Developing Cambodian secondary school students' intercultural competence: Strategies and challenges

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This study aims to investigate teachers' teaching goals, perception of intercultural competence (IC), and to what extent their teaching goals and perceptions are reflected in their classroom practices for developing their students' IC. The study also aims to explore teachers' strategies and the challenges they have faced in developing their students' IC. Closed and open-ended questions were utilised to collect the data from 38 English as foreign language (EFL) teachers teaching an English subject at 19 different public secondary schools located in 12 different provinces and cities across Cambodia. The results revealed that most EFL teachers reported their teaching goal as equipping students with competence in using English to communicate with people across borders. The results also indicated that most EFL teachers accepted IC as a significant aspect of language learning. Yet, the teachers did not regularly incorporate cultures as topics into their teaching practices, due to some challenges such as the lack of multicultural content in the textbook, the lack of knowledge of IC assessment and cultural incorporation, and their students' low level of English language proficiency. Based on the findings, the study sheds some light on how to help EFL teachers develop their students' IC.

Introduction

In today's world of mobility, migration, and globalisation, the dominance of native English speakers in English as a foreign language (EFL) education has steadily diminished, since English now is used by most people to communicate with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. That is, the native norm has been replaced by the intercultural speaker paradigm. One who can successfully communicate in such a multicultural context needs to possess both linguistic competence and another competence, often-called *intercultural competence* (IC), the ability to understand cultural differences in order to function successfully in multicultural communication. With respect to this, IC is an imperative for EFL learners and its significance has been acknowledged by many scholars. IC is a crucial component in EFL education (Schat, van der Knaap & de Graaff, 2021), so teaching EFL should not be solely about linguistic competence. Linguistic knowledge without IC cannot guarantee success in professional communication, especially in a global setting (Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Liu, 2015) and therefore IC is regarded as one of the fundamental skills (Atay, Kurt, Camlibel, Ersin & Kaşlıoğlu, 2009; Wattanavorakijkul, 2020). In addition, according to Martin and Nakayama (2021), culture has been accepted as the foremost concept in intercultural communication, and culture and communication are interconnected since the two influence one another.

The cultural dimension thus should be included in teaching and learning (Chan & DeWitt, 2019) to develop students' IC. It must be integrated into the teaching of the four skills (Reid, 2015; Ren & Cui, 2017) because culture has been known as the fifth skill (Sevimel-

Sahin, 2020). In other words, learning a foreign language involves not only knowing how to listen, speak, read, and write, but also how to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds (Enisa & Gunes, 2019). Due to the fact that IC is a requisite for EFL learners, the goal of teaching and learning EFL in most contexts has shifted from a focus on linguistics alone. Cambodia is one example of making progress in moving beyond linguistic competence alone in EFL education. Training students to be native-like or to be competent only in linguistics appeared to be the norm for teaching and learning EFL in Cambodia in previous decades. However, this perspective is being lessened as education reform is reaching a new stage with respect to regional and global settings. According to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS, 2015, 2019), responding to local and global settings is now the new vision and mission for Cambodian education. MoEYS (2015) launched a general education curriculum framework with the goal of producing the human capital of Cambodia with the highest potential for responding to market demands, ASEAN economic integration, and global changes. One goal of the framework is to help students use foreign languages effectively, particularly English, for communication, research, and continuing education. As stated in *Educational Strategic Plan-2019-2023*, the vision of the MoEYS is to establish and develop high-quality, ethical human resources in order to develop a knowledge-based society in Cambodia. To accomplish this,

MoEYS has the mission of leading, managing and developing the education, youth and sport sector in Cambodia, responding to the socio-economic and cultural development needs of its people and the reality of regionalization and globalization (MoEYS, 2019, p.18).

Accordingly, teaching and learning EFL is expected to move from focusing only on the four skills to the integration of cultures that support the mentioned vision and goal of education policies.

In the Cambodian secondary education setting, because students have little opportunity for exposure to culturally diverse environments, some EFL teachers may lack ideas about how to develop students' IC. Or else, they may know how to develop their students' IC, but various challenges may prevent them from developing their students' IC. If teachers' teaching goals are not in line with the intercultural communication paradigm, or if they think IC is not significant for language learners, they will not incorporate cultures in their teaching. In recent decades, there has been much research into cultural awareness and establishing cross-cultural understanding in the classroom (Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2015), but research into students' IC in non-multicultural contexts remained scant.

The research objectives and research questions

The current study aims to investigate EFL teachers' teaching goals, their perception of IC, and to what extent their teaching goals and perceptions of IC reflect on their teaching practice regarding the incorporation of cultural dimensions. The study also aims to explore the strategies they have employed, and the challenges they have faced in

developing their students' IC in the non-multicultural context of Cambodian secondary education. The findings may shed some light on how to help or support teachers in developing their students' IC. That is to say, findings concerning the strategies the teachers have employed to develop their students' IC could inform other teachers who have no ideas about how to develop students' IC. Additionally, identifying the challenges the teachers have faced could alert policymakers and educational leaders to provide the necessary supports. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What do Cambodian EFL secondary school teachers perceive as their teaching goals?
2. What do Cambodian EFL secondary school teachers perceive as IC?
3. To what extent do Cambodian EFL secondary school teachers' teaching goals and perceptions of IC reflect their teaching cultures?
4. What strategies have Cambodian EFL secondary school teachers employed to develop students' IC?
5. What challenges have Cambodian EFL secondary school teachers faced in developing students' IC?

Intercultural competence (IC)

The goal of teaching and learning EFL has altered its focus in response to today's world of mobility, migration, and globalisation. According to Freitag-Hild (2018), it has shifted from a focus on communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence, and the intercultural speaker has replaced the role model of the native speaker. The intercultural speakers possess both linguistic competence and IC (Wilkinson, 2012). IC can be defined as the individual's ability to be proficient in intercultural understanding, which can help him/her to communicate effectively with others from different cultural backgrounds. According to UNESCO (2013), IC involves having sufficient relevant knowledge of specific cultures, general knowledge of issues arising when people from different cultural backgrounds interact, and the skills required to draw on both knowledge and attitudes while engaging with others from different cultures. Hoff (2016) defined IC succinctly as "the ability to successfully communicate across cultures" (p.56). Wilkinson (2012) claimed that IC is increasingly being referred to as "global competence", because it is not restricted to a particular culture or language and is competent in mediating across various borders. With this competence, the intercultural speakers have no hindrance in mobility as they are able to thrive in multiple situations (Wilkinson, 2012). Due to the fact that IC is a requisite for EFL learners in the context of intercultural communication, many scholars have motivated EFL educators and students to go beyond the native norm and embrace it in teaching and learning EFL. Moreover, the scholars have proposed IC models encompassing various skills and knowledge EFL learners need to develop.

Byram (1997) proposed a model of intercultural communicative competence that included IC with five components, namely attitudes, knowledge, the skill of interpreting and relating, the skill of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness, which, according to Hoff (2014, 2016, 2020), denoted the characteristics of an effective 'intercultural speaker'. The first component is 'attitudes' which refers to the intercultural

speaker's attitudes, encompassing transparency and curiosity, meaning that the individuals should be willing to relativise their beliefs and behaviours, rather than assuming that they are the only ones that are possible and right. 'Knowledge' refers to the knowledge of social groups and social identities, both one's own and others. 'Skill of interpreting and relating' refers to the skill to infer, describe and relate to an event from another culture. 'Skill of discovery and interaction' refers to the ability to learn new things regarding a culture and cultural practices, as well as skills and attitudes under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. Finally, 'critical cultural awareness' is the ability to critically evaluate practices and products in the speaker's own and other cultures. It has been a subject of debate on Byram's model when comes to discussing intercultural communication. Intercultural communication can occasionally result in miscommunication, arguments, and conflict (UNESCO, 2013), so helping the learners to deal with this in a positive and innovative way is imperative for intercultural education (Hoff, 2016).

However, Hoff (2014) argued that Byram's model does not take into account how conflict and disagreement can frequently result in meaningful communicative situations in which the participants are intensely involved. In addition, the components in Byram's model are interconnected aspects of a whole, rather than discrete learning objectives (Hoff, 2014). Hoff (2014) elucidated that the component 'attitude' in Byram's model may be detrimental to the advancement of IC, since it implies that both the learners' perspective and the foreign cultures are not treated seriously enough. Training the students to demonstrate positive attitudes toward others may not promote independent and critical thinking; however, the component 'critical cultural awareness' could deal with this concern because the goal is to develop students' capacity to present rational, well-balanced arguments, rather than to amend learners' viewpoints or advocate a particular style of thinking (Hoff, 2014). The component 'attitude' also may deal with what 'critical cultural awareness' is concerned with, in terms of a way to balance and adjust the learners' view (Hoff, 2014). Moreover, according to Freitag-Hild (2018), the current research also shows that the concept in Byram's model has become elusive. What Freitag-Hild is concerned with is that the component 'attitudes', including respect for others and the capacity for self-reflection, is difficult to categorise and measure.

For Matsuo (2014), Byram's model employed CLT (communicative language teaching), the worldwide default method for teaching English, as the instructional approach for its language-related components. The structural linguistic basics of CLT cannot be taught communicatively, so it only develops the learners' passive knowledge. Because culture is the discourse, both linguistics and cultures should be learned through dialogue (Matsuo, 2014). However, Freitag-Hild (2018) asserted that the model could be used to plan learning processes, since it emphasised the various skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed for successful intercultural encounters. Hoff (2014, 2020) also acknowledged the model is still widely used today, and therefore, according to Hoff (2020), its limitation is crucial for stakeholders to be aware of when using it as a prescription for intercultural language teaching and learning.

The pyramid model proposed by Deardorff (2006) focused on five aspects including 'knowledge and comprehension'; 'skills'; 'attitudes'; 'desired external outcomes'; and 'desired internal outcomes'. 'Knowledge and comprehension' refer to the individual's knowledge and understanding of cultural differences, including his/her own culture and other cultures. 'Skills' refers to skills to listen, observe, evaluate, analyse, relate, and interpret. 'Attitudes' refer to the individual's attitudes toward cultural diversity in terms of being respectful to other cultures and being open to learning those cultural differences. 'Desired external outcome' resulted from the knowledge, skills, and attitudes helping the individual to behave and communicate effectively. Finally, 'Desired internal outcome' includes adaptability to diverse cultural environments and flexibility in employing suitable communication styles and behavior. The first three dimensions in Deardorff's model are similar to Byram's model, but Deardorff (2006) proposed the last two dimensions that refer to the individual's outcomes in effective communication, because they have already mastered the first three dimensions. Likewise, Javidan and Teagarden (2011) said that IC contains three areas including relevant knowledge, receptive attitude, and integrated skills. 'Relevant knowledge' is about distinctive cultures and issues related to interaction among various cultural groups. 'Receptive attitude' encourage initiating and maintaining interaction with persons from diverse cultures. The last element is 'integrated skills' is to make use of the knowledge and attitudes to interact with various others.

UNESCO (2013) categorised the components of IC into three, namely 'learning to know'; 'learning to do'; and 'learning to reflect'. 'Learning to know' means knowing about the cultures of others. 'Learning to do' is the active step of interacting with cultural others. The third is 'learning to reflect' which refers to the step of thinking about one's social self as having a place in the global world. According to three areas raised by Javidan and Teagarden (2011) and the other dimension 'learning to do' categorised by UNESCO (2013), IC seems to be developed only through active involvement in multicultural contexts rather than through classroom learning as they focused on the interaction with persons from different cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, numerous studies suggested many strategies that EFL teachers could employ to develop students' IC in non-multicultural contexts.

Strategies for developing students' IC

Although developing students' IC may be difficult in a situation where they have litle opportunity for exposure to different multicultural contexts, various strategies have been proposed. According to Ren and Cui (2017), teachers could develop student IC by teaching students different cultures, and strengthening students' cultural awareness of their native languages, which could be helpful for promoting their language and cultural competence. Teachers can explain both the meaning of the language and the cultural context in which it is utilised (Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012). In this respect, EFL teachers could use numerous methods such as comparison method, role-play, cultural assimilation, cultural island, and so on (see Reid, 2015). For instance, in the comparison method, Reid (2015) stated that it involves a comparison between the learners' culture and foreign cultures. Teachers may assign students to read the documents or watch a short

video regarding the daily routine of a foreign country and compare it with ones in their own countries. In 'role-play', teachers can select a specific situation such as in a hotel, in the station, and the like and they can let students practise. 'Role-play' is the closest possible opportunity for learners to practise real-life scenarios, which are important for intercultural communication and can be applied to all levels and ages (Reid, 2015). The study of Banjongjit and Boonmoh (2018) found that 'role-play' was the most successful way to develop students' IC.

Concerning 'the cultural assimilation method, the learners are given several options and they have to select the one they think is correct, learners should decide whether kissing, bowing, or shaking a hand is correct. Based on their own experience, students would choose one option of greeting typically for their own culture (Reid, 2015). Reid added that, however, teachers could tell the students that all options are correct depending on different cultures. Fungchomchoei and Kardkarnklai (2016) conducted a study with Thai secondary school teachers and found that the strategy that teachers used to extend their students' cultural knowledge was that they encouraged their students to use social media to investigate, comprehend, and evaluate the interrelations between language, and culture. Besides, choosing teaching and learning materials is also important for EFL teachers to use. Rosyidi and Purwati (2017) suggested some teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, computers, cassettes, VCDs, magazines, newspapers, and the like that the teachers can use in their teaching to foster their students' IC.

Challenges in developing students' IC

In non-multicultural contexts, teachers can employ numerous strategies to cultivate their students' IC; they may incorporate cultures as topics in their teaching in various ways. That said, they might face some challenges in introducing cultures in their teaching. For instance, teachers may lack knowledge of cultural expertise or training on which aspects of culture to teach (Atay et al., 2009; Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2015) and they may not have enough teaching resources to support teaching cultures. School curriculum may also not allow the teachers to introduce foreign culture in teaching and learning a foreign language. Furthermore, teaching and learning materials may not be applicable to teaching cultures, for example, if the content in the textbook does not include cultural diversity (Manjarrés, 2009; Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2015). Moreover, teachers may lack relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward intercultural encounters and clear assessment tools for assessing students' IC (Manjarrés, 2009). Numerous studies have been congruent with these perspectives concerning difficulties which EFL teachers encounter when seeking to integrate cultures into classroom activities. For instance, Özışık, Yeşilyurt and DemiÍRöz (2019) conducted a study in Turkey that found the lack of knowledge regarding how to integrate cultures in classroom activities to be the key challenge.

Another study (Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2015) conducted in Iran found the textbook to be an obstacle that was blocking teachers from incorporating cultures in their teaching. Smakova and Paulsrud (2020) investigated how Kazakhstani EFL teachers from English-medium schools understood intercultural communicative competence which includes both

communicative competence and IC. Their study also aimed to ascertain the extent to which the teachers' ideas were integrated and represented in their stated teaching practices. Results revealed that the respondents were aware of the role of teaching for IC in language learning, but they did not implement it regularly due to the lack of practical environments, inappropriate curriculum/coursebook, lack of experience and knowledge about how to teach cultures, and lack of experience and knowledge about cultural diversity.

Teachers' teaching goals and teachers' perception of IC

The goals of the current language instruction are to gain an understanding of cultural differences and to enhance students' cultural awareness (Liu, 2015), which can develop students' IC. Nevertheless, if the teachers' teaching goals were just to equip their students with linguistic competence, no doubt, the teachers would ignore teaching cultures. That is to say, the teachers' teaching goals could determine whether cultures are incorporated into teaching activities. Besides, teachers' perception of IC would also reflect on their classroom practice. Simply put, if the teachers did not think IC was significant for their students to learn, they, surely, would not incorporate cultural dimensions in their teaching. The study by Estaji and Rahimi (2018) also found that the teachers' perceptions of IC influenced their teaching practices. The study by Fungchomchoei and Kardkarnklai (2016) indicated that when teachers perceived IC positively, they endeavoured to incorporate cultures in their teaching practices; the teachers encouraged their students to use social media to investigate, comprehend, and evaluate the interrelationships between language, culture, and communication. However, other factors could also intervene in the influence; this has been justified by the existing studies. For instance, a study (Atay et al., 2009) conducted in Turkey indicated that the teachers perceived the significant role of cultures in foreign language learning, but they did not frequently incorporate cultures into their classroom activities. Atay et al. (2009) raised some possible intervening factors such as the lack of teaching and learning resources, and expertise in how to integrate cultures in their teaching.

Cambodian secondary education

Cambodian secondary education, one of the education levels in the Cambodian education system, is run by the royal government of Cambodia. This excludes private education, which is run by the private sector. All public secondary schools follow the national curriculum developed and designed by MoEYS, Kingdom of Cambodia. Secondary education comprises two compulsory cycles, namely lower secondary (Grades 7 to 9) and upper secondary (Grades 10 to 12). The foreign language (French or English, requiring students to choose one as living language 1) is one of the significant subjects in both lower and upper secondary cycles. The living language 1 is required to be taught 4 hours a week and the other which is living language 2 is required to be taught 2 hours a week (see MoEYS, 2015). Each teaching hour consists of a 50-minute teaching period for both lower and upper secondary education (MoEYS, 2015). However, English has commonly been accepted as the only living language 1 or the only foreign language subject in most

public secondary schools. The English textbook *English For Cambodia* published by MoEYS is used in both cycles. This study did not include the schools that implement the New Generation School (NGS) program, the new reform school program launched by MoEYS to improve education quality. NGS "receive greater autonomy from the state to stimulate the education innovation" (MoEYS, 2016, p.4). The study excluded NGSs because each NGS has its own decision in choosing an English textbook. NGSs do not use the English textbook *English for Cambodia* as teaching material for the English subject.

Methods

Participants

The study was conducted with 38 Cambodian EFL secondary school teachers teaching English at 19 public secondary schools located in12 different provinces and the city across Cambodia. The sample was selected through convenience sampling based on being approachable for data collection. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic information regarding their genders. Frequency count (F. count) and percentage (%) are presented. Table 1 also shows the teachers' years of teaching experiences at their public secondary schools. All had at least two years of teaching experience at their secondary schools.

Table 1: Teachers' gender and years of teaching experiences (N=38)

		F. count	%
Gender	Female	18	47.4
	Male	20	52.6
Years of teaching	Less than 2 years	0	0%
	2 - 4 years	17	44.7
	5 - 7 years	11	29.0
	More than 7 years	10	26.3

Instruments

The data were collected both quantitatively (close-ended questions) and qualitatively (open-ended questions). The survey presented in *Google Forms* was sent to all teachers through *Facebook Messenger* or *Telegram*. The first part of the survey sought teachers' demographic information, and the second part included both close-ended questions and open-ended questions. In the open-ended questions, the teachers were invited to share what they perceive as IC, and in the close-ended questions with five-point Likert-style scales (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, and Always), the teachers were asked to report how often they have integrated cultures as topics in their teaching. The last items in the survey concerned challenges the participants faced in developing their students' IC. The closed-ended questions were adopted and adapted from Smakova and Paulsrud (2020). For the items concerning challenges, Smakova and Paulsrud (2020) used five-point Likert scales in their study, but in this study, the researcher decided to use only two options, Yes

or No, because this part of the survey included two open-ended questions that invited the participants to explain their choices given in the quantitative questions.

Data analysis

From the close-ended questions, the researcher obtained frequency counts and percentages. For the open-ended questions, the researcher used a thematic analysis technique after Braun and Clarke (2006). Five steps were included: familiarisation with the data, generation of code, theme quest, revision of themes, and theme description. In the current study, the researcher organised rich data by appropriate codes, to facilitate the discovery of significant themes based on the research question in this study. Then, the researcher reported the results with the most common theme with some examples extracted from teachers' responses.

Results

Teachers' teaching goal

The data regarding teachers 'teaching goals were obtained from the open-ended question '*What is your main goal of teaching English?*' Thirty-six participants responded to this question. The teachers' goals in teaching English are categorised into three dimensions namely developing students' intercultural communicative competence, developing students' language proficiency, and helping students pass a national exam.

Nineteen teachers reported that their teaching goals were to help students be able to use English to communicate with people across the borders as justified by Teacher 3.

> In learning any foreign language, communication is significant, so my main goal of teaching English is to help my students learn English effectively so that they can use it to communicate with people from different countries… (Teacher 3)

Twelve teachers reported their teaching goals were to improve their students' proficiency in the English language and know the target culture of countries where English is used, as seen in the example given by Teacher 4.

> Honestly, my teaching goal regarding the English language is to equip my students with language proficiency and help them know the cultures of other countries…. (Teacher 4)

Five teachers stressed the significant goal of their teaching English as helping their students to pass the national exam, as seen in the excerpt from Teacher 20.

> In teaching English, I usually try to help them learn knowledge of English that can help them pass their pass high school exam…. (Teacher 20)

Teachers' perception of IC

Two open-ended questions were used to obtain the data concerning teachers' perception of IC. The first open-ended question *'What can you say about intercultural competence?'* allowed the teachers to demonstrate their understanding of the term IC and all teachers responded to this question. Twenty teachers conceptualised IC as *'the ability to understand cultural differences'* which was significant in successful communication, as justified by Teachers 11 and 23.

> In my opinion, intercultural competence is the ability to understand our own cultures as well as foreign cultures to be able to communicate successfully with different people from diverse cultural backgrounds… (Teacher 11)

> Intercultural competence is the way in which we know about our culture and other culture for interacting with each other in order to avoid cultural conflict. For example, we learn how American people greet each other… (Teacher 23)

Twelve teachers conceptualised IC as the individual's knowledge of his/her own culture and target cultures, as seen in an excerpt from Teacher 13.

> ….when someone has intercultural competence, they have the knowledge of their cultures and target cultures or the culture of native countries where English is used as the mother tongue…(Teacher 13)

The rest of the teachers indicated uncertainty or a lesser understanding of the concept of IC, as seen in the excerpt from Teacher 30.

> I think intercultural competence is an active speaking skill. It may involve using English in everyday conversation smoothly… (Teacher 30)

For investigating the significance of IC, the question was 'What are the significances of intercultural competence for your students as language learners?' Thirty-seven teachers responded to this question. Most teachers, precisely twenty-five teachers, stressed the significance of IC in terms of 'facilitating communication'. In other words, they perceived the significance of IC as helping the learners communicate successfully with different people from diverse cultural backgrounds, as seen in the excerpts from Teachers 10 and 24.

> With intercultural competence, the ESL/EFL learners are able to communicate successfully with others who have different cultural backgrounds without any problems in it…. (Teacher 10)

> It helps my students understand other countries' cultures. When students are aware of various cultures, they will know how to give a polite response according to one's specific cultural norm which indicates the way one speaks or gestures...(Teacher 24)

Ten teachers reported the significance of IC as 'keeping a robust relationship with others' as seen in the example given by Teacher 18.

> It is a kind of general knowledge that can also promote relationships among different people who use English. For example, if we have intercultural competence we behave properly so that we can get on well with different people (Teacher 18)

In addition to acknowledging the significance of IC in communication, the rest of the teachers perceived the significance of IC in terms of 'scholarship and job opportunities, as seen in the example given by Teacher 13.

> …. intercultural competence is crucial for students as it helps them communicate with people from different countries effectively and it also will provide students with opportunities for study abroad, job opportunities, living in peace… (Teacher 13)

Incorporating intercultural dimensions in teaching

To get data on how often the teachers incorporated intercultural dimensions in their teaching, two close-ended questions were used to ask the teachers to rate how often they integrated Cambodian culture (Q 4) and foreign cultures (Q 5) as topics in their teaching. All thirty-eight teachers responded to these two questions. Table 2 presents the data obtained from the two questions. Frequency count (F. count) and Percentage (%) were used to present the data. The results revealed that most teachers did not regularly incorporate cultures in their teaching and learning since sixteen teachers or 42.1% reported that they sometimes integrated Cambodian culture topics in their English class and seventeen teachers or 44.7% indicated that they rarely integrated foreign cultures into their English class.

Table 2: Results regarding the frequency of incorporating IC in teaching (N=38)

Q 4. How often do you integrate Cambodian culture as a topic in your English class?									
Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always	
F. count	%	F. count	%	F. count	%	F. count	%	F. count	%
0	0	7	18.4	**16**	**42.1**	14	36.9	1	2.6

Q 5. How often do you integrate foreign cultures as topics in your English class?									
Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always	
F. count	%	F. count	%	F. count	%	F. count	%	F. count	%
1	2.6	**17**	**44.7**	12	31.6	8	21.1	0	0

Strategies in developing students' IC

To examine strategies that teachers have employed to develop their students' IC, two open-ended questions were used, '*Please provide the strategies that you have employed to develop your students IC*' and '*Choose the effective strategy that you have just mentioned and write here*'. Thirty-seven teachers responded to the first question and thirty-five teachers responded to the second of these questions. The common and the most effective strategies reported by the teachers included the selection of 'culturally-related topics and documents' to teach, followed by assigning 'group discussion and presentation' about cultures, and using 'role play'.

Twenty teachers mentioned that they have employed a selection of 'culturally-related topics and documents' to teach their students, as seen in the example given by Teacher 2.

> … I often select relevant documents or topics to teach my students cultures regarding the similarities and differences among those cultures. I mean I select the supplementary teaching materials that contain cultural differences especially when I teach them reading skills, I select the reading texts about cultures…. (Teacher 2)

In addition to the selection of relevant topics or documents, thirteen teachers said that they have assigned 'group discussion and presentation' about cultures, for developing their students' IC, as justified by Teacher 8.

> … I first select cultural topics to teach, and then I assign my students to work in groups or pairs to discuss and let them write posters about some special ceremonies or festivals of different countries like Khmer New Year vs Chinese New Year. Students will have to list down some similarities and differences. Then I ask them to do the presentation…. (Teacher 8)

Eleven teachers also mentioned 'role play', which they have used in developing their students' IC as seen in an extract from Teacher 11.

> … I have used some strategies such as assigning group work and presenting cultural differences and role-play. In role-play, for example, I assign one of my students to be a foreigner and the other one to be a Cambodian. They make a conversation by each asking about their partner's culture on a specific occasion like during a wedding…. (Teacher 11)

Challenges in developing students' IC

To obtain data about the challenges the teachers have faced in developing students' IC, close-ended questions and open-ended questions were employed. Ten items were adopted from Smakova and Paulsrud (2020) adapted into a 'Yes/No' format. Table 3 presents the data as frequency counts (F. count) and percentages. All 38 teachers responded to all items except items 2 and 6 (each 37 respondents). The results revealed that the common challenge they faced in developing students' IC was the textbook lacking multicultural content, since twenty-nine participants or 76.3% responded 'Yes' to item 1. The other challenges included the lack of knowledge and experience in assessing IC and the lack of knowledge in integrating cultures in their teaching as seen in the number of teachers responding to items 3, 4, and 5.

To expand the data, two open-ended questions were used. The first, '*If the other challenges which you have faced are not mentioned in the questionnaires, write here*', allowed the teachers to raise the other challenges which were not mentioned in the close-ended questions. In the second question, '*Based on all challenges, you have just indicated through all questions above, which one is the most challenging one? Why?*', the teachers were also invited to choose and describe the most challenging ones and they were also invited to provide their reasons. Twenty-nine teachers responded to the first question.

Seventeen teachers raised the same challenges; they said students' knowledge of the target language made it difficult to teach cultures, as seen in this excerpt from Teacher 9.

Table 3: Challenges in developing students' IC

No.	Items	Yes		No	
		F. count	%	F. count	%
1	The textbook I am using lacks multicultural content for students to learn.	**29**	**76.3**	**9**	23.7
2	The school curriculum is not appropriate for teaching other cultures.	19	51.4	18	48.6
3	I have less experience and knowledge about the assessment process of intercultural competence.	**27**	**71.1**	**11**	28.9
4	I have less experience and knowledge about how students can demonstrate their intercultural competence.	**25**	**65.8**	**13**	34.2
5	I have less experience and knowledge about how to integrate cultures appropriately.	**27**	**71.1**	**11**	28.9
6	I have less knowledge about how to promote reflective thinking on cultural diversity.	22	59.5	15	40.5
7	Students feel reluctant to learn about their own culture.	21	55.3	17	44.7
8	Students feel reluctant to learn about foreign cultures.	20	52.6	18	47.3
9	Culture is considered an irrelevant topic for English classes at my schools.	18	47.4	20	52.6
10	Lack of time.	22	57.9	16	42.1

> Most of my students have low ability in the English language, so it is very difficult to teach them about cultures. When I teach them cultures, I spend much time explaining them in Khmer… (Teacher 9)

Eight teachers mentioned that the lack of resources that supported teaching and learning cultures was another challenges, as seen in the extract by Teacher 2

> … I think teaching and learning resources related to cultures are significant, but we do not have those… (Teacher 2)

The rest of the teachers raised different challenges; for example, three participants said the learners' different interests were the other challenges, as seen in the example from Teacher 7.

> … there are many students in my class. Some students like learning about cultures, but others do not, so I think it is very challenging to integrate cultures into my teaching (Teacher 7)

In the final question, the teachers were invited to choose the challenge which is the most challenging one for developing students' IC. Twenty-seven teachers responded to this

question; 21 teachers chose the textbook that lacked multicultural content, as seen in the example from Teacher 11.

> …. if I have to choose one which is the most challenging, I would say the textbook because we use the textbook as a key teaching and learning material. Both teachers and students focus only on what is in the textbook… (Teacher 11)

The other teachers mentioned different challenges, such as the lack of teaching and learning resources, students' interests, and time constraints, as justified by Teachers 15 and 21.

> ….the most challenge for me would be the students' interests because there are more than thirty students in my class and they have different interests in learning. Some like learning about cultures while others do not. (Teacher 15)

> ….time is the most concern for me to teach cultures because we have to follow the school schedule. If we teach some things which are not relevant to the lessons in the book, I will not finish the lessons on time… (Teacher 21)

Discussion

Most teachers reported that helping their students to be able to use English in communicating with different people from different cultural backgrounds was the main goal of their teaching English. This finding accords with an objective of the Cambodian national curriculum, namely enabling students to use English in communication (MoEYS, 2015). The result concerning how the teachers perceived IC revealed that most teachers described IC as the individual's ability to understand cultural differences (their own cultures and cultures of others), which is essential in successful communication. This is in line with the significance given in the literature, as one of the fundamental skills (Wattanavorakijkul, 2020), accepted as the fifth skill' in English language education (Sevimel-Sahin, 2020). Nevertheless, the result revealed that the teachers did not regularly incorporate intercultural dimensions in their teaching, due to some challenges which are presented in the following sections.

The results concerning the strategies the teachers have employed to develop students' IC included selecting 'culture-related topics/ documents' to teach; assigning 'group discussion' and 'group/individual presentation'; and using 'role-play'. These strategies could be effective to be used to help develop students' IC, as some have been suggested by scholars. For instance, EFL teachers could use culture-related sources to foster students' IC (Rosyidi & Purwati, 2017). Noticeably, most teachers reported that they presented the topics of cultures in terms of similarities and differences, and assigned their students to work in groups to compare and contrast those cultures. There could be other effective ways also to develop students' knowledge, raise students' awareness, or instil their attitudes toward cultural diversity, which could lead to the development of students' IC. This method corresponds to the IC models proposed by some scholars. 'Skill' in Byram's (1997) model refers to a skill to infer, describe and relate to an event from another culture. The other component of Byram's (1977) model is 'critical cultural

awareness', which is the ability to critically evaluate practices and products in the speaker's own and other cultures. It also corresponds to the five components in Deardorff's (2006) pyramid model. The first three components include 'knowledge and comprehension (understanding cultural differences)'; 'skills (skills to listen, observe, relate ...)'; and 'attitudes toward cultural diversity)'. The last two components of Deardorff's model, including 'desired external outcome' and 'desired internal outcomes' indicate that with such knowledge, skills, and attitude, from the three components students can perform intercultural communication successfully and effectively. In addition, regarding 'role-play' that some teachers have employed also corresponds to one component of Byram's (1997) model; it is the skill of discovery and interaction', since this component refers to the ability of the individual to learn new things about a culture and cultural practices, skills and attitudes through actual communication and interaction.

Apropos of challenges in developing students' IC, most teachers accepted that textbooks lacked cultural content, and the teachers had less knowledge and experience regarding IC assessment and multicultural integration in their teaching. The findings were supported by some scholars and previous studies; for example, the challenges that teachers encountered were teaching and learning materials like textbooks which did not include cultural diversity (Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2015; Manjarrés, 2009; Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2015). Teachers might neglect to integrate intercultural in their teaching owing to their lack of cultural expertise, or knowledge on which aspects of culture to teach (Atay et al., 2009; Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2015). The study by Özışık, Yeşilyurt and DemiRöz (2019) also showed that the challenges most teachers faced were the lack of knowledge regarding how to integrate cultures in their English class, and the lack of experience and clear assessment tools for assessing students' IC (Manjarrés, 2009). In addition, they also reported that they lacked teaching and learning materials to teach cultures; this finding was in line with what was raised. Moreover, the teachers also mentioned the levels of students' target language proficiency being unsuitable for teaching cultures. This finding was not congruent with what Reid (2015) claimed regarding 'role-play' as applicable to all levels and ages. Based on the data from the open-ended question, most teachers who raised this challenge did not mention 'role-play' as one of the strategies for developing students' IC.

Conclusion

The results here revealed that most teachers demonstrated that their main teaching goal was to help their students to be able to use English in intercultural communication. In addition, most teachers showed good understanding of the concept of IC, and they accepted IC as an essential aspect of foreign language learning and intercultural communication. In addition, teachers raised several strategies to develop students' IC, such as selecting culture-related materials or documents to teach, assigning group work and group/individual presentations, and role-play cultural differences. The teachers' strategies in developing their students' IC also responded to the IC models proposed by scholars. Yet, they did not frequently incorporate cultures in their teaching practice to develop their students' IC. The teachers raised some challenges they have faced in developing their students' IC. The textbook they used at their schools did not include

multicultural content. In addition, most teachers also reported that they lacked knowledge and experience regarding IC assessment and cultural diversity integration in their teaching. Moreover, they lacked teaching and learning resources that supported teaching cultures. Finally, students' English language proficiency was not suitable for teaching cultures. In this sense, the contents of the textbook should be revised by infusing cultural diversity. Regarding the lack of knowledge and experience of cultural diversity and IC assessment, technical support like training should be offered. The teaching and learning resources in which cultural content is manifested should be provided for them. Finally, concerning the challenge with respect to students' language proficiency, teachers may need some guidance on how to incorporate cultures in classes with low-language proficiency students.

Future studies

As this study investigated strategies for developing students' IC, future studies may include how teachers develop students' intercultural communicative competence which includes both linguistic competence and IC. In addition, the current study employed close-ended and open-ended questions to collect the data, so future studies may also employ interviews. Participants in this study comprised 38 teachers from 19 public secondary schools across Cambodia, so future studies may select a larger and more diverse sample. As the participants in this study were EFL teachers, future studies may also investigate students' attitudes toward IC and learning about cultures. Since most teachers reported that the textbook did not include multicultural content, further research could analyse the cultural content of the textbook *English for Cambodia*. Teachers also raised the challenges due to students' level of target language proficiency, the different challenges the teachers have faced based on the grade level taught are also topics for future studies.

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