

Teacher Cognition of Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Chinese ELT Context

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Abstract

This pilot study is an inquiry into teacher cognition of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the Chinese English language teaching (ELT) context of higher education in which teacher cognition is fundamental to any pedagogical practice or reform. Through a questionnaire survey among university English teachers, the authors wish to find out the status quo of teacher cognition on various aspects of ICC-oriented ELT, in particular how these English teachers conceptualize ICC, how they perceive ICC in relation to ELT, how they believe ICC can be best fostered through ELT, how their perception is related and realized in their own teaching practice, and how they relate ICC teaching to the development of learners' other competencies in English, etc. The results suggest that the Chinese university English teachers' conceptualization of ICC and its relevance to ELT is vague in spite of their perceived goal and strong desire to develop students' ICC. Such results indicate the significance of intercultural teacher education and the interculturalization of ELT in the Chinese context.

Keywords: teacher cognition, intercultural communicative competence, ELT in China

Introduction

In the context of globalization, English/foreign language teaching (ELT/FLT) inevitably develops toward the direction of intercultural education, especially in non-English speaking countries. It is a shared belief among Chinese English teachers that the ultimate goal of English language teaching is to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Two official teaching guidelines, *The National Curriculum Guide for English Majors* (2000) and *The National Curriculum Requirements for the Teaching of College English* (2004) have started to include intercultural communication as part of the teaching principles and teaching content, though the teaching of ICC is otherwise hardly addressed between the covers (Song, 2008). In general, how ICC development can be most productively and systematically integrated into the ELT agenda still remains the greatest challenge for the Chinese ELT researchers and practitioners. English teachers undoubtedly will play a critical role in any pedagogical response to such challenge as teacher cognition is fundamental to any pedagogical practice or reform. To find out the status quo of teacher cognition on various aspects of ICC-oriented ELT, the authors conducted a pilot questionnaire survey among 30 Chinese university English teachers and looked into how these teachers currently conceptualize ICC and its relation to ELT and how their perception is related and realized in their own teaching practice, etc. Following a briefing of relevant studies and methodology,

the paper focuses on detailed description and discussion of the questionnaire survey and concludes with reflections and suggestions for future study.

Literature Review

Teacher Cognition

Teacher cognition refers to the “unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think” (Borg, 2003, p.81) and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom. It further refers to teachers’ beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, knowledge, and principles relating to teaching, as well as judgments and reflections on the teaching practice. Teacher cognition plays a pivotal role in a schematic conceptualization of teaching. It is within this framework, grounded in an analysis of mainstream educational research, that language teacher cognition research has emerged (Freeman, 1996; 2002).

Teacher cognition is considered to be a critical impetus of teacher improvement and an intrinsic factor of teacher behavior. Several research studies regarding this issue have been undertaken (Calderhead, 1996; Carter, 1990; Fenstermacher, 1994; Richardson, 1996; Verloop, Van Driel & Meijer, 2001). In the field of language teaching, Borg (2003, 2006, 2009), Gatbonton (1999) and Woods (1996) are among the leading scholars whose work has constructed the general framework for studying language teacher cognition. Research of language teacher cognition mainly involves how teacher cognition is related to their past experience, education background, knowledge, perception and environmental factors. And the most frequently used methods in data collection in these studies have been self-report, oral commentary, observation, and reflective writing (Borg, 2003).

The research on teacher cognition has been prosperous in the last decade within China. A number of scholars introduced the research status of Western countries relevant to teacher cognition (Liu & Shen, 2006; Zhang, Lin & Shen, 2004); and meanwhile some of them combined the study of this issue with the study of ELT, such as grammar (Gao & Liu, 2008) and writing (Zhang, 2008; Zheng, 2006), and with the study of teachers’ occupational identity (Wu, 2008; Xia & Feng, 2006). However, it cannot be denied that the research into Chinese teacher cognition lags behind Western studies, because the scope of research is limited compared with foreign studies on this issue (Gao & Li, 2007).

Teacher Cognition of ICC

ICC (also in some cases, IC, intercultural competence) has been conceptualized in a variety of ways depending on the scholars’ theoretical orientations and perceptions of what counts as competence (Song, 2008, p. 82). Byram’s (1997) model of ICC, which is designed for the language classroom and has been most widely adopted in ELT/FLT as well as related research, conceptualized ICC in terms of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence. Furthermore, he incorporates knowledge (*savoir*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*),

intercultural attitudes (*savoir être*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) into an integrated system of intercultural competence.

Foreign language (FL) teachers' intercultural competence (IC) is recognized as an important marker of their professional identities (Sercu, Bandura & Castro, 2005). FL teachers' perception of ICC and subsequently the degree of their willingness to interculturalize FL, IC education are crucial to the realization of the ultimate goal of FL & IC education – promoting students' acquisition of IC in the FL classroom. In the academic area of studying intercultural FL teachers, several research studies have been undertaken regarding the relationship between FL teacher cognition of ICC and FL education. Previous research findings show that no clear relationship appears to exist between teachers' perception of ICC and the way in which they actually shape their teaching practice (Sercu et al., 2005, Risager, 1998).

Sercu et al. (2005) conducted a research project which focused specifically on FL teachers' perceptions regarding the teaching of ICC in foreign language education and on how teaching practices relate to the expected “foreign language and intercultural competence teacher” (p. 2). Their findings revealed two clearly distinct teacher profiles when mapping teachers' beliefs regarding the integration of ICC in FL education: “the favorably disposed foreign language teacher” and “the unfavorably disposed foreign language teacher”. Their data also revealed that no clear relationship exists between teachers' beliefs with respect to integration and the way in which they actually shape their teaching practice. Their FL findings further suggest that teachers are moving toward becoming IC teachers, but their profile fails to meet all the expectations regarding knowledge, skills and attitudes desirable in the FL & IC teachers.

Aleksandrowicz-Pędich (2003) and her partners carried out a research project with the recognition of the key importance of teachers' views about FL (English and French) education with respect to ICC in a broad European context. The results revealed that few teachers had studied IC in a systemic way. Although most of the teachers realized the important role of ICC in both education and everyday living, they still lacked a clear understanding of how to integrate the ICC into FL teaching. A report on intercultural language learning (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino & Kohler, 2003), issued by the Department of Education in Australia, presented the similar results that there is no clear and coherent framework for conceptualizing culture and cultural learning in language programs due to teachers' obscure perception of ICC and IC education. Furthermore, there is a lack of resources of ICC education, a framework to design curriculum for IL learning, or an overall assessing framework of ICC.

Although some Chinese scholars maintained that intercultural education should be included in the system of FL teacher education (Li, 2006; Zhang, 2007), the research into Chinese teachers' perception of ICC is still inadequate. It is observed that in Chinese universities, most of the FL teachers have vague perceptions of ICC, of the relationship between ICC and FL teaching, and of the content and methods of ICC education (Song, 2008, 2009; Xu, 2000, 2008; Zhang, 2007).

Methodology

Purpose

This pilot study was part of a project on a national survey of teacher and student cognition

of ICC teaching and learning in the Chinese ELT context. The researchers aimed at investigating Chinese college English teachers' perceptions of ICC, their understanding of the relationship between ICC and FL&IC education, and the current status of intercultural education in terms of teachers' belief, teaching content, teaching methods, and teaching materials.

Participants

The participants were 30 English teachers, 24 females and 6 males, who worked at a northeastern Chinese university. They have taught for an average number of 15 years and most of the teachers had overseas experience. They taught all types of students, non-English major undergraduates and graduates as well as English major undergraduates and graduates. Two out of 30 teachers were aged from 21 to 30, nineteen from 31 to 40, five from 41 to 50, and four from 51 to 60. Regarding the level of education received, half of the teachers have obtained Ph.D.s with the rest of them having obtained MAs.

Instrument

The instrument of the study is a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was mainly adapted from that used by Lies Sercu with Ewa Bandura and a group of other scholars in an international investigation on foreign language teachers and intercultural competence (Sercu et al., 2005), which explored the cultural dimension in foreign language education in terms of intercultural communicative competence of teachers and learners. Similar structure was used but an adjustment was made by making it more convenient to insert answers and data coding through the use of tables, more objective questions and consideration of relevance to the Chinese context. Some of our questions are also adapted from two other sources: *Report on Intercultural Language Learning*, Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training (Liddicoat et al., 2003), and *The views of teachers of English and French on intercultural communicative competence in language teaching* by Aleksandrowicz-Pędich et al. (2003).

The questionnaire contains seven sections: 1) Personal information; 2) Perception of English teaching; 3) Perception of English and teachers' familiarity with the target culture(s) associated with English; 4) Culture in English/foreign language teaching; 5) English language teaching materials; 6) Contact opportunities with the other cultures or peoples at your university; and 7) Intercultural English/foreign language teaching.

All of the 30 teachers were given a hard copy of the questionnaire and they were informed that they could take one day or two days to complete the questionnaire. Two days later, 29 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed by the researchers. All the respondents reported that they took between 30 minutes to 60 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

Results and Discussion

The following section presents the Chinese university English teachers' cognition of ICC in terms of their perceptions of English teaching, English language and familiarity with the target culture(s), the practiced culture teaching activities, the current ELT materials, the teachers'

contact opportunities with other cultures or peoples, and ultimately their cognition of intercultural ELT. The results are presented according to the questions asked in the questionnaire.

Perception of English Teaching

How do you perceive the objectives of English/foreign language teaching?

Table 1 presents the results obtained from the participants' responses to the question regarding their perception of teaching objectives. A clear preference for ELT objectives can be identified from the comparison of mean scores. Assisting students to acquire communicative skills, which will be useful for them to communicate with English speakers in their future career or education, was ranked as the most important objective of English teaching. Assisting students to acquire a level of proficiency in English that will allow them to read and write in the target language for their future career or education was graded as the second most important goal of ELT and to promote the students' familiarity with the culture, the civilization of the English speaking countries was found to be the third ranking. Promoting the acquisition of a level of proficiency for practical purposes such as overseas traveling was ranked as the least significant objective of ELT.

Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions of Language Teaching Objectives

Order of Importance	Objectives	Mean Score
1	Assist students to acquire communicative skills that will be useful for them to communicate with English speakers in their future career or education.	7.79
2	Assist students to acquire a level of proficiency in English that will allow them to read and write in the target language for their future career or education.	6.64
3	Promote the students' familiarity with the culture, the civilization of the English speaking countries.	6.32
4	Promote the acquisition of an open mind and a positive disposition towards unfamiliar cultures.	4.75
5	Assist students in developing a better understanding of their own identity and culture.	3.13
6	Promote the students' familiarity with the culture(s), the civilization of all foreign countries.	2.30
7	Promote the acquisition of a level of proficiency for practical purposes such as overseas traveling.	1.27
8	Others (please specify) _____.	0

Note. Mean scores range from 1 to 8, calculated based on the following conditions:

1 = the least important; 2 = the second least important.....8 = the most important.

The results revealed that most of the English teachers consider developing students' communicative competence and language proficiency as the crucial teaching objective for English teaching. Fortunately, several teachers realized that it is significant to cultivate students' familiarity with the target cultures. It is not surprising that a few teachers have the awareness to assist students to understand their own cultural identity and their own cultures. To some extent, the functional value of English, such as being a language tool for people to travel around, seemed not so important for English teachers in Chinese ELT context.

What do you think of “culture teaching” objectives in an English or foreign language teaching context?

The results were summarized in Table 2. The two most important objectives of cultural teaching were respectively to provide information about shared values and beliefs in the target culture(s) and to promote the ability to handle intercultural contact situations. To develop attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other peoples and cultures ranked as the fourth most important objective for cultural teaching. And to promote students' ability to empathize with people living in other cultures, an objective connected to the culture learning objectives, was identified as the last in the ranking.

Table 2. Teachers' Perceptions of Culture Teaching Objectives

Order of Importance	Objectives	Mean Score
1	Provide information about shared values and beliefs in the target culture(s).	7.21
2	Promote the ability to handle intercultural contact situations.	6.96
3	Provide information about the history, geography, social and political conditions of the target culture(s).	5.32
4	Develop attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other peoples and cultures.	4.49
5	Provide experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre, film, etc.).	3.94
6	Provide information about daily life and customs in the target culture(s).	3.05
7	Promote increased understanding of students' own culture.	2.17
8	Promote the ability to empathize with people living in other cultures.	1.34

Note. Mean scores range from 1 to 8, calculated based on the following conditions:

1 = the least important; 2 = the second least important.....8 = the most important.

The observed teachers' neglect of assisting students to understand their own culture suggests that most of them do not have a clear conceptualization about cultural teaching and intercultural education that emphasizes the development of critical culture awareness based on the understanding of both the self and the cultural other. Critical culture awareness refers to "an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries (Byram, 1997, p. 101). Since teachers put much more emphasis on the target cultures rather than on students' own culture, it seems hard to develop students' ability to recognize their own as well as other cultural identities and practices.

How do you distribute the time over "language teaching" and "culture teaching" and would you like to devote more time to "culture teaching"?

Ten teachers claimed to devote 60% of class time to language teaching, such as grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing, etc. Nine teachers claimed to distribute their class time equally for language and culture teaching. Five teachers admitted that they devoted 80% of the class time to language teaching and 20% to culture teaching due to the course types, among whom two taught writing, two taught grammar and one taught listening. Another five teachers chose the proportion of 40% (language) and 60% (culture) in their culture-based courses.

However, the results need to be interpreted cautiously since the types of courses taught by the respondents were different. One teacher who taught *History of Western Civilizations* stated that she offered students a large amount of cultural knowledge in the class due to the culture-based nature of the program. Another teacher who taught *English Grammar* recounted that there was not much room for him to practice cultural teaching, for it is a course targeting at improving students' language proficiency. Upon reflection, the authors believe that the time distributed over language teaching and culture teaching depends on both the teachers' perception of the (inter)cultural dimension of language teaching and the type of the course. Both factors need to be considered in the question design for more accurate data elicitation.

With respect to whether the teachers would like to devote more time to "culture teaching", 10 teachers were eager to devote more time to cultural teaching in class while 15 respondents were willing to do so to a certain extent, with four being not particularly interested in doing this.

Perception of English Language and Familiarity with the Target Culture(s) Associated with English

What kind of language is today's English to you and what kind of English do you think should be taught in the Chinese universities?

As regards the concept of today's English, 15 respondents thought English is an international language used for communication with people from both English-speaking and non-English speaking countries and only four teachers claimed that English is a language mainly used for communication with and among people in the English-speaking countries/cultures. Ten considered English as a language that has many localized varieties, such as American English, Singaporean English, Japanese English and China English, with each being a legitimate variety of International English or World English.

Regarding the question on the kind of English to be taught in the Chinese universities, 15 teachers who previously regarded English as an international language used in both English/non-English speaking countries still maintained their opinions while three teachers who previously viewed English as a language with many localized varieties believed the English used in the English-speaking countries rather than the English spoken in non-mainstream countries should be taught in Chinese universities. The results suggest that at least three teachers, about 10% of all the respondents, deemed it unnecessary to teach the localized varieties of English in the university programs.

Which aspect of the culture(s) associated with English are you most or least familiar with?

Table 3 shows the summary of the results of the respondents' familiarity with the English cultures. Most of the teachers were familiar with daily life, routines, living conditions, food and drink of English cultures mainly due to the wide spread of media. They were also familiar with the education systems of English speaking countries since most of the respondents had the overseas experiences at some universities. However, the majority of them did not know much about youth culture and ethnic groups of the English cultures. They admitted that they even had no clear idea about Chinese youth culture, saying nothing of the English youth culture.

Table 3. Teachers' Familiarities with the English Culture(s)

Order of Familiarity	Objectives	Mean Score
1	Daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink etc.	7.01
2	Education, professional life	6.72
3	Values and beliefs	6.71
4	History, geography, political system	6.55
5	Literature	6.39
6	Traditions, folklore, tourist attractions	4.96
7	International relations (political, economic and cultural), with students' own country and other countries	4.78
8	Different ethnic and social groups	4.73
9	Youth culture	4.50

Note. Mean scores range from 1 to 10, calculated based on the following conditions:

1 = the least familiar with; 2 = the second least familiar with... 10 = the most familiar with.

Culture in English Teaching

What kinds of culture teaching activities do you practice during classroom teaching time?

The top three frequently practiced culture teaching activities by the respondents were informing students of what teachers know about the target cultures, informing students of the

fascinating or strange aspects of the target cultures, and illustrating the target cultures by means of audio-visual equipment. These teaching activities supply students with the social and culture knowledge of the target cultures.

Less frequently or once in a while, teachers touch upon the negatively disposed aspect of the target cultures, discuss stereotypes regarding particular cultures and countries or regarding the inhabitants of particular countries, and ask students to think about the life in a foreign country.

Most of the respondents stated that they never invite a foreigner to their classrooms, and they explained in the informal interview afterwards that the university often invites foreign scholars or professionals to give students lectures on intercultural communication. Nearly half of the respondents admitted that they never ask their students about their experiences in the target culture since most of the Chinese college students do not have overseas experience, and the same proportion of respondents stated that they never bring objects originating from the target cultures to their classrooms.

The results of this section suggest that most of the English teachers focus more on the two aspects of Byram's (1997) Model of ICC learning objectives – offering knowledge of the target cultures and improving students' skills of interpreting and relating – rather than improving students' skills of discovery and interaction, attitudes of curiosity and openness, and ultimately their critical culture awareness.

How extensively and with what particular aspects do you teach?

The extent of particular cultural aspects was dealt with by the respondents in their teaching practice. The top three cultural aspects frequently dealt with or taught by teachers are daily life, routines, value, beliefs, traditions, folklore and tourist attractions of the target cultures (mean score/ $M = 3.67$). The aspects touched upon by the teachers are education, professional life, ethnic and social groups and literature of the target cultures ($M = 2.96$). Once in while, the teachers touched upon historical, geographical, political or artistic parts of the target cultures ($M = 2.55$). As regards international relations, about 17% of the respondents declared that they never touched upon it in the classrooms ($M = 1.19$) and as for youth culture, about 31% of the teachers stated that they never touched it ($M = 1.07$). The results echo the findings in the previous section. It seems that English teachers' acquaintance with the English cultures influence their teaching practice, and teacher tend to teach the aspects they are more familiar with.

English Language Teaching Materials

What teaching materials do you use in your teaching practice and why?

Fifteen out of 29 teachers responded that they used textbooks plus additional materials in the classroom while seven used textbooks only, four used additional materials only, three used additional materials plus textbooks. Most of the teachers recounted they did not have the right to choose textbooks, especially those who taught non-English major students. The teachers who taught English major students stated that compared with their counterparts, they were freer to choose the textbooks that they are willing to use within a certain scope.

What are the reasons for not using textbooks and for using additional materials together with textbooks?

The teachers who admitted that they did not use the textbooks believe that textbooks contain a more organized skill-training procedure since they are mainly oriented towards exams and focused on language proficiency. Textbooks are not always satisfactory and sometimes what teachers want to emphasize is not included. The information in the existing textbooks is limited, outdated and not much culture content is offered.

Most of the teachers used additional materials in their English teaching classrooms due to the deficiency of the current existing textbooks. Among the types of the additional materials used in the class, the most frequently used are video materials, followed by printed materials and audio materials. The teachers maintained that additional materials are colorful, authentic and fresh, which are complements of textbooks. These materials attract students' attention to the topics discussed in class since they are updated and interesting. They enrich the contents of the textbook and make up what the teachers failed to present. Additional materials provide more information to improve students' intercultural communicative competence. By using additional materials, students learn both the target language and the target culture.

Contact Opportunities with the Other Cultures or Peoples***What are the intercultural/international activities at your university and do they have a positive effect on students' attitudes and perceptions of the target cultures?***

The respondents stated that their university often invites guest lecturers, especially distinguished scholars. Sometimes the students' union or students' movie club show English movies during students' spare time. For English majors, once in a while they organize and perform English plays, and some teachers are invited as judges or guests.

All the respondents believe the above-mentioned intercultural/international activities play a positive role in students' attitudes toward and perceptions of the target cultures. These activities provide more opportunities for students to practice English, to get information about the target cultures and for teachers to teach those cultures. The more the students understand the target culture, the greater cultural awareness they will have, and the more tolerant they will be. Most of the teachers mentioned the significance of students' exchange programs offered by the university. They stated that the exchange programs establish cooperation between the Chinese universities and the universities in English speaking countries and further offer chances for students to experience diverse cultures. By participating in these activities, the students can foster more interest in the target languages and cultures.

What do you think the university can do to increase chances of intercultural contact?

With respect to this question, the respondents offered many suggestions. They thought that the university should organize more exchange programs, either short-term or long-term programs, for both students and teachers, invite more renowned international experts to give

lectures, and regularly organize conferences or activities about cultural communication. Some teachers suggested that the university make more efforts to develop joint degree programs.

Intercultural English Language Teaching

What are your opinions regarding the (inter)cultural dimension of English teaching?

Twenty-three statements regarding the intercultural dimension of English/foreign language teaching were provided, and for each of them, the respondents had to score on a five-point disagree-agree scale from disagree completely to agree completely. Table 4 shows the order of the 23 statements with the mean score for each statement. Teachers all strongly agreed that teaching culture is as important as teaching the target language in an English/foreign language classroom, and all students should acquire intercultural competence. The respondents also indicated the difficulty in integrating language and culture teaching, and they further argued that English/foreign language teaching should not only touch upon foreign cultures but also deepen students' understanding of their own culture. All the teachers agreed to some extent that English teachers should present a realistic image of a foreign culture, touch upon negative sides of the foreign culture and society and enhance students' understanding of own cultural identities. The respondents considered that language problems lie at the heart of misunderstandings in cultural differences, and students can acquire intercultural skills in an English classroom. They strongly disagreed that one should use texts written in the mother tongue and discuss these texts in the mother tongue as regards intercultural understanding even when in a foreign language classroom. Some teachers explained that intercultural education and English education do not contradict each other at all.

Table 4. Teachers' Opinions on the (Inter)Cultural Dimension of English Teaching

	Statements regarding the (Inter)cultural Dimension of English/Foreign Language Teaching	Mean Score
1	In an English/foreign language classroom, teaching culture is as important as teaching the target language.	4.66
2	All students should acquire intercultural competence.	4.59
3	Intercultural skills cannot be acquired at university.	4.57
4	It is impossible to teach the foreign language and the foreign culture in an integrated way.	4.36
5	The more students know about the foreign culture, the more tolerant they are.	4.35
6	Providing additional cultural information makes students more tolerant towards other cultures and peoples.	4.32
7	I would like to teach intercultural competence through my English language teaching.	4.32
8	English/Foreign language teaching should not only touch upon foreign cultures. It should also deepen students' understanding of their own culture.	4.21

9	An English/foreign language teacher should present a realistic image of a foreign culture, and therefore should also touch upon negative sides of the foreign culture and society.	4.17
10	Intercultural education is best undertaken cross-curricularly.	4.04
11	An English/foreign language teacher should present a positive image of the target culture(s) and society.	3.97
12	Intercultural education reinforces students' already existing stereotypes of other peoples and cultures.	3.82
13	English/foreign language teaching should enhance students' understanding of their own cultural identities.	3.24
14	Before you can teach culture or the intercultural dimension regarding the target language, students have to possess a sufficiently high level of proficiency in the target language.	3.60
15	When you only have a limited number of teaching periods, culture teaching has to give way to language teaching.	3.43
16	In international contacts misunderstandings arise equally often from linguistic as from cultural differences.	3.29
17	Every subject, not just English/foreign language teaching, should promote the acquisition of intercultural skills.	2.91
18	Intercultural education has no effect whatsoever on students' attitudes.	2.55
19	Only when there are ethnic minority community students in your classes do you have to teach intercultural competence. Language and culture cannot be taught in an integrated way. You have to separate the two.	2.20
20	I would like to promote the acquisition of intercultural skills through my teaching.	2.16
21	Language problems lie at the heart of misunderstandings in international contacts, not cultural differences.	1.35
22	In the foreign language classroom students can only acquire additional cultural knowledge. They cannot acquire intercultural skills.	1.35
23	If one wants to be able to achieve anything at all as regards intercultural understanding one should use texts written in the mother tongue and discuss these texts in the mother tongue, even when in a foreign language classroom.	1.12

Note. Mean scores range from 1 to 5, calculated based on the following conditions:

1 = disagree completely; 2 = disagree to a certain extent; 3 = undecided; 4 = agree to certain extent; 5 = agree completely.

What do you see as the top three major issues and the top three priorities related to the integration of language and culture in language teaching and across the curriculum?

The orders of the top three major issues and the top three priorities related to the integration of language and culture in language learning and across the curriculum are presented in Table 5. The respondents agreed that a lack of resources for both materials development and professional

learning is the most important issue, which echoes the findings of the respondents' view on the teaching materials. A lack of shared understanding of the nature of culture is considered as the second important issue to encounter, followed by the lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of teachers. With respect to the potential priorities, professional development is ranked as the most important priority, followed by research into practice and reviewing the current syllabus.

Table 5. The Top Three Major Issues and the Top Three Priorities

Order of Importance	Potential Issues	Mean Score
1	A lack of resources for both materials development and professional learning	7.58
2	A lack of shared understanding of the nature of culture	6.03
3	A lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of teachers	5.94
	Potential Priorities	
1	Professional development	6.44
2	Research into practice	5.87
3	Reviewing the current syllabus	5.12

Note. Mean scores range from 1 to 8, calculated based on the following conditions:

1 = the least important issue; 2 = the second least important issue.....8 = the most important.

Do you think there are important differences between the intercultural approach and the communicative approach to English teaching?

Fourteen out of 29 teachers considered there are differences between the intercultural approach and the communicative approach to English teaching while four stated there are not any differences between the two. Eleven out of 29 admitted they are not clear about the approaches. The main differences between the two approaches suggested by the respondents are summarized in Table 6. As regards the teachers who considered there are differences between the intercultural approach and the communicative approach, they believe the former focuses more on the cultural aspects and may result in the improvement of students' ICC while the latter aims more at developing students' language proficiency; the former is more global whereas the latter is more local. One teacher suggested the different theoretical foundations between the two approaches, but he failed to clarify into which specific theory the two approaches are categorized.

Table 6. The Differences between the Intercultural Approach and the Communicative Approach

	The Intercultural Approach	The Communicative Approach
1	Emphasizing cultural aspects	Emphasizing on practice of language
2	Focusing on the exchanges of cultural values	Focusing on training students' communicative competence
3	The content to teach	The means to teach
4	Occurring in the global context which aims at cultivating intercultural speakers	Occurring in a native-speaker based context
5	Promoting ICC and focusing on cultural information	Focusing on communication skills training
6	Being based on intercultural understanding, not limited to the native speaker	Being based on local understanding
7	Falling into the category of theory	Falling into the category of practice
8	Resulting in students' new attitudes and mind sets and embodying more complex interpretations of context	Resulting in a better language competence

Among the four teachers who believe there are not any differences between the two approaches, one stated that communication can't occur without culture and the other one thought that the difference between the two concepts does not matter at all since the two approaches are identical in nature.

Do you think there are important differences between intercultural communicative competence and communicative competence for English students?

Fourteen out of 29 teachers stated that there are important differences between ICC and communicative competence (CC). Four out of 29 thought there are not any differences between the two terms and the rest of the teachers admitted they are not clear about the two.

The main differences between the two concepts suggested by the respondents are summarized in Table 7. An examination of the claimed differences between ICC and CC indicates a considerable lack of clear understanding about the relationship between the two competences. For instance, one teacher stated that "ICC is a part of CC" and another one declared that "CC includes both intercultural communication competence and inner-cultural communication competence". One teacher suggested that "language fluency does not necessarily lead to successful cultural understandings", but she failed to explain the further relationship between the two concepts.

Table 7. The Differences between ICC and CC

	ICC	CC
1	Involving intercultural dimension of language teaching	Being more concerned with daily communication
2	The ability of dealing with cultural shocks	The ability of using the language
3	The ability possessed by an intercultural speaker or a global citizen	The ability possessed by a skillful English/foreign language speaker
4	Focusing on communication skills based on cultural differences	Focusing on communication skill
5	The ability to learn the target culture	The ability to use the target language
6	Embracing all cultures and encourages identity mindfulness	Rejecting the native culture
7	ICC is a part of CC	CC does not necessarily refer to intercultural communication.
8	No comments	CC includes both intercultural communication competence and inner-cultural communication competence
9	Students need to acquire not just linguistic or sociolinguistic skills, but greater aspirations in ICC	Language fluency (CC) does not necessarily lead to successful cultural understandings

How do you think (inter)cultural learning can be assessed and which way is the most effective?

Twelve out of 29 respondents were inclined to test students' knowledge of target cultures while 14 chose to test students' attitudes towards other cultures and peoples. Altogether, 25 out of 29 teachers suggested to assess students' skillfulness/ competence in using the target language in intercultural communication settings. The results showed that most of the respondents (86%) considered testing students' skillfulness/competence to be the most effective way to assess ICC. They believe that students' skillfulness in using the target language in intercultural communication settings is a crucial part of ICC assessment. About half of the teachers (47%) considered attitudes to be an important aspect in ICC assessment, and only 41% of the respondents thought that ICC can be assessed merely through testing the students' knowledge of target culture(s).

Conclusion

The results of this small-scale research show that although many Chinese English teachers could make a distinction between the intercultural approach and the communicative approach

to English teaching, their conceptualization of ICC and its relevance to ELT is ambiguous. Some teachers showed strong doubt toward the possibility of acquiring intercultural skills at university and of teaching the foreign languages/cultures in an integrated way. In addition, the results revealed limited teaching content of intercultural education due to the teachers' unfamiliarity with specific aspects of the target cultures as well as the inadequacy of (inter) cultural elements in the teaching materials. Even if these teachers are willing to develop students' ICC in the classroom, and most claimed to have devoted a large proportion of time to culture teaching, the intercultural dimension in their English language teaching needs to be enhanced. The teachers are looking forward to more opportunities of intercultural contact, abundant resources for teaching materials, and professional development in the integration of language and culture teaching.

There is still a long way to go for the Chinese university English language teachers before adequate institutional support could be given to ensure meaningful intercultural English teaching and before the large number of English teachers become well-informed about what constitutes intercultural communication competence and how their teaching practice can be more relevant and literally move towards this ambitious goal.

The pilot study conducted by the present authors offers valuable experience and directions for future research in both the design of questionnaire and methods of data collection and analysis. It is hoped that both the qualitative and quantitative methods and findings of the present study will offer insights for future research and for successful interculturalization of ELT in China. A great deal more effort should be put into improving the format of the questionnaire such as cutting the length, and using L1 for more effective and efficient operation, as well as improving diverse techniques of conducting the questionnaires, and achieving a wider regional coverage of data collection. A nation-wide survey of the same nature is now under way conducted by the authors and their colleagues, and a series of survey reports will be presented in the near future.

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