preferred communication style and the reasons for the preference for a typical group during the project.

Week	Average time for an encounter	Distribution of nationality of foreigners	Preferred communication styles (%)	Preferred Reasons
1 + 2	2 minutes/ 7 encounters	Asian visitors: 3 European visitors: 2 Native speakers: 2	Preference of speaking with: - NS: 62% - NNS: 15%	Easier, more comfortable, more confident to talk to Asian people (Korea, Japan and India)
3	9 minutes/ 9 encounters	Asian visitors: 2 European visitors: 3 Native speakers: 4	- Both NS and NNS: 23%	Native speakers are a source of language learning with perfect accent, pronunciation, rich vocab;
4-5	18 minutes/ 9 encounters	Asian visitors: 1 European visitors: 4 Native speakers: 4		European people are considered as friendly warm considerate helpful communicators (German, Polish, Swiss and Sweden)

The data collected from the discussions for the first two weeks were coded and a new theme emerged was that the preferred communication styles. These students applied what they learned from the language classroom into the real situations in a basic and simple way as perceived. They reported that they were really under pressure to do the survey with foreign visitors who were at first really difficult to start a conversation with. Group 6 said

"At first we felt it extremely hard to start a conversation with a foreign stranger and we thought we had to give up the task because we were refused many times.

But then we were reminded of the teacher's rewarding scheme so we decided to continue" (G6)

They had to try hard to carry out the task in a simple way and to finish the conversation as quickly as possible and therefore the average time spent for each survey was very short –only two minutes.

"*For the first two weeks we were still very nervous and anxious to try to make contact with foreign visitors, so we just tried to do the survey and finished the conversation in a very short time, just in two minutes or so*" (G5)

However, when they continuously gained some first-hand communication experience with people from native-speaking and European countries after five weeks, they learned how to maintain the conversations (up to eighteen minutes) and they confirmed that the time spent with these people was valuable and unforgettable to them.

"*It was the first time we had as many as conversations with foreigners in our life. At first we didn't believe in ourselves that we could communicate well. But when we opened the conversation successfully with some European people especially from Germany, Russia, Spain and Switzerland, we built up confidence and we felt more comfortable to continue our job*" (G2)

The findings in table 1 also revealed the preference of communication styles of the participants. Many of respondents- 62% of the students- would like to speak with native people (Americans, Australians, Canadians and British) whereas only 15% reported that they preferred to communicate with European or Asian people. The rest (23%) said they liked to speak with both native and non-native speakers. The reasons for many students in favour of native speakers (NS) were (a) NS are friendly, easy-going, enthusiastic, open-minded and helpful; (b) these Westerners are a great source of listening with perfect accent, pronunciation and vocabulary; (c) NS can teach them some new words and correct their mistakes. The reasons for non-native speakers (NNS) were (a) NNS are similar to them in many ways, including culture and level of English, so it is easier to talk to; (b) NNS made them feel equal and comfortable to converse with. Followings were the extracts from the students' reflective journal:

"*It is really easier to listen to and understand what native people speak because they pronounce perfectly with a good wide range of words. We can learn English from them during the conversation*" (G3)

"*We found speaking with both natives and non-natives has its own advantage. With native people we can imitate their accent, their perfect pronunciation and their good choice of words. When talking to non-native speakers we can recognize different types of accent so that it would be easier for us to converse with Asian or European people later on*" (G7).

Table 2 shows the reported communication problems and communication strategies used by seven groups of the respondents.

Week	Communication difficulties	Communication strategies used
1 + 2	- Low English proficiency such as poor pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, problems in listening and speaking; - demotivation, hesitation, anxiety, nervousness, passiveness and reticence	- frequently used avoidance: message abandon, topic change, conversation stop, code-switching, fillers and hesitation devices - Cooperative learning
3-4	Low level of English proficiency Cultural knowledge Verbal Communication strategies	- Less avoidance, some interactional and intra-actional strategies used: self-repair, omission, appeal for help, expressing for non-understanding, - Cooperative learning
5	Low level of English proficiency Awareness of cultural differences Verbal communication strategies Non-verbal communication strategies	- Less avoidance, interactional and intra-actional strategies: approximation, circumlocution, comprehension check, clarification request, eye contact maintenance, positive gestures like smiling, politeness strategies - Cooperative learning, learner autonomy

The results from Table 2 confirmed the statement "Practice makes perfect". All of the participants reported their ups-and-downs time with different stories during the first two weeks. The conversation recordings showed the students' talks were full of pauses, fillers, hesitation and silence. Also, a great many of "yes" and "no", smiles and nods were frequent among their responses. The findings were in accordance with the results found in many studies on Asian students' communication styles (Le & Phan, 2013; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2016; Nunan, 2003, Pham, 2000). For instance, after the first two weeks, many groups reported that:

> "*We found the biggest problems that impeded our communication with foreign people were our pronunciation mistakes and the lack of vocabulary for the topic. Most interlocutors didn't understand what we said and usually we passed the topic and moved on to the next question*" (G6)
> "*During the first two weeks, we just tried to finish the tasks as quickly as possible because we were so nervous and uncomfortable in the conversations. We think we were not good at English speaking and listening. Our pronunciation was terrible*" (G7)

On the contrary, after finishing the five-week social interaction project, the students reported their changes in their perceptions to actual oral communication with foreign

people. Most of them seemed to recognize the fundamental importance of culture-related problems in face-to-face interactions in which more than 85% of the participants agreed they lacked the communicative skills and strategies to compensate for misunderstandings. The following extracts found in the interviews after the project confirmed those results:

> "*We failed the conversation because we didn't know about or have experience of how to use the communication strategies to survive the interactions. We think if we had been equipped with some more communicative skills, we could have done better in these situations*" (G3)
> "*The project was of great importance in raising our cultural awareness and enhancing our cultural sensitivity. We wish we could understand their attitudes, gestures and facial expressions more so that we would learn how to maintain the conversation more successfully in face-to-face communication*" (G4)

Half of the students admitted they failed the conversations because they were not aware of cultural differences between them and other interlocutors. After five weeks of experiencing the real contacts with many foreign people, the students were really in need of an intercultural communication course embedded in the curriculum.

> "*We think the teacher should supply us more intercultural communication and communication strategies and help us how to use these strategies to succeed in opening, maintain and closing conversations with foreign people*" (G1)

Table 3 summarises the students' feedback to the effectiveness of the project in helping students gain confidence in intercultural communication. A comparison between the pre- and post-survey was made so as to indicate the significant differences in the participants' language development and confidence gain. It was demonstrated through the results of the Paired Samples T-Test:

	Pre-task Mean	Post-task Mean	Paired Samples T-Test				
Confidence	2.56	4.24	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			-2.086	-1.267	-8.330	33	.000
Ability	2.44	3.09	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			-.837	-.457	-6.936	33	.000
Knowledge	2.35	3.05	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			-1.094	-.361	-4.125	21	.000

Anxiety	3.85	2.09	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			-1.469	-2.077	-12.132	21	.000
Enjoyment	3.74	4.32	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			-1.034	-.057	-2.324	21	.030

*p<0.05

The findings in Table 3 showed that there were statistically significant differences in students' confidence, ability, knowledge and anxiety in intercultural communication. The results of Paired Sample T-test with Sig. (2-tailed) was .000 (p<.005) demonstrated that the participants gained more confidence and linguistic knowledge after finishing the project. Clearly after constant working with the project for five weeks, the participants reported they had accumulated more valuable experiences in genuine communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. Firstly they were able to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in their English proficiency and they then adjusted their English learning path. Secondly the participants developed their observing skills which helped them identify different types of communication styles from different cultures; they understood what these people needed so that they maintained better communication. Thirdly they raised the awareness of cultural differences between them and other speakers and developed both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies.

> *"The important thing is they actually could understand what we're saying though we didn't pronounce some words accurately. So, the project could indeed make us realize that "travelling forms a young man" and "the more mistakes you make the more you learn". We not only gained confidence ourselves but acknowledged different cultures of other countries in the world as well. Moreover, we also had a good time to relax and save the memorable moments in Hoi An"* (G5).
> *"It seemed to me that 'the English' I have learned in class was extremely different from what I have encountered. The project was really effective and productive in the way that it made me aware of my English and my own culture. I recognized that English in class was for examination, English in use was real and practical for my future career"* (G3)

Several respondents shared with the researcher their stories in actual interactions with foreign visitors. They all recognized the great importance of intercultural knowledge and skills in maintaining successful interactions.

> *"Once we had a conversation with an Italian family of two women and a baby, we tried to touch and pamper the baby. The mother seemed annoyed with our bahaviour and we didn't understand why she was so negative to our seemingly kind act to a baby. Later on throughout the discussion with my teacher, we were told that there were behavior-related differences between Asian and Western*

cultures. In Western countries we shouldn't touch or kiss or pamper a baby if you were not allowed by the parents. This incident was a big lesson for us and it was the first time we experience this cultural distance" (G3)

Table 4 presents the students' expectations toward intercultural communication training in EFL classroom.

EFL teachers should…
organize culture-related activities or task-based projects
bring intercultural communication courses to class.
teach students about rules, etiquette or norms in different cultures, including inappropriate behaviors or culturally-offended situations.
use videos/films about cultural differences/clashes in classrooms.
provide or recommend some interesting books, videos, websites, or learning materials for self-study.

Five key themes emerged from the students' reflective journals signified the importance of and necessity for intercultural communication training in EFL class. All the participants reported their strong desire to be equipped with IC training so that they could be competent communicators. The following quotes were:

"We are looking forward to similar tasks or projects that give us more opportunities to be exposed to actual use of English. We are also in need of an intercultural course introduced to us so that we are prepared for unexpected communication problems" (G1)
"We wish to be taught about different cultures, etiquette, rules in conversation that help us avoid misunderstandings and communication breakdowns" (G2)
"The teacher should use various sources of teaching materials such as videos, films or youtubes to illustrate these cultural problems and to suggest solutions" (G3)
"The teacher should recommend some websites, textbooks, or materials for our self-study" (G4)

6. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The action research study on Vietnamese English-major students' communication experience has shed light on my teaching practice in many ways. The results showed the project effectively created an authentic language environment to respond to the communicative needs of the students in EFL classroom at UFLS, the University of Danang. Especially the students reported these activities were of great importance because they were provided with many opportunities to experience the target language (Truong & Tran, 2013). In other words, when the students were exposed to a language environment and expected not only to understand but also to respond to what they hear, they were sure to recognize that making an effort to get the gist, using strategies to interpret, express and negotiate meaning, were critical to the development of

communicative competence (Fenner, 2008; Kleinsasser, 1993; Littlewood, 2007; Nunan, 2003; Savignon, 2003). Generally these tasks served as teaching strategies that promoted students' confidence and built up their intercultural communicative competence.

More importantly the five-week task-based project has made me alter the teaching practices. I had to revise the credo of teaching in EFL classroom by reevaluating the lesson plans in EFL class and find more culturally appropriate speaking tasks and materials that inspired the students' communication motivation. In attempting to do this action research, I have developed my research skills and gained professional development as well (Doqaruni, 2014). And the positive feedbacks from my students' journals were truly an amazing source of motivation to my teaching career:

> *"To sum up, we all make up that such experience will help us a lot in developing ourselves today and future, too. Once again, we want to thank you, teacher that you have created useful opportunities for us to break our limitation!"* (G4)

> *"Finally, we would like to send a big thank you to our teacher for giving us such a new experience to try and explore. We had realized a lot about ourselves after this journey and we realized that beside English, we also have to improve different skills such as communication skills, knowledge about different cultures and so on. This is one of the moments that we will never forget in our University's time"* (G1)

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