

Intercultural effectiveness of international post-graduate students

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Abstract

In the increasingly multicultural and multiethnic campuses it has become important to foster not only intercultural awareness and cultural sensitivity, but effective interaction among culturally diverse students. Therefore, this research studied whether or not a five-week Thai language course favors the development of intercultural effectiveness of international postgraduate students in a Thai public university. In doing so pre- and post-tests were administered. The population was all international post-graduate students registered in a Thai language course (N=35) in 2014. 25 respondents (n=25) accepted to take part in this study, 10 were females and 15 males, and the sample average age was 32. The research design was a quantitative study, the research instrument was the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IAS) along with a demographic questionnaire. The sampling method was purposive sampling. Results of the pre-test revealed that the study sample exhibited a moderate level of intercultural effectiveness. The post-test results showed students' transition from moderate to high level of intercultural effectiveness. However, the difference between the pre- and post- test was not statistically significant. Students scored the lowest on Behavioral Flexibility and the highest on Interactant Respect in the pre-test. After the completion of the 5-week Thai Language course students scored the lowest on Message Skills, while maintained

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scoring the highest on Interactant Respect. The paper concludes with a description of the study's limitations, discusses the implications of the findings for the increasingly multiethnic and international campuses, and finally presents suggestions for further studies.

Keywords: cross-cultural contact, foreign language, intercultural effectiveness, international students, study abroad, Thai language

บทคัดย่อ

การเพิ่มขึ้นของความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมและชนชาติในหลายวิทยาเขตของสถาบันการศึกษาภายในเป็นความสำคัญที่จะต้องส่งเสริม ไม่เพียงแต่การตระหนักรทางวัฒนธรรม และการรับรู้ทางวัฒนธรรม แต่ยังรวมไปถึงการสื่อสารที่มีประสิทธิภาพระหว่างนักศึกษาที่มีวัฒนธรรมที่แตกต่างกันด้วย ดังนั้นการวิจัยครั้งนี้ได้ศึกษาว่าหลักสูตรเรียนภาษาไทย 5 สัปดาห์มีส่วนช่วยพัฒนาประสิทธิภาพการรับรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาต่างชาติที่เรียนในมหาวิทยาลัยรัฐบาลของไทยหรือไม่ การจัดเก็บข้อมูลทำโดยการสอบถามก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียน ประชากรในการวิจัยครั้งนี้ ได้แก่ นักศึกษาระดับหลังปริญญาตรีที่ลงทะเบียนเรียนหลักสูตรเรียนภาษาไทยในปี 2557 จำนวนทั้งหมด 35 คน กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนักศึกษา 25 คน (หญิง 15 ชาย 10 อายุเฉลี่ย 32 ปี) ที่ตกลงเข้าร่วมการวิจัยนี้ การวิจัยนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ได้แก่ แบบสอบถาม ระดับประสิทธิภาพระหว่างวัฒนธรรม (Intercultural Effectiveness Scale or IAS) ด้านประชากร กลุ่มตัวอย่างได้มาโดยวิธีการสุ่มแบบเจาะจง ผลการวิจัย พบว่า การทดสอบก่อนเรียนกลุ่มตัวอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพการรับรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมอยู่ในระดับปานกลาง การทดสอบหลังเรียนแสดงให้เห็นว่าระดับการรับรู้มีการเปลี่ยนแปลงจากระดับปานกลางไปจนถึงระดับสูง อย่างไรก็ตามความแตกต่างระหว่างการทดสอบก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียนไม่ได้มีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ นักศึกษาให้คะแนนความยืดหยุ่นทางพฤติกรรม (Behavioral Flexibility) ต่ำสุดและให้คะแนนการเคารพในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ (Interactant Respect) สูงสุดในการทดสอบก่อนเรียน หลังจากสำเร็จหลักสูตรเรียนภาษาไทย 5 สัปดาห์ นักศึกษาให้คะแนนต่ำสุดอยู่ที่ทักษะการสื่อข้อความ (Message Skills) และสูงสุดยังคงอยู่ที่การเคารพในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ (Interactant Respect) งานวิจัยนี้ สรุปโดยการอภิปรายข้อจำกัดในการวิจัย ข้อคิดเห็นการเกี่ยวพันของการค้นพบสำหรับการเพิ่มขึ้นของชนชาติและวิทยาเขตนานาชาติหลายแห่ง และได้นำเสนอข้อเสนอแนะสำหรับการวิจัยในครั้งต่อไปด้วย

คำสำคัญ : การติดต่อข้ามวัฒนธรรม, ภาษาต่างประเทศ, ประสิทธิผลระหว่างวัฒนธรรม, นักศึกษาต่างชาติ, การศึกษาในต่างประเทศ, ภาษาไทย

According to the Thai Office of the Higher Education Commission (2014) about 24,490 Thai tertiary level students were studying abroad in 2012. The top four destination countries were The U.S., U.K., Australia, and Japan. In the same year, 20,309 foreign tertiary level students were studying in 103 Thai higher institutions. The top four countries of origin were China, Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Vietnam. The top four Thai University destinations were Assumption University, Mahachulalongkornvidyalaya University, Mahidol University, and Ramkhamhaeng University. The phenomenon of student mobility across this region is expected to grow (Welch, 2011) making our campuses much more diverse in terms of culture.

More culturally different people in our campuses also mean more possibility for cross-cultural contact. Foreign students, who are immersed in a new milieu, find themselves in what Coser calls *complex social structures* (Coser, 1975). In complex social structures, the likelihood to meet people who are different to oneself in set of values, beliefs, assumptions, behavioral scripts, communication styles, and language increases. These culturally different people not only question foreigners' most certain assumptions, core values and beliefs, but challenge them to think and behave in truly unpredictable ways (Coser, 1975). To sum up, intercultural interactions are profoundly challenging and psychologically intense (Bennett, J., 2003; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Lee, McCauley, Moghaddam, & Worchel, 2004; Paige, 1993a; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

In line with the above-mentioned thinking, a study reported that cross-cultural contact can even rise xenophobic reactions, undermine positive perception of both the host country and local people, and reinforce appreciation of one's own people, culture or country while staying abroad (Martin, 1987). This experience can be exacerbated to the extent that it may even cause psychological disorders such as depression, schizophrenia, and lack of self-confidence (Chen, 1987). Hence, the presence of culturally different people inside the campus has the potential to set up a psychologically intense and profoundly challenging scenario for the participants in which meaningful cross-cultural interaction between i.e., international and domestic students has been documented to occur scarcely (Summers & Volet, 2008; Volet & Ang, 1998).

Therefore, more cross-cultural contact also means less effectiveness in terms of interaction and communication with others. Hence, when crossing cultures, there is a strong need not only to prevent negative outcomes of intercultural contact but to learn to function in the host culture; that is, there is a need to be interculturally competent and effective.

This study draws upon a multidisciplinary base of theories regarding the nature of intercultural contact, communication, and language which are integrated by the intercultural communication approach. For the purpose of this paper, the theoretical framework of this study is built specifically on Chen and Starosta's (Chen & Starosta, 1996) model of intercultural communication competence. The model, first, not only synthesizes more than five decades of academic research on intercultural communication, but integrates different approaches and, hence, explores holistically the phenomenon of intercultural interaction. Second, the model makes a clear distinction of concepts such as intercultural sensitivity, intercultural effectiveness, and intercultural communication competence largely used either randomly or interchangeably by multidisciplinary scholars during the last fifty years of research. Finally, the model contains three specific dimensions which can be explored and measured independently.

Intercultural effectiveness, as defined by Chen and Starosta, is the behavioral dimension of intercultural communication competence (Chen & Starosta, 1996). It specifically refers to the "person's ability to interact and adjust adroitly with other human beings" in an intercultural setting (Chen, 2009). In other words, an intercultural effective person possesses, first, an expanded behavioral repertoire. Second, he is able to discriminate which verbal and nonverbal behaviors and communication styles are the most suitable in specific intercultural encounters. Third, he is able to switch his behavioral and communication style to meet the contextual requirements to achieve one's own goals. Lately, the intercultural effective person does display respect and acts under the set of rules, values, and assumptions that govern the host culture. Hence, intercultural effectiveness does not only mean to achieve one's own personal goals, but it embraces the individual's "ability to maintain the face of one's culturally different counterparts" while interacting (Chen, 2009). According to Chen and Starosta, the intercultural effectiveness is achieved through the development of five components: *message skills, interaction*

management, behavioral flexibility, identity management, and relationship cultivation (Chen & Starosta, 1996). These behavioral skills have been proved to enable people to not only communicate effectively with culturally different others but to better adjust to the host culture as well (Chen & Starosta, 1996).

Literature on intercultural interactions reported that those five interactional skills -*message skills, interaction management, behavioral flexibility, identity management, and relationship cultivation*- can vary to some degree on the nature of the sojourner's role, however (Kealey & Ruben, 1983). In the higher education arena, Kealey found that, besides understanding local culture, tolerating differences and adapting one's own method, learning the local language is also a *sine qua non* for students' intercultural effectiveness (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996). Deardorff asserts that those needed skills can be developed specially within the foreign language classroom (Deardorff, 2011), while Witte goes further by contending that the only way to develop intercultural skills which enable people to function properly and effectively in intercultural settings is through learning a foreign language (Witte, 2011). However, literature on intercultural communication shows that Kealey's findings and Witte's utterance are not conclusive nor categorical (Bennett, J., Bennett, & Allen, 2003; Paige, 1993b). For instance, Paige on his classic study on the nature of intercultural experience argues that proficiency in the host language –although it mitigates the psychological intensity of the cross-cultural contact- is neither absolutely essential for cross-cultural contact, nor does assure effective intercultural communication (Paige, 1993b). These contrasting positions deserves a deeper analysis and understanding on what each scholar means by "language", the topic that leads to the philosophical analysis and which goes beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, these scholars elucidate the importance of the role of language in cross-cultural encounters.

Locally, in an attempt to help foreign students operate and function with Thais, the university where this study took place provides a Thai Language for its foreign students. This research was conducted when post-graduate foreign students were registered to "Thai Language and Culture for Daily Life". The course lasted for five weeks from Saturday 23rd August to Saturday 20th September in 2014, meeting weekly 4 hours at a time, from 09.00 a.m. to 01.00 p.m. The course put special emphasis on the use of Thai language in social

context so that learners can gain knowledge of both the Thai language and social practices. The major goal was to enable the students to communicate with Thais in daily life setting with a correct understanding of Thai social rules and etiquette. Finally, the course was delivered by lecture, role plays, games and exercises on grammar, listening and pronunciation. To avoid any kind of biases, the researchers neither taught nor participated in the course. The topics of the course were as follows.

Week 1	Overview to Thai language and culture-specific information, such as characteristics of the Thai language, greetings, introducing oneself, starting, maintaining and terminating properly interactions with Thai people, conversation practices and exercises
Week 2	Hearing practice exercise, time in Thai, conversation practices and exercises
Week 3	Hearing practice exercise, days, months, and years in Thai, conversation practices and exercises
Week 4	Hearing practice exercise, Thai foods, conversation practices and exercises, Cooking class: Tom yum kung
Week 5	Hearing practice exercise, time in Thai, conversation practices and exercises, Thai family, Thai festival: Loy Kra Thong

The university offers this Thai language for foreign students on the assumption that it will strengthen foreign students' effectiveness when interacting with their Thai counterparts, and it will increase the interaction between them. Therefore, the research objective of this study is to investigate whether the following variables such as the five-week Thai language course along with the frequency of cross-cultural contact, age, and gender influences the level of foreign postgraduate students' intercultural effectiveness. In doing so, pre- and post-tests were administered. This study tries to answer the following research questions: What level of intercultural effectiveness do students exhibit before joining the five-week Thai language course? Does their intercultural effectiveness level change after completing the five-week Thai language course? Does the five-week Thai language course duration increase students' level of intercultural effectiveness? Do gender,

age, and frequency of cross-cultural contact affect their level of intercultural effectiveness?

Method

Since the researcher's objective was to study the impact of the five-week Thai language course on students' intercultural effectiveness, a survey research was employed as an appropriate data gathering technique. The study employed only quantitative methods of data gathering.

Participants

The study population (N=35) was all foreign graduate students registered in the five-week Thai language course in the academic year of 2014-I. However, only 25 (males=15, females=10, age range=24-46, age mean=32) students agreed to take the questionnaire in the pre-test. All of them were Asians. Owing to withdrawal from the Thai language course only 18 (males=12, females=6, age range=24-46, age mean=30) students took the post-test. The type of sampling design utilized was that of "convenience sampling"

Research instrument

The research instrument for this study contained two sections: (A) demographic information and (B) the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES).

(A) The demographic information section consisted of questions concerning students' personal information such as gender, nationality, current degree, and foreign language abilities. There were also questions about their international travel experience, whether they have previously studied abroad, had intercultural training before coming to Thailand, and the extent to which they interact with host students.

(B) The intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES) was developed by Portalla and Chen (Portalla & Chen, 2010) and aims specifically at measuring the effectiveness of people's interactions in an intercultural setting. The intercultural effectiveness scale is a Five-Point Likert scale containing 20 items which specifically measure the level of intercultural effectiveness. The instrument contains six factors, hence, individuals who score highly on this scale tend to exhibit the following six characteristics (Portalla & Chen, 2010):

1) *Behavioral Flexibility*: They are sensitive to an intercultural interaction, therefore, they are able to learn what is appropriate in a given situation.

2) *Interaction Relaxation*: They are less anxious in intercultural interactions, do not find difficult to participate and interact with their culturally different counterparts.

3) *Interactant Respect*: They know how to effectively show respect to their culturally different interactant. They use appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviors to show that they are listening and making sense their counterparts' opinions.

4) *Message Skills*: They are able to display message skills in intercultural interactions, i.e., they are able to understand, distinguish, and execute the messages during the interaction as well as respond appropriately.

5) *Identity Maintenance*: They know how to maintain their counterparts' identity in intercultural interaction. They can choose the most suitable behavior so as to promote and respect others' cultural identity.

6) *Interaction Management*: They know how to manage the process of intercultural interaction. They are able to handle the more procedural aspects of the interaction such as initiating and terminating interaction and balancing speaking turns. They are able to emote responsiveness, attentiveness, and perceptiveness while interacting with others who have different cultural background.

Procedure

The research instrument was administered in the classroom setting twice: on the first day (pre-test) and the last day (post-test) of the five-week Thai language course. The research questionnaire was designed to be completed in about 25 minutes. In administering the questionnaire, students were told that the purpose of the survey was to collect information from all foreign students registered in the Thai Language course concerning their experiences in interacting with peers who have different culture than theirs'. Besides, they were informed that the study was design to look for patrons as a group not as individuals, hence, in both data analysis and results of individuals would not be identified. This was done so in an attempt to reduce social desirability. They were also told that their responses were important whether they were favorable or not. Finally, they were assured that their

responses would be given anonymously and would be treated as completely confidential.

Results

Descriptive statistic

The respondents' average age was 30 and the majority (60%) was males. 72% were pursuing a master degree, whereas 28% pursuing their doctorate. The overwhelming majority belongs to an ethic group in their home country (80%) and most of them (84%) were Buddhist affiliation. The majority used to live in urban areas in their home country (80% in cities) with only 8% lived in towns before coming to Thailand. All of them speak English as a second language, only 16% were multilingual. 40% had "sporadic" interaction with domestic students during a month while only 24% had "extensive" interaction.

Intercultural Effectiveness level

The pre-test results showed the study sample exhibiting moderate level of intercultural effectiveness (Mean=3.34, SD= .177, n=25) as measured by the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale. The post-test showed a slight increase on the mean score of students' intercultural effectiveness (Mean=3.54, SD=.293, n=18). After the completion of the five-week Thai language course, students moved from "moderate level" to high level of intercultural effectiveness (see Table 4.1). The highest score on both pre- and post-tests was on Interactant Respect whereas the lowest scores in the pre-test and the post-tests were on Message Skills, and Behavioral Flexibility, respectively.

Table 4.1 Pre and post test results

Dimensions of IES	Pre-test (N=25)			Post-test (N=18)		
	Mean	SD	Level of IE	Mean	SD	Level of IE
1) Behavioral Flexibility	3.08	.463	Mode rate	3.19	.473	Mode rate
2) Interaction Relaxation	3.35	.347	Mode rate	3.71	.399	High
3) Interactant Respect	4.01	.379	High	4.26	.405	High

Dimensions of IES	Pre-test (N=25)			Post-test (N=18)		
	Mean	SD	Level of IE	Mean	SD	Level of IE
4) Message Skills	3.04	.599	Mode rate	3.06	.498	Mode rate
5) Identity Maintenance	3.19	.488	Mode rate	3.33	.594	Mode rate
6) Interaction Management	3.35	.416	Mode rate	3.42	.797	Mode rate
IES Overall score	3.34	.177	Mode rate	3.54	.293	High

Note: The rating scale was split into 5 levels and were interpreted following Paige et al, (2003) Likert scaling technique: 1.00-1.50 = lowest, 1.51-2.50 = low, 2.51-3.50 = moderate, 3.51-4.50 = high, 4.51-5.00 = highest.

Paired sample t-test of the five dimension of the IES

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether the five-week Thai language course had a significant effect on the level of intercultural effectiveness of foreign postgraduate students. The results indicated that the post-test mean score ($M = 3.54$, $SD = .293$, $n=18$) was not significantly different ($t = -1.009$, $p = .327$) from the pre-test mean score ($M = 3.34$, $SD = .177$, $n=25$). A further analysis of the six dimensions of the intercultural effectiveness between the pre- and post- tests did not show a significant difference either (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Paired samples *t*-test

Paired differences					
	Mean	SD	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pair 1 BF_PRE – BF_POST ¹	-.041	.753	.177	-.235	.817
Pair 2 IR_PRE – IR_POST ²	-.333	.925	.218	-1.528	.145
Pair 3 IRPT_PRE – IRPT_POST ³	-.184	.817	.192	-.957	.352
Pair 4 MS_PRE – MS_POST ⁴	.083	.958	.225	.369	.717
Pair 5 IDM_PRE – IDM_POST ⁵	.055	.953	.224	.247	.808
Pair 6 INTM_PRE – INTM_POST ⁶	-.138	.962	.241	-.574	.573
Pair 7 IES_PRE – IES_POST	-.136	.572	.134	-1.009	.327

¹ Behavioral Flexibility, ²Interaction Relaxation, ³Interactant Respect, ⁴Message Skills, ⁵Identity Maintenance, ⁶Interaction Management

Difference of intercultural effectiveness based on gender

In the pre-test, males (Mean=3.40, SD=.400, n=15) scored slightly higher than females (Mean=3.25, SD=.433, n=10). However, the difference was not significantly different (*t*=.985, *p*=.380). Further analysis of the six dimensions of the IES showed that males scored higher than females on Behavioral Flexibility, Interactant Respect, Message Skills, and Identity Maintenance. Females scored higher than males on Interaction Relaxation only. However, the difference between females and males on each of these dimensions of the IE was not significantly different. Finally, both scored equally (Mean=335) on Interaction Management. In the post-test, females (Mean=358, SD=.220, n=6) scored slightly higher than their male counterparts (Mean=3.51, SD=.367, n=12). However, the difference was not significant either (*t*=.431, *p*=.672). Females scored higher than males on Interaction Relaxation, Identity Maintenance, and Interaction Management, whereas males scored higher than females on Behavioral Flexibility, Interactant Respect, and Message Skills. However, the difference between females and males on each of these six dimensions of the IES was not significantly different.

Difference of intercultural effectiveness based on students' age

On the pre-test, the 20-30 age group (Mean=3.39, SD=.432, n=15) scored slightly higher than the 31-45 age group (Mean=3.25, SD=.384 n=9). However, the difference was not significantly different ($t=.818$, $p=.422$). Further analysis of the 6 dimensions of the IES showed that the 20-30 age group scored higher than the 31-45 age group on Interactant Respect, Message Skills, Identity Maintenance, and Interaction Management while the 31-45 age group scored higher than their younger counterparts on Interaction Relaxation only. However, the difference was not significant. Both groups achieved the same score on Behavioral Flexibility. In the post test, the 31-45 age group (Mean=3.65, SD=.367, n=6) scored higher than 20-30 age group (Mean=3.47, SD=.295 n=12). However, the difference was not significantly different ($t=-1.070$, $p=.301$). Further analysis of the 6 dimensions of the IES showed that the 31-45 age group scored higher than their younger counterparts on five of the six IE's dimensions. However, the difference was not significant. Finally, both groups achieved the same score on Interaction Management.

Difference of intercultural effectiveness based on the amount of intercultural contact

In the pre-test, students having “frequent” cross-cultural contact scored higher (Mean=3.47, SD=.431, n=9) than their counterparts with “limited” (Mean=3.26, SD=.468, n=9) and “extensive” cross-cultural contact (Mean=3.25, SD=.287, n=6). However, the difference was not significant ($F=.727$, $p=.495$). In the post test, students having “frequent” cross-cultural contact still scored higher (Mean=3.70, SD=.340, n=8) than their counterparts with “limited” (Mean=3.55, SD=.269, n=8) and “extensive” cross-cultural contact (Mean=3.34, SD=.320, n=5). However, the difference also showed no significance ($F=1.743$, $p=.209$).

Discussion

This study was designed to investigate both the level of intercultural effectiveness of foreign post-graduate students registered in the five-week Thai language course, and whether the five-week Thai language course had an effect on foreign post-graduate students' intercultural effectiveness. Owing to the

intrinsic limitations such as small sample size, quantitative research design, and single research instrument, the findings of this study are mainly suggestive rather than being conclusive.

The pre-test revealed that the study sample exhibited moderate level of intercultural effectiveness as measured by the IES. Based on their post-test score, these students, to a medium level, are able to: 1) modify their behavior in order to adapt themselves to the specific situation. They are aware of their emotional expressions while interacting with others 2) understand, execute, and respond the messages via verbal and non-verbal language 3) recognize, promote, nurture, and respect the other's cultural identity and finally, 4) they know how to start, sustain, and end the interaction with others in an intercultural setting. This implies ability to balance speaking turns and emote responsiveness, attentiveness, and perceptiveness while interacting. These students, to a high level, are able to: 1) control their anxiety during their interaction with others and 2) show respect to their counterparts and build mutual relationship in intercultural interactions.

This finding is coherent with the fact that nobody is a *tabula rasa* when taking part in cross-cultural encounters. Rather, individuals have a set of skills, habits, knowledge, assumptions, and values that, to some degree, has helped them be effective in their own cultural context and which can be utilized when crossing cultures and be, to a varied degree, effective in intercultural situations (Deardorff, 2011; McMurray, 2007; Raya & Sercu, 2007). However, the ability to function properly and effectively in another culture, interculturalists have documented, does not just happen as an automatic outcome of the amount of contact among culturally different others, or living in a foreign culture or country (Deardorff, 2011).

The results of the paired samples *t*-tests showed that the five-week Thai language course did not have a significant effect on the level of intercultural effectiveness. This finding was expected since teaching culture in this short Thai language course was limited by time and content. On the one hand, since the main aim of this Thai language course was to enable students to communicate in Thai, most of the time and resources was devoted to communication practices and linguistic teaching. Besides, it lasted only for five weeks, meeting only once a week. Although the lecturer was interested in

teaching Thai culture simultaneously, time constraints did not allow to do so. This limitation documented among foreign language teachers was reported not only internationally (Raya & Sercu, 2007) but also in Thailand among EFL teachers (Budharugsa, 2011).

Besides, the concept of culture was limited to *objective culture* which refers to the visible or tangible aspects of culture such as history, geography, music, traditions, greetings, food, and so forth (Bennett, J. et al., 2003). Since mastering a foreign language demands extensive practice and time, much of the time and resources were allocated to pursue this goal. Hence, there was not enough time to explore and understand the construct of *subjective culture* such as beliefs, values, and assumptions. There was no time, for instance, to analyze culture from *etic* categories, communication styles, or non-verbal behaviors which are widely used in intercultural trainings (Storti, 2010). The *etic* approach of culture enables students not only to compare and find similarities and differences among cultures but to be aware of one's own narrow framework for viewing the world and the unsophisticated way of thinking about diversity (Bennett, Milton, 2001). Taking into account these limitations, the Thai language course did not challenge, for instance, students' ethnocentrism which has been pointed out as one of the major obstacles to intercultural effectiveness (Barna, 2013; Kealey & Ruben, 1983). Deardorff contends that for intercultural competence to develop, it is needed to challenge and question the persons' most certain assumptions, to be aware of cultural differences and to stop behaving, interpreting, and projecting others behaviors from one's own cultural script (Deardorff, 2011). This fact might also explain the lack of effect of the Thai language on intercultural effectiveness.

To summarize, intercultural communication competence is not seen as an independent discipline in the university where this study took place, hence, it is tangentially approached it. However, intercultural scholars are cautioning against teaching intercultural competence as an attached objective to another main subject since it can convey unintended subliminal messages regarding beliefs about culture, teaching culture, and intercultural competence. For instance, by annexing culture and intercultural competence to another main subject, there is a message that intercultural competence is not important (McMurray, 2007). If it were, it would be allocated more time and more

resources. Another unintended messages might be that learning “good enough” about the host culture is easy, requires a short period of time and is mainly achieved through lectures on facts, history, traditions, or languages (McMurray, 2007). In the light of these unintended subliminal messages, teaching culture and intercultural competence looks so simple. However, interculturalists, psychologists, and language teachers concluded that teaching culture is exceedingly complex (Witte, 2011). For instance, Sercu found that EFL teachers from seven countries pointed out to lack knowledge and experience to prepare appropriate teaching materials for teaching cultures, suitable culture teaching materials, and appropriate approaches to teaching culture (Sercu, 2011). Same findings were reported among foreign language teachers in Portugal who realizing the complexity of teaching culture tended to focus on linguistic competence only (Afonso, 2011).

Upon testing the age and gender against the six factors of the IES and between the pre- and post- tests, no significant difference was found. Thus, for the sample in this study, age and gender –understood as cultural gender affiliation rather than biological sex of the participants- appears to have no impact on the level of intercultural effectiveness as measured by the IES. These results are in line with empirical findings showing that the ability to develop adaptive behavior and sensitivity in order to be effective in the host culture is not a natural process which is achieved as getting older, nor is gender correlated with the development of sensitivity and adaptation (Lai, 2006).

Regarding frequency of intercultural interactions, only 24% had “extensive” interaction with their Thai peers. However, students rating their interaction as “scarce” and “sometimes” during a period of a month made a total of 76%, that is, the large majority does not interact with their culturally different peers. This finding is not an exception. D’Souza for instance, reported that students on multicultural campuses segregate themselves and driving themselves more ethnocentric (D’Souza, 1991). Literature on interaction between international and domestic students worldwide converges to indicate that culturally different people do not readily mix, rather they prefer to network with others from the same cultural background. Since intercultural interactions are profoundly challenging and psychologically intense (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), it can be, therefore, argued that placing together culturally

different students inside the classroom or campus is not always enough to foster better intergroup relations and feelings toward each other (Amir, 1969).

The ANOVA analysis among students having “scarce,” “sometimes,” and “extensive” interaction with host students at the campus setting did not show significant difference in their level of intercultural effectiveness. These findings support one of the major hypotheses appearing in the social psychology and intercultural literature positing that contact itself among culturally different people is not enough to boost intercultural effectiveness and produce better intergroup feelings, attitudes, and relations (Amir, 1969; Bennett, Milton, 1998; Deardorff, 2011). Rather, the development of intercultural effectiveness demands new awareness and attitudes and emerges from purposively building what interculturalists call the intercultural mind-set, heart-set, and skill-set (Bennett, J. et al., 2003; Bennett, M., 1986; Push, 2009).

Finally, the presence of culturally different students in our campuses calls for opportune intervention for meaningful interaction among culturally different students to occur. As Paige (Paige, 1993b) noted, education for meaningful relationship among people from other different cultures and intercultural learning cannot be achieved by using the same traditional constructs and pedagogy. Rather, it requires a theory-based intervention that goes beyond the linguistic competence so that contact with culturally different others leads purposely to respect, trust, sensitivity, understanding, and enjoyment. Therefore, the recommendation based on this study findings is clear: not only to approach *objective culture* and the knowledge dimension, but to explore and delve the affective dimension of intercultural interactions aiming at sharpening *message skills, interaction management, behavioral flexibility, identity management, and relationship cultivation* so as to foster effective intercultural interactions (Chen & Starosta, 1996). Moreover, it is also advised to understand first what foreign language teachers understand by the term intercultural effectiveness and intercultural competence and to what extent foreign language teachers are interculturally effective persons.

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