
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Developing Students' Intercultural Communication Competence by Supplementing Local Culture Contents into English Lessons

Nguyen Thi Hong Minh¹ ✉ and Nguyen Thi Thuy Linh²

^{1,2}Faculty of Foreign Languages Education, Thai Nguyen University of Education, Viet Nam

Corresponding Author: Nguyen Thi Hong Minh, **E-mail:** minhnh@tnue.edu.vn

| ABSTRACT

The ultimate goal of language learning is to communicate effectively and sensibly in that language, yet during the history of language teaching and learning, a focus on linguistic competence has remained dominant, which has undoubtedly resulted in language learners' lack of sociolinguistic competence or —intercultural competence allowing them to be a successful speaker of the language. This study aims to increase students' intercultural awareness and strengthen their understanding of their home culture by integrating local culture contents into English lessons for 9th graders. The intervention lasted 10 weeks in the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022, and 40 students in 9th grade at a junior high school in Thai Nguyen city, Vietnam, were engaged in the study as participants. The study utilized tests and questionnaires as the fundamental research instruments to gather data on augmenting local culture contents into English teaching in order to increase students' intercultural awareness of their surroundings. SPSS version 26.0 was used to process and analyze the results of the pre and post-tests as well as the pre and post-questionnaires. The results showed that the supplementation of local culture contents into English lessons has a positive effect on the participants' intercultural communication competence. It is therefore proposed that local culture contents should be more regularly integrated into English lessons to develop students' knowledge of local culture.

| KEYWORDS

Intercultural communication, competence, local culture, intercultural awareness

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 28 July 2022

PUBLISHED: 03 August 2022

DOI: 10.32996/jeltal.2022.4.3.7

1. Introduction

English as the most preferred and learned second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) (Graddol, 2006; Le Van Canh, 2004) has been used as a tool of worldwide communication, which according to Philipsen (2005), is socially tied to people and communities. That is the reason why, when teaching English, intercultural competence is regarded as a necessary component of English education in that it builds learners' communicative competence for effective and appropriate communication across cultures.

In reaction to the cooperation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and globalization, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Vietnam attempts a novel mission - to contribute to the intercultural competence of Vietnamese students to become capable global citizens. This mission is also stated in the objectives of the 2018 English language curriculum: to raise comprehensive intercultural competence, to build positive intercultural awareness towards selfness and otherness, and at first to reflect the values of the home culture in English (MOET, 2018). However, the prescribed nationwide used English textbooks at Vietnamese lower and upper secondary schools seem not to cover essential contents and activities for students to "reflect the values of the home culture in English" as there is little or no mention of local cultures for all provinces in the textbook. Furthermore, the heavy emphasis on grammar and vocabulary knowledge both in the school and exam practices has led to the underestimating of cultural knowledge - the basis of intercultural competence. Therefore, it is vital that local cultural contents should be integrated into the English language syllabus and lessons for the enhancement of students' intercultural competence.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culture and language learning and teaching

Culture is a broad concept that is not easy to be defined as it includes a range of our life dimensions, and different people may have different definitions for it. On a general level, as stated by Lado (1957), "culture is the ways of a people" and "cultures are structured systems of patterned behavior" (Lado, 1957: 111), indicating that culture is a system that patterns the behaviors of the individuals. Veronica has defined culture from the anthropological perspective as a "product of what man believes and does. It is very rich, very variable, very malleable and very large," as cited and translated in Ryan (1998: 144). Kramsch (1993: 205) defined culture as "a social construct, the product of self and other perceptions".

A more specific definition of culture is suggested by Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990) with four aspects of culture: the semantic sense, the aesthetic sense, the sociological sense, and the pragmatic sense. The semantic sense refers to the whole conceptualization system which conditions perceptions and thought processes. The aesthetic sense encompasses such art forms as cinema, literature, music, and media, whereas the sociological one includes the organization and nature of family, interpersonal relations, customs, and material conditions. The pragmatic or sociolinguistic sense refers to the background knowledge, social and paralinguistic skills, and language code that is fundamental for successful communication. These four meanings of culture offer more core to the common definitions above and reflect culture's many dimensions. It is a shared assumption that all of these characteristics are primarily conveyed through language, which is an integral part of the culture (Taga, 1999; Brown, 2007). Culture cannot be expressed and communicated without language. Language and culture, therefore, are two things that cannot be isolated because they bolster each other.

According to McKay (2003), there are two ways that culture could have influences on language education: linguistically and pedagogically. Linguistically, culture impacts the language at the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels. From a pedagogical perspective, it affects the selection of language resources since both the cultural context of the language materials, and the cultural foundation of the teaching methodology must be considered while deciding upon the language materials. For example, while some textbooks cover source culture elements, others include target culture examples. In other words, cultural classes have a humanizing and motivating effect on the language learner and the learning process.

Culture, then, enters into language teaching in two ways. First and foremost, it is advisable that language teachers support students' understanding, communication, and preservation of their own cultural backgrounds through culturally sustaining pedagogy. On this basis, they could teach about culture in order to help their learners develop intercultural awareness and the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for successful encounters with people of different cultural backgrounds (Baker, 2011). With the belief that one should understand and communicate about themselves before others, this study, therefore, offers an opportunity to investigate the ways that language teachers approach the first cultural demand.

2.2. Intercultural communication competence and intercultural awareness

Intercultural communication competence is a term that has a wide range of definitions. According to Fantini (2006), intercultural communicative competence is the set of skills required to connect successfully and respectfully with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself. Wiseman (2001) defines it as the combination of information, skills, and motivation required to communicate effectively and respectfully with people from many cultures, with motivation being a key component.

The most influential model of intercultural communicative competence is supplied by Byram (1997), and most definitions of this competence nowadays are based on this model. Byram (1997) defined intercultural communicative competence as the interaction of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and intercultural competence. It demonstrates that he is not ready to completely abandon the goals and principles of the communicative method of teaching foreign languages but rather to broaden it and add an intercultural perspective. Byram also ensures that the relationship between language and culture is acknowledged in this way.

Intercultural awareness is closely associated with intercultural communication competence and, to some extent, could be regarded as the basic demonstration of intercultural communication competence.

Baker (2011) categorized intercultural awareness into 3 levels. Level 1, basic cultural awareness, shows aspects of cultural awareness which are related to an understanding of cultures at a very broad level with a concentration on the first culture, rather than specifically orientated to intercultural communication. This level involves an awareness of the first culture, how it shapes behavior, attitudes, and beliefs, and how crucial it is to communication. There is also a recognition that other cultures may differ, although this recognition might not come with any particular, in-depth knowledge of other civilizations or even the idea of culture itself. This is associated with an ability, or the development of ability, to articulate one's own cultural perspective and an ability to make general comparisons between one's own culture and 'others'. Level 2, advanced cultural awareness, involves moving away from essentialist stances and toward more sophisticated understandings of cultures and cultural frames of reference. Cultures are

regarded as one of many social groups or contexts at this level and the fluid, dynamic, and relative aspect of any cultural classification or knowledge. This is combined with specific knowledge about (an) other culture(s) and the probable implications on communication in terms of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. In terms of skills or abilities, level 2 intercultural communication participants should be able to use their cultural knowledge to prepare for potential areas of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. To avoid stereotyping, though, this needs to be combined with the capacity to move beyond generalizations in response to the specific instance of intercultural communication that they are engaged in. Intercultural communicators should also be able to compare and mediate between specific cultural frames of reference at this level. In this sense, it is probably most closely related to the previous conceptions of intercultural competence. Intercultural Awareness is the last stage, which recognizes that cultural references and communicative practices in intercultural communication are not confined things. It may or may not link to a particular culture. There is also a knowledge of much intercultural communication's liminal and emergent character. English as a worldwide language facilitates communication. This necessitates several of the preceding features to be engaged at the same time, including the capacity to negotiate and arbitrate between several cultural frameworks of reference and modes of communication as they appear in specific cases of intercultural communication.

2.3. Supplementing local culture elements into English instruction

Many educational academics have paid particular attention to including materials related to local culture in English instruction. As a matter of fact, it attracts many scholars in Europe (e.g., Byram & Risager, 1999; Mendez García, & Ryan, 2005). It has recently grown and spread to New Zealand, Australia (e.g., Newton et al., 2010; Newton, 2016), various regions of Asia (e.g., Zhou Yi, 2011; Zhou Chunhong, 2011), including Vietnam (e.g., Đinh Ngọc Thủy, 2016), and many other places.

Since integrating cultures into language teaching induces both integrity and multiculturalism, it varies according to views on cultures, sociocultural contexts, and the mainstream of language teaching pedagogy. However, there are two main themes in intercultural education research: examining the status of intercultural teaching from teachers' views, practices, and curricula (Đinh Ngọc Thủy, 2016; Nilmanee & Soontornwipast, 2014) ; and determining the best method for intercultural language (Hồ Sỹ Thắng Kiệt, 2011).

It is known that of all the mentioned locally-oriented research, Đinh Ngọc Thủy's (2016) was conducted in general education as an investigation into the representations of local culture in English textbook series. Due to the shortage of related empirical studies in general education, this research was based on previous studies in various educational settings, including tertiary and informal education.

Supplying cultural content in English lessons has become a popular practice around the world. The majority of research was conducted in universities or high school contexts, where teachers have more freedom to design their syllabus, select topics, and choose the learning materials so that content about local culture can be favorably added to English lessons. However, in Vietnam, students at lower secondary schools seem to have fewer opportunities to get access to their home culture due to the prescribed curriculum, syllabus, and textbooks. Therefore, the researcher carried out the research on integrating local culture into teaching English for secondary school students, specifically for the 9th graders, with the hope of enhancing their understanding of local culture and raising awareness to preserve their local cultural values.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

This research was investigated to reveal answers to the following questions:

1. How are local culture elements presented in the current English language textbook?
2. How does the supplementation of local culture contents into English lessons raise students' intercultural awareness?
3. To what extent does the supplementation of local culture contents into English lessons enhance the students' motivation in English learning?

3.2 Participants

Participants in this study included 40 students (20 males and 20 females) in the 9th grade in a local junior high school in Thai Nguyen city, Vietnam. The students are at the age of 15, and they have been officially studying English for at least 6 years, so the English proficiency of the participants is estimated at the pre-intermediate level.

3.3 Research Design

The thesis primarily followed an action research design combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. This study examined how local culture was included in teaching English in upper secondary schools. It used qualitative and quantitative data to combine the benefits and minimize the negatives of each type of data (Trochim, 2005). On the one hand, quantitative

techniques provide researchers access to information from a larger population and offer inferential data to potential connections between the elements or variables. In contrast, qualitative methods allow researchers to explore specific cases for insightful interpretation.

To begin with, in order to discover how the cultural contents are presented in the English 9 textbook, the researcher analyzed the textbook to find out which culture contents were introduced and decided which belonged to the home country's culture or hometown culture.

In the first week, a pre-test was given to students to investigate the initial understanding level of their local culture. The students also express their opinions about culture integration in English lessons. Then, after 10 weeks, a post-test was used to examine whether students' understanding of local culture is improved or not.

Finally, all the data collected underwent a thorough analysis to provide answers to the research questions.

3.4 Data collection instruments

Questionnaires were used in this study as a primary instrument to collect information about students' perceptions of supplementing local culture contents into English lessons, students' needs of supplementation local culture contents into English lessons to raise students' intercultural awareness, and to what extent the supplementation of local culture contents into English lessons enhance the 9th graders' motivation in English learning.

Questionnaire 1, with 2 sections, investigated the students' opinions about the culture and local culture in English learning, their needs, and the degree of their preferences for the local culture contents or activities to be conducted in English lessons.

Questionnaire 2 includes two sections. The first section aimed to evaluate students' attitudes towards the integration of local cultural content and sought to gather information on students' interests, motivation, and feedback on the implementation of local cultural content and activities in English lessons. The second section aimed to examine the level of preference in content, activities, and parts of the lesson that supplemented local culture.

Moreover, in this study, two major tests were constructed to discover the participants' progress during and achievement after the intervention. The questions in the pre-test and post-tests were in a multiple-choice form about historical relics, famous places, traditional food, art, and festivals in Thai Nguyen. Students were required to complete twenty questions in 20 minutes. The level of difficulty of the two tests, both in the language use and the required knowledge, was equal so that the changes in students' intercultural awareness could be identified.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 The presence of local culture in textbook English 9

The current English 9 textbook consists of 12 units with 4 different themes of our community, people and heritages, the world around us, and life in the future. There are seven lessons in each unit with different objectives. The first lesson is used to help students have a general overview of the unit's main topic. The second lesson provides students with vocabulary and pronunciation. In the third lesson, grammar is introduced to students, and they do exercises to practice. Students are given some short reading texts, recordings, or questions for discussion in the communication part. The two next lessons help students develop their skills: reading-speaking and listening-writing. Some exercises are given in the last lesson in order to help students further practice their language use.

Although the English 9 textbook covers four main themes as indicated in the English curriculum, there are not many local culture contents that appear in the textbook. The table below shows the presence of local culture in the textbook.

Unit	Topic	The presence of local culture		Details
		Vietnamese culture	Thai Nguyen culture	
1	Local environment	Yes	No	Lesson 1: Getting started: Talk about Bat Trang village
2	City life	Yes	No	Lesson 4: Communication This part mentions some information about Vung Tau, a city in the south of Viet Nam.
3	Teen stress and pressure	No	No	
4	Life in the past	Yes	No	Lesson 6: Listening The recording is about Vietnamese schools in the past.
5	Wonders of Viet Nam	Yes	No	Lesson 5: Reading The reading text is about Son Doong cave in Quang Binh, Viet Nam
6	Vietnam: then and now	Yes	No	Lesson 1: Getting started The conversation mentioned life in the past in Vietnam. Lesson 5: Reading The reading text is about the tram system in Hanoi then and now.
7	Recipe and eating habit	No	No	
8	Tourism	No	No	Lesson 5: Reading Son Doong cave in Quang Binh, Viet Nam is mentioned in the reading text.
9	English in the world	No	No	
10	Space travel	No	No	
11	Changing role in society	No	No	
12	My future career	No	No	

Table 1. *The presence of local culture in textbook English 9*

As can be seen from the table, though the topic of each unit seems interesting and attractive, not all of the lessons have local culture contents. To be more specific, 6 out of 12 units, equivalent to 50% of the units, include no information about students' home country culture. It is noteworthy that even though there is some presence of Vietnamese culture, it appears that it is presented in the language input, for example, the reading or listening texts, rather than the activities that the students can perform to communicate about their home country culture. Furthermore, there is completely no content about the culture of Thai Nguyen - the students' home city. Accordingly, it is fundamental that the English language teachers provide more support through culturally sustaining pedagogy to encourage students' understanding, communication, and preservation of their own cultural backgrounds.

4.1.2 *The growth of students' intercultural awareness through supplementing local culture into English lessons*

4.1.2.1 *Students' initial perception of supplementing local culture content into English lessons*

A questionnaire on students' needs for local culture integration into English lessons was conducted and then analyzed based on the categorization of the level of agreement as follows.

Mean	Level of agreement
4.50 - 5.00	Strongly agree
3.50 - 4.49	Agree
2.50 - 3.49	Neutral
1.50 - 2.49	Disagree
1.00 - 1.49	Strongly disagree

Table 2. Interpretation of level of agreement

(Source: Atef & Munir, 2009; Shams; 2008 cited in Idek, et.al., 2014)

	N	Min	Max	Mean (pre-questionnaire)	Level of agreement
1. Understanding culture is an integral part of English learning.	40	2	5	3.95	Agree
2. Most English lessons have my hometown culture content.	40	2	5	2.30	Disagree
3. English learners should have some understanding of culture in general.	40	2	5	4.50	Strongly agree
4. I should have some understanding of my own local culture.	40	2	5	4.23	Agree
5. Supplementing local culture contents in English lessons motivates me to learn English better.	40	2	5	3.88	Agree
6. Supplementing local culture contents in English lessons helps widen my understanding of my local culture.	40	2	5	4.53	Strongly agree
7. Supplementing local culture contents in English lessons helps develop my intercultural communication competence.	40	2	5	4.48	Agree
8. Supplementing local culture contents in English lessons helps me be more confident in communicating and sharing my local culture with other people.	40	2	5	4.25	Agree
9. I can find information about my local culture easily in the English textbook.	40	2	5	2.38	Disagree
10. My English teachers need to integrate local culture into English lessons.	40	2	5	4.00	Agree
11. My English teachers should supplement local culture into English lessons regularly.	40	2	5	4.25	Agree
12. Local culture content supplemented into English lessons should be in line with the content of the lesson.	40	2	5	4.00	Agree
13. Local culture content should be introduced in separate lessons rather than integrated into my regular English lessons.	40	2	5	3.28	Neutral

Table 3. Students' perception of supplementing local culture contents into English lessons

The table illustrates the result of the first questionnaire, which investigated students' perception of supplementing local culture contents into English lessons. It is noticeable that most of the students knew the importance of culture when learning English. The mean score of over 4.5 showed that they strongly agreed with the statement that understanding culture is an integral part of English learning and supplementing local culture contents in English lessons helps widen my understanding of my local culture. The lowest mean score is 2.3 showed the respondents' disagreement with having hometown culture content in most English lessons. They also found it is not easy to find local cultural elements in an English textbook. Therefore, the teacher needs to supplement local cultural content in English lessons.

The students were also surveyed about their need to supplement local culture in English lessons. Most of the respondents wanted to explore a local society in English lessons. Regarding the aspect of local culture that should be integrated into English lessons, many respondents wished to gain more knowledge of local music, art, local people, heritages, historical events, and socio-economic issues through English lessons. Most of them expected the teacher to spend 30-50% of the class time on local culture content in English lessons. Some of them preferred some contents of English lessons to be replaced by related local content. Besides, the respondents would prefer to make English magazines, presentations, and English videos while exploring the local culture.

4.1.2.2 Changes in students' understanding of the first culture

Students' scores in the pre and post-test of local culture understanding were compared in terms of mean, standard deviation, and standard error mean.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	9.98	40	2.391	.378
	Post-test	13.70	40	2.441	.386

Table 4. Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test scores

Table 4 shows that the post-test score is 3.72 (13.70 – 9.98) higher than the pre-test, indicating that 9th graders' intercultural communication competence has been noticeably developed after local culture contents were supplemented into their English lessons.

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-test & Post-test	40	.970	.000

Table 5. Correlations between Pre-Test and Post-Test results

The link between pre-test and post-test results is displayed in Table 5. A correlation coefficient of 0.970 with a corresponding p-value of 0.000 indicates a significant relationship between the two variables. It can be concluded that the application of local culture contents in English lessons for 9th graders has a great influence on their intercultural communication competence.

		Paired Differences					t	d f	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Me an	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test – Post-test	- 3.7 25	.599	.095	-3.916	-3.534	- 39.3 56	3 9	.000

Table 6. Paired differences between Pre-Test and Post-Test

The changes between pre-test and post-test are depicted in Table 6. The noticeable difference from the 0.05 level of significance is shown by the obtained t-value of 39.356 and the corresponding p-value of 0.000 at df = 39. As a result, it can be concluded that the supplementing of local culture contents in English lessons enhanced students' intercultural communication competence. Furthermore, the gap between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of 3.72 determines that 9th graders' intercultural communication competence has improved significantly after the experiment, based on the evidence from pre-test and post-test results.

4.1.3 Students' motivation in English learning after integrating local culture into English lessons

Students' preferences of the activities conducted in the research were categorized into 5 groups and interpreted as follows.

Rank	Level of preference
4.1-5.0	Extremely preferred
3.1-4.0	Moderately preferred
2.1-3.0	Preferred
1.1-2.0	Less preferred
0-1.0	Not preferred

Table 7. Interpretation of level of preference (Source: Oxford's scale, 1990)

Cultural content	N	Min	Max	Mean (post-questionnaire)	Level of preference	Rank
People, heritage, and tourism	40	2	5	4.53	Extremely preferred	1
Music and Art	40	2	5	3.95	Moderately preferred	2
Historic events	40	2	5	3.65	Moderately preferred	3
Social economy	40	2	5	3.55	Moderately preferred	4
Social science	40	2	5	3.48	Moderately preferred	5
Natural science	40	2	5	3.43	Moderately preferred	6
Architect	40	2	5	3.38	Moderately preferred	7

Table 8. How students like local culture contents

The table illustrates the result of the post questionnaire. The highest mean score was 4.03, showing that many respondents chose cultural content about people, heritage, and tourism as their first preference. Regarding the aspect of students' interest in cultural content, more than 60% of the respondents fancied people, heritages, historical events, music, and art. The respondents were quite interested in the social economy and social and natural science, and they were motivated to explore local culture through English lessons.

The result of the post-questionnaire also shows students' attitudes towards the integration of local culture contents. It is noticeable that many respondents strongly agree that knowing English will be helpful for their studies, and it broadens their future options. The respondents were motivated to learn English with local culture contents in the class and outside class by watching films, listening to music, and reading. They were ready to introduce local culture to others.

4.2. Discussion

The data collected in the study reflected the current situation of the 9th graders' understanding of local culture and how supplementation of local culture develops students' intercultural communication competence. Most students appreciated integrating local cultural values into English lessons and were aware of the importance of culture in teaching English. Furthermore, they were interested in learning about local culture through English lessons, and they longed to obtain more information about their home culture to widen their minds.

There are a number of reasons that accounted for the low score of the pre-test of students' knowledge of their own culture. Firstly, most students tend to explore the culture of other countries when they learn English. Secondly, students mainly learn things in textbooks without finding other sources to widen their local understanding. Thirdly, some students lack real experience in the

world around them because they do not have space to explore their lives. These cause problems for students because they do not have enough local understanding to talk to others or introduce their local tourism and local factors to the foreigner. Most students find it is not easy to see local culture in the textbook, so they expect their teachers to supply local culture of tourism, natural and social science, people, and heritage in the English language syllabus so that they can widen their minds about local culture.

The analysis of textbook English grade 9 reveals that it includes various functional and cultural aspects from both the general and local cultures; nonetheless, most of them reflect universal cultural values rather than local ones. Furthermore, there is a shortage of genuine representation from various locations around the province or country. As a result, learners are unlikely to have a complete awareness of the target culture and other cultures around the world, posing numerous challenges to students' intercultural communication ability. Because the emphasis of these textbooks is on polishing and perfecting students' language skills, the manner in which cultural themes are introduced can be justified in part. More specifically, cooperation from both teachers and learners should be sought to tackle the available cultural elements from a multi-faceted perspective, thereby enhancing students' intercultural communication competence.

It could be deduced from the textbook analysis of English grade 9 that there were not many local factors appearing in English lessons. These factors are mainly about students' home country culture, but the hometown culture is not introduced in any parts of the English lessons. This would leave the learners with a sense of incompleteness, unfamiliarity with the language input, and the irrelevance of their learning to their real life, as well as the question of the meaningfulness of their learning. Therefore, to ensure students can talk to other people in English about their country, they need to be supplemented with local culture content and activities through English lessons based on their needs. Learners expect to have more group discussions, projects, and other activities such as making videos, magazines, talk shows, and dramas about local culture. As a consequence, a wide range of changes could be made to the English lessons, such as replacing reading text, recording, asking students to do projects, and making magazines and videos on their home city culture.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided several significant findings. The first finding emphasizes the importance of local culture and its presence in the current English language textbook for grade 9. The second finding showed the changes in students' intercultural awareness through the supplementation of local culture in English lessons. The last one is supplementing local culture content to enhance the 9th graders' motivation in English learning.

Firstly, the current English language textbook for 9th graders includes little information and limited activities on students' home country as well as home city culture. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate relevant hometown culture into English lessons to widen their understanding, which can encourage their pride in the local culture and then leads to their actions to preserve their culture values.

Secondly, supplementing local culture contents into English lessons could raise students' intercultural awareness, in this study, at least at level 1, awareness of their own culture. Those contents provide cultural contexts through which factual information can be introduced comprehensively and accurately. The growth in the test scores has demonstrated a rise in their intercultural awareness. Students understand more about their first culture, which will be a good foundation for them to explore other cultures.

Lastly, integrating local culture contents into English lessons could enhance students' motivation in English learning. Supplementing local culture content helps students be aware of their local cultural values. Students are motivated to explore culture through English lessons. They could recognize how regional culture affects their lives and raise awareness of keeping and preserving local cultural values. In this sense, English learning does promote not only students' language proficiency but also their intercultural communication competence, which is undoubtedly a crucial goal of English education in the communicative approach.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Thai Nguyen University of Education and Nguyen Du Lower secondary school for allowing us to conduct the study. Additionally, our greatest thanks also go to the 40 students in the 9th grade at Nguyen Du junior high school in Thai Nguyen city. They were willing to participate in the project either as the participants or the respondents of the questionnaires.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the study's design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of the data, in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1] Graddol, D. (2006). *English next: Why global English may mean the end of 'English as a foreign language*.
- [2] Le Van C. (2006). A historical review of English language education in Vietnam. In Y. H. Choi & B. Spolsky (Eds.), *English education in Asia: History and policies (167–180)*. Seoul: Asia TEFL.
- [3] Philipsen, G., Coutu, L. M., & Covarrubias, P. (2005). Speech codes theory. *Theorizing about intercultural communication*, 55-68.
- [4] Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures*.
- [5] Chau T. and Hoang H (2018), towards the integration of culture into teaching English in upper secondary schools: teachers 'concerns and expectations.
- [6] Đinh N. T (2016). *Culture representations in English language teaching curriculum in Vietnam*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Monash University Australia.
- [7] Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters
- [8] Fantini. (2016). Towards intercultural communicative competence in ELT. *ELT Journal*
- [9] Ho S. and Thang K (2011). *An investigation of intercultural teaching and learning in tertiary EFL classrooms in Vietnam* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.
- [10] Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*: Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK
- [11] Hoang V. V. (2014). *Tiếng Anh 9*, Vietnam Education Publishing House.
- [12] Zhou Y. (2011). A Study of Chinese university EFL teachers and their intercultural competence teaching. Doctoral dissertation. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.
- [13] Baker, W. (2011). Intercultural awareness: modeling an understanding of cultures in intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 11(3), 197-214.