Raising Thai EFL Primary School Teachers' Cultural Awareness through Lesson Designs

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Abstract

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is essential in a world characterized by cultural diversity. EFL teachers have played a major role in developing this competence. Therefore, the research objectives were: to study Thai EFL teachers' perception of the characteristics of culture, the roles of culture in ELT, and ICC before and after lesson design activities, and to study their cultural awareness after those activities. The participants were 30 Thai EFL primary school teachers from Loei province. The data collection was conducted using a rating scale questionnaire and an observation form. The findings revealed changes in the participants' perceptions of the aforementioned issues, reflecting more flexible and realistic perspectives. They rated the belief that culture was the core knowledge to be incorporated in ELT at the highest level, and expressed a higher agreement that cultural aspects were key elements for developing intercultural competence. The changes were also reflected through their lesson designs, showing that the topics related to little-c cultural aspects with cultural awareness indicators covering the four criteria: intercultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery or interaction. The latter indicator was found at the highest degree among all of them. Thus, the Thai EFL primary school teachers' cultural awareness was raised significantly and resulted in their increased understanding of how to cultivate learners' ICC with cultural awareness.

Keywords: Cultural Awareness; EFL Teachers; Lesson Design; Primary School; Teaching Culture

Introduction

The concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become increasingly influential to the nature of foreign language teaching and learning (Byram, 2014; Hakimi et al., 2024; Kramsch, 2006; Meadows, 2016). As pointed out by Byram (1997), besides communication skills, the objective of foreign language learning is also to develop the learners' ability to communicate with consideration of cultural differences. In 1997, Byram (1997) introduced a model of ICC that has been widely used as a theoretical framework to address questions related to teaching and learning a foreign language for effective communication across cultures. According to Byram (1997), ICC refers to "the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (p.71). In addition, the person who possesses ICC is

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able to build relationships by using a foreign language to communicate effectively and interact appropriately with people whose cultural backgrounds, viewpoints, and needs are different from their own and that person also has an inner drive to enhance their communication skills. The ICC concept is in agreement with Hymes (1972) and Kramsch (1993), who argue that culture is an integral part of foreign language learning. Thus, the cultural aspect is one of the essential elements to be incorporated into a foreign language classroom to help improve learners' cultural knowledge as well as their communication skills appropriate to a particular socio-cultural context.

In order to develop ICC, Byram (1997) proposed five factors to be considered: 1) cultural knowledge of self and others; of individual and societal interaction, 2) intercultural attitudes toward relativising self and valuing others, 3) skills of interpreting and relating things from other cultures, 4) skills of discovering and/or interacting to acquire new knowledge and practices from other cultures, and 5) critical cultural awareness. For Byram, critical cultural awareness is a crucial educational aim for foreign language teaching. Thus, it can be said that cultural awareness is an expected learning outcome after acquiring the first four elements and is considered the first step towards understanding the differences between one's own culture and that of others.

In foreign language classrooms, teachers' knowledge and instructional strategies play a significant role in English language learning as the learners have limited exposure to English in their day-to-day lives. According to Duangsri (2023), it was found that Thai EFL student teachers viewed the role of culture in ELT as not particularly significant (N = 30, x̄ = 3.17, S.D.= 0.56). Based on their interviews, they planned to teach linguistic knowledge, particularly vocabulary, as the first priority, while cultural aspects tended to be deferred and considered optional for teaching. Consequently, it was likely that cultural aspects were not to be integrated into the lesson plan. As a result, the learners' awareness of culture in the lessons was unlikely to be raised. The study also indicated that the cultural aspects in the Thai EFL teaching context were mainly related to community perspectives: perceptions, values, attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews (e.g., thinking patterns) rather than cultural products and social practices (e.g., everyday practices habitually performed in a society). Furthermore, the acquisition of cultural knowledge was more effective through explicit teaching through classroom interaction rather than through implicit learning. This finding was in line with the result of the study by Abd Rahman et al. (2022) that Malaysian learners' socio-cultural linguistic competence was developed through explicit methods and classroom interaction.

Compared to student teachers, the professionals demonstrated a higher level of professionalism with greater pedagogical content knowledge and more extensive experience in teaching English. Additionally, according to previous studies, it was more likely that teachers' pedagogical beliefs or their theoretical views shaped how they characterized the teaching of culture in English classrooms (Chung, 2022; Pajares, 1992; Součková, 2020; Wolf & Brown, 2023). Furthermore, lesson design activities were found to be an effective method for raising teachers' cultural awareness (Chien, 2022; Öztürk & Yangın Ekşi, 2022). In other words, lesson plan designs serve as evidence reflecting how teachers teach culture in their classrooms. However, Abdelhalim and Aldaghri (2024) found that, in some cases, teachers' beliefs or attitudes did not have an

effect on their teaching of culture. Several potential factors were related to cultural values (e.g., an individual's thinking pattern, and the respect and obedience towards the seniors in society), and classroom and institutional contexts (e.g., teachers' workload, assessment systems, learners' thinking styles, and levels of language proficiency). Given the strong professional capacity and the role of full-time mentors, it was likely that the in-service teachers' instructional guidance influenced student teachers' pedagogical content knowledge regarding culture teaching. Thus, it was interesting to study their perceptions of culture as well as their awareness of cultural aspects in English lessons through lesson design activity emphasizing the language and culture strand specified in the basic education core curriculum B. E. 2551 (2008). The purposes of the present study were, therefore, to describe Thai EFL primary school teachers' perceptions of characteristics of culture, the roles of culture in ELT, and intercultural competence before and after participating in lesson design activities focusing on language and culture, and to study their cultural awareness in terms of cultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction to acquire new cultural knowledge.

Research Questions

1) Were there any differences in Thai EFL primary school teachers' perceptions of characteristics of culture, the roles of culture in ELT, and intercultural competence, before and after participating in lesson design activities?

2) To what extent was those teachers' cultural awareness raised after participating in lesson design activities?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Characteristics of Culture

There are several explanations for the characteristics of culture such as those of Geertz (1973), Hall (1976), Kramsch (2015), and Scollon and Scollon (2000). Five characteristics in common were found, as described below.

First, culture is developed through the socialization of a particular social group. It is normative, symbolic, and changeable over time. It can encompass community practices or community perspectives. It is shared, learned, and passed down from generation to generation within a cultural group. Second, culture is a core concept affecting how people within a cultural community interpret actions or situations. It involves the ways of thought navigated by social values, shared beliefs, and the shared history of the community. Third, culture is often compared to an iceberg. It consists of two parts: the tip and the bottom. The tip is on the surface of the water, while the bottom is submerged. According to this metaphor, the above-water part of the iceberg represents visible culture—such as music, food, clothes, language, verbal and non-verbal communication—and the underwater part represents invisible culture—such as community perspectives, traditions, myths, celebrations, rituals, cultural beliefs, values, and norms. Lastly, there are two types of cultural knowledge: subjective and objective. Subjective knowledge is interpretable based on individual experiences, while objective knowledge is factual and observable.

Since culture can be both seen and unseen, to be aware of what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable behaviors in other cultures and to avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the message while communicating across cultures, it is essential to understand the counterpart's culture; especially the invisible part. To teach culture, teachers should be aware of the aforementioned characteristics of culture. These characteristics were used as a conceptual framework to design a questionnaire and analyze the participants' perspective about culture.

Roles of Culture in ELT

Culture as an Essential Component of Communication

As culture involves ways of social practice, behaviors, and perspectives that are different among social groups, cultural knowledge is crucial for EFL learners to understand and be aware of the differences. In this view, culture plays its role by signaling rules or norms for the appropriate use of language. It also contributes to the meaning of the message delivered both by speech (verbal and non-verbal languages such as gestures and facial expressions) and non-speech communications (e.g., sign language, pictures, or icons) (Hymes, 1972; Scollon & Scollon, 2000). Thus, both literal meaning and cultural meaning create successful communication across cultures.

As English is used for international communication among people with different first languages and cultural backgrounds, cultural differences and similarities become foundational knowledge for successful intercultural communication. EFL learners should pay attention to the differences and be able to apply this knowledge to engage in communication with the actual use of English in different contexts. Thus, in this sense, culture is an essential component of intercultural communication.

Culture as Knowledge in Lesson Content

The second role of culture, in relation to its characteristics, is related to how a cultural group perceives the meaning of an experience, and this perception is generally affected by the group's social values, beliefs, and history (Geertz, 1973; Kroeber & Parsons, 1958). Viewed through this lens, culture functions as knowledge in lesson content (Hua, 2014; Iswandari & Ardi, 2022) to provide cultural knowledge to learners. Cultural knowledge refers to values, beliefs, and worldviews or thinking patterns and there are two types of cultural knowledge: subjective and objective. Subjective knowledge is related to big-C culture, which is invisible and mainly reflects humanistic concepts such as the arts, literature, history, and important institutions of the nation. Thus, it is mostly delivered through passages or messages for reading, listening, and watching (both for comprehension and interpretation or inferences). The interpretive nature of the subjective knowledge encourages learners to gain insight into others' language and culture with a deeper understanding of different mindsets in comparison with their own. On the other hand, objective knowledge relates to little-c culture, which is naturally visible and concerned with cultural practices, for example, food, public holidays, ways of life, traditions, customs, hobbies, gestures, and body language (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993; Xiao, 2010). The related lesson content, therefore, involves factual and observable knowledge which

includes appropriate behaviors and practices in daily life, such as expressing politeness, greeting, asking for permission, responding to a request, expressing appreciation, agreeing, reflecting understanding, cooking, celebrating holidays, and festivals.

The main objectives of lesson content in this aspect are to provide learners with general knowledge of language and culture and to promote their ability to select an appropriate verbal strategy for cross-cultural communication within context, which is the first step in developing intercultural communication skills.

Cultural Awareness

As a consequence of the important status of English in the world and in Thailand as well as the current conceptualization reflecting the ELT trend in teaching little-c culture or social values in using language situationally responsive to the globalization era, EFL learners need to acquire ICC and the ICC concept has continuously influenced ELT since 1990 (Byram, 2014; Hakimi et al., 2024; Kramsch, 2006; Meadows, 2016). ELT for ICC emphasizes how speakers communicate with people whose cultural backgrounds are different from theirs by considering the impacts that might occur because of the cultural differences (Byram, 2014). According to Byram (2013), cultural competence and intercultural competence are different. *Cultural competence* refers to the ability to know the culture, act appropriately according to the culture, and maintain cultural sensitivity in decision-making. Therefore, the counterpart's culture is the major concern. *Intercultural competence* refers to an awareness of cultural factors that potentially impact the interrelation between speakers from different languages and cultures. Those factors, which serve as a foundation for intercultural communication, include attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In other words, ICC is the ultimate goal for teaching culture and has become one of the main learning objectives in ELT (Byram, 1997; Byram, 2013; Jiang et al., 2022). This theoretical view forms the basis for establishing several internationally accredited assessment frameworks for foreign language proficiency skills (Dolmaci & Sezgin, 2021), such as The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The framework has also been adopted for assessing the English skills of Thai EFL learners and teachers, and has influenced the direction of ELT in Thailand.

Referring to Byram (1997), Byram et al. (2002), Deardorff (2011), and Fenner (2008), ICC involves the capabilities to use the second language to successfully interact with people with different language and cultural backgrounds. The capabilities consist of five linked elements as follows:

1) *Attitudes*: Intercultural attitudes involve appreciating and respecting others' cultures as well as one's own, valuing cultural diversity with open-mindedness, and having curiosity to learn and gain a new cultural experience.

2) *Knowledge*: Understanding cultures of a particular country or community, general knowledge about important cultural thought patterns that influence how people with different languages and cultures understand each other's ways of communication.

3) *Skills of interpreting and relating*: The ability to notice, listen, compare, evaluate, and analyze a thought or a circumstance from different cultural perspectives to achieve a correct interpretation of a communication.

4) *Skills of discovery or interaction*: The ability to acquire new cultural experiences and integrate them into existing ones, while operating with knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real-time communication and interaction.

5) *Critical cultural awareness*: The ability to critically evaluate one's own worldview and cultural products in comparison with those of others using explicit evaluating criteria.

It can be concluded that the goal of learning a foreign language is to possess communicative competence for communicating across cultures appropriately with awareness of the values and positive attitudes towards cultural diversity. For the present study, the five above-mentioned elements of ICC were applied to assess the teachers' cultural awareness and the definitions of cultural awareness and its indicators as reference for the present study were as follows.

Cultural awareness refers to the ability to evaluate cultural worldviews, perspectives, products, and practices both in one's own culture and in others by critically analyzing them on the basis of cultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery or interaction. This enables one to communicate a message meaningfully as intended while considering limitations that may cause misunderstandings when communicating with people whose languages and cultures differ from one's own. As concluded from the aforementioned ICC concepts of Byram (1997), Byram et al. (2002), Deardorff (2011), and Fenner, (2008), the indicators of cultural awareness in teachers for this study were:

1) *Intercultural attitudes*: Teachers designed a teaching and learning activity related to the language and culture domain. The activity helped promote the learners' attitudes toward appreciating and respecting their own and others' cultures, valuing cultural diversity, being open-minded and curious about learning new cultural experiences, and sharing a sense of belonging to a cultural group.

2) *Cultural knowledge*: Teachers correctly explained the characteristics of language and culture and the factors potentially influencing both a successful and/or misunderstanding of intercultural communication through English.

3) *Skills of interpreting and relating*: Teachers chose teaching-learning materials or resources suitable for stimulating the learners to compare, analyze, and relate the new and the existing knowledge of language and culture in the lesson through different cultural perspectives, considering the factors that might affect the success in communication.

4) *Skills of discovery or interaction*: Teachers chose teaching-learning materials or resources suitable for stimulating the learners to collaboratively seek new knowledge on language and culture in the lesson and learn how to integrate the existing knowledge, and apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real-time communication and interaction.

Teaching of Culture in Thai EFL Context

The Focused Culture

English in Thailand is a foreign language as it is not the nation's official nor another language commonly used in daily life. To comply with the national core curriculum for basic education, cultures of the UK and the US, the main native-English-speaking countries, are presented in Thai EFL classrooms and the majority of English textbooks in schools are produced by publishers in the UK and the US (Chareonkul & Wijitsopon, 2020). Given that English is a global language, the purpose of ELT is mainly to promote intercultural communication. This aligns with the goal of the learners who are speakers of other languages (Kachru, 1985). Most of them tend to pay less attention to the UK or the US culture but learn to use English as a lingua franca in context. Similarly, Thai EFL learners need knowledge of a variety of cultures beyond the UK or the US culture. Thus, cultural contents from other foreign countries demonstrated in the participants' lesson plan were acceptable for the present study.

Instructional Pedagogy

The previous studies (Bunmak, 2023; Nilubol, 2020; Obod et al., 2020) revealed that teaching culture in English classrooms using the learners' first language as a medium helped them learn by comparing the differences and the similarities between two cultures and resulted in positive attitudes towards language learning along with more cultural awareness. Such a strategy has been reported to be effective for the learners at the lower and the higher levels. As a result, teachers were likely to view translation as the most effective way to illustrate the new language and culture and promote the learners' cultural awareness from different cultural perspectives. This can be a foundation for their further improvement in communication across cultures in a more appropriate and successful manner.

Regarding the teaching materials and activities, Thai EFL teachers commonly adopt Western-published textbooks rather than adapting them to be relevant to Thai learners, citing that they provide a reliable model of correct use of the English language and are practical for classrooms (Baker, 2008; Ulla, 2019). In addition, videos, documentaries, Hollywood films, English songs, self-study projects on ICC for class presentation, extra-curricular activities allowing learners to mingle with foreigners (e.g., short overseas trips, study tours, and short training courses), and learning-by-doing activities are recommended for teaching culture in EFL classrooms (Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017).

The teaching materials and activities mentioned above suggested that authentic materials, experiential knowledge, and project-based learning are effective in developing Thai EFL learners' intercultural communication skills. However, Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak (2017) pointed out that although Thai EFL teachers were aware of the relationship between language and culture, their conceptualization of ICC for implementation in their English classrooms was found to be insufficient.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study was conducted using a mixed-methods design to address the two research questions (RQs) posed, based on the assumption that teachers' theoretical views of culture influence how they characterized the teaching of culture in their EFL classrooms. RQ1 was closed-ended and required quantitative data to determine the teachers' perceptions regarding the hypothesized independent variable's effect on the level of teachers' cultural awareness, the dependent variable, was reflected in the teachers' subsequent perception after the treatment. RQ2 was open-ended and required qualitative data to assess the teachers' level of cultural awareness demonstrated through their lesson designs. The findings from RQ1 were compared and contrasted with those generated from RQ2 to enhance the validity of the results and the conclusions regarding the extent to which the teachers' cultural awareness increased after the treatment. Data collection for the two types occurred in parallel. The procedural framework is illustrated in Figure 1.
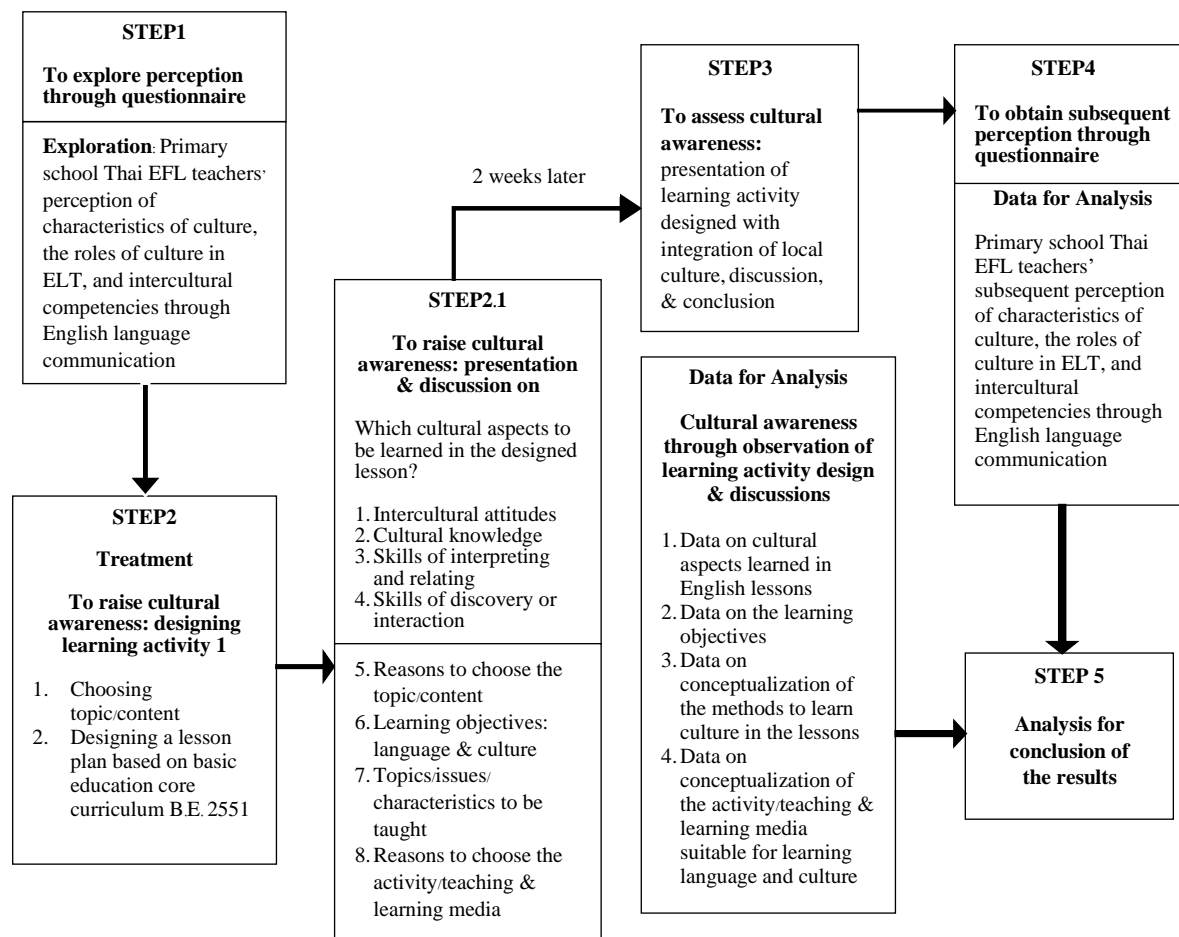
Participants

The participants consisted of 30 volunteers selected from the population of 154 Thai EFL teachers in primary schools under the Primary Education English Resource Center (Peer Center) supervised by the Office of Loei Primary Educational Service Area 2, Loei province. The criteria for the sample size were based on Srisa-ard (1992): 15-30% of the population of approximately hundreds. The size of 30 represented 19.48% of the population with similar qualifications. Therefore, the number was deemed appropriate for providing reliable results for the study.

Instruments

Two types of instruments were used for the data collection: a questionnaire, and an observation form. The questionnaire was adapted from Duangsri (2023) for two reasons: 1) the research question of the present study was similar to that posed by Duangsri (2023) focusing on the same construct: perceptions towards the characteristics of culture and cultural aspects for English language learning; and 2) to gain a clear understanding of the problems in incorporating culture into EFL classroom that might exist along the continuum from teacher preparation to in-service teacher professional development. The five-point rating scale questionnaire was used to obtain the quantitative data on the participants' perception regarding the characteristics of culture, the roles of culture in ELT, and intercultural competencies in English language communication, before and after the learning design activities.

Figure 1
Procedural Framework

STEP1

To explore perception through questionnaire

Exploration: Primary school Thai EFL teachers' perception of characteristics of culture, the roles of culture in ELT, and intercultural competencies through English language communication

2 weeks later

STEP2

Treatment

To raise cultural awareness: designing learning activity 1

1. Choosing topic/content
2. Designing a lesson plan based on basic education core curriculum B.E. 2551

STEP2.1

To raise cultural awareness: presentation & discussion on

Which cultural aspects to be learned in the designed lesson?

1. Intercultural attitudes
2. Cultural knowledge
3. Skills of interpreting and relating
4. Skills of discovery or interaction

5. Reasons to choose the topic/content
6. Learning objectives: language & culture
7. Topics/issues/ characteristics to be taught
8. Reasons to choose the activity/teaching & learning media

STEP3

To assess cultural awareness: presentation of learning activity designed with integration of local culture, discussion, & conclusion

Data for Analysis

Cultural awareness through observation of learning activity design & discussions

1. Data on cultural aspects learned in English lessons
2. Data on the learning objectives
3. Data on conceptualization of the methods to learn culture in the lessons
4. Data on conceptualization of the activity/teaching & learning media suitable for learning language and culture

STEP4

To obtain subsequent perception through questionnaire

Data for Analysis

Primary school Thai EFL teachers' subsequent perception of characteristics of culture, the roles of culture in ELT, and intercultural competencies through English language communication

STEP 5

Analysis for conclusion of the results

The observations were conducted to obtain qualitative data on the participants' cultural awareness. The form contained criteria designed based on the ICC concepts of Byram (1997), Byram et al. (2002), Deardorff (2011), and Fenner (2008), which were defined as the indicators of cultural awareness: intercultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery or interaction as explained earlier. The elements in the lessons to be observed included cultural aspects to be learned, learning objectives, teaching methods, activities, teaching and learning media suitable for learning language and culture. The observation protocol is shown in Steps 2 and 3 of Figure 1.

The validation results of the two instruments showed that the Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC) scores of the questionnaire and the observation form were acceptable: between 0.80 and 1.00 with good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$), and between 0.60 and 1.00, respectively. Thus, the items in the questionnaire were deemed suitable to elicit the participants' perceptions as required. Similarly, the questions and criteria were deemed appropriate to assess the participants' cultural awareness.

Data Collection

1. *Step 1*: Exploring the participants' perception of characteristics of culture, the roles of culture in ELT, and intercultural competencies through the questionnaire

2. *Step 2*: Selecting a topic or content and designing English lesson plans on the topic following the basic education core curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008).

3. *Step 2.1*: Making presentations on a group basis, explaining, and discussing the cultural aspects to be learned in the designed lesson in terms of intercultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction, as well as the reasons for choosing the topic/ content, learning objectives, topics/ issues/ characteristics to be taught, and reasons for choosing a particular activity/teaching and learning media. The researchers' roles were to provide feedback on the design and to ask questions to help the participants demonstrate their knowledge of the specified cultural aspects. Then, the participants summarized the lesson learned for the day. They were asked to design an English learning activity integrating local culture to present in the following 2 weeks.

4. *Step 3:* Making presentations of their English learning activity design, explaining, and discussing following the discussion points from Step 2. The researchers observed their designed lessons, discussion, and checked on the observation form according to the indicators of cultural awareness.

5. *Step 4*: Obtaining the participants' subsequent perception of the same points explored in Step 1.

6. *Step 5*: Comparing and analyzing the data statistically. Qualitative data were analyzed using a content analysis approach. The quantitative and the qualitative results were compared and contrasted to draw conclusions.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed for means ($\bar{x}$), standard deviations (S.D.), and coefficient of variation (CV) using SPSS statistical software to identify any statistical differences between the participants' perceptions before and after the lesson design activities. The results of the perception assessment were reported in terms of the degree of agreement towards each issue shown in Table 1-3. The analysis results indicated if the participants' perceptions changed after the lesson design activities.

The qualitative data were examined using the content analysis method. For consistency purposes, the data were coded by three raters (two researchers and one educational supervisor) independently according to four criteria to assess cultural awareness: intercultural attitudes (ICA), cultural knowledge (CK), skills of interpreting and relating (Itpr & Rlt), and skills of discovery or interaction (Dscv/Interac). The data were then categorized following the indicators for assessing the degree of cultural awareness displayed by the participants (see Table 4). The analysis revealed the participants' degree of cultural awareness. The analysis of both the quantitative and the qualitative data were compared and contrasted to identify whether they were consistent and reflected any changes in the participants' cultural awareness.

Results

The findings are presented in relation to each research question as follows.

Finding 1: Changes in the Participants' Perceptions

The answer to RQ1 was derived from the quantitative data which were categorized into three main topics with subtopics for each one. The results are reported in Tables 1-3.

Table 1 indicates that there were some similar changes in the participants' perceptions of the characteristics of culture: 1) they agreed to a higher degree, with higher means $\bar{x}$ and low frequencies of data distribution (low CV values), that culture involved social practices, social values, and social products, and 2) their perceptions became more flexible (with lower $\bar{x}$ and low CV value) with the awareness that culture could be invisible and visible, difficult and also easy to change in some aspects, and achieving the acquisition of cultural knowledge could be conducted in different ways other than through implicit learning.

Table 1

Comparison of Perceptions toward Characteristics of Culture

Perception Issues	Perception before Treatment			Perception after Treatment		
	$\bar{x} \pm$ S.D.	CV (%)	Interpretatio	$\bar{x} \pm$ S.D.	CV (%)	Interpretatio
1. Characteristics of						
1.1 Social practices	4.43 ±	16	Agree	4.47 ± 0.79	18	Agree
1.2 Social values	4.26 ±	23	Agree	4.49 ± 0.71	16	Agree
1.3 Social products	3.77 ±	25	Agree	4.17 ± 1.10	26	Agree
1.4 Invisible	3.97 ±	24	Agree	2.91 ± 1.28	44	Neutral
1.5 Difficult to change	4.69 ±	13	Fully agree	3.57 ± 1.21	34	Agree
1.6 Acquired through implicit learning	4.66 ±	15	Fully agree	3.26 ± 1.20	37	Neutral

Table 2 suggests that the roles of culture in ELT were known to the participants but the weights of importance placed were different. There were two points of change: 1) they agreed in a higher degree (higher $\bar{x}$ and low CV values) that culture played an important role as a core of language learning, a core factor enabling language proficiency, an outcome of higher language proficiency, and a primary learning domain in ELT, and 2) the decline (lower $\bar{x}$ and low CV values) in their perception of culture as a piece of information delivered through language and learned as an option revealed their increased awareness of the importance of culture in ELT. It was in line with their perception that culture was an integral part of language, and the perception remained the same (fully agreeing with low CV values).

Table 2

Comparison of Perceptions of the Roles of Culture in ELT

Perception Issues	Perception before Treatment			Perception after Treatment		
	x̄ ± S.D.	CV (%	Interpretatio	x̄ ± S.D.	CV (%	Interpretatio
2. Roles of culture in						
2.1 An integral part of	4.69±0.5	13	Fully agree	4.69±0.7	15	Fully agree
2.2 A core of language	3.85±0.8	22	Agree	4.40±0.7	16	Agree
2.3 A core factor language proficiency	3.57±1.2	34	Agree	4.80±0.7	16	Fully agree
2.4 An outcome of language proficiency	4.57±0.7	15	Fully agree	4.88±0.7	15	Fully agree
2.5 An additional feature as an option	4.56±0.7	16	Fully agree	3.26±1.2	37	Neutral
2.6 A piece of delivered through	4.45±0.7	16	Agree	3.34±1.1	33	Neutral
2.7 A primary learning	3.86±0.7	20	Agree	4.33±0.7	16	Agree

Table 3 reveals that the participants' perceptions of the intercultural competence (IC) through English language communication for all issues changed to a higher degree of agreement (higher x̄ and low CV values). They fully agreed that using nonverbal language, verbal language, and tone of voice appropriately in a particular context indicated the learners' IC, and agreed in a higher degree that knowledge of culture and awareness of the interlocutor's culture were factors influencing mutual understanding through intercultural communication. The awareness of others' cultural attitudes shifted from neutral to agreement at a much higher degree with a very low CV values.

Table 3

Comparison of Perceptions of Intercultural Competence (IC) through English Language (EL) Communication

Perception Issues	Perception before Treatment			Perception after Treatment		
	x̄ ± S.D.	CV (%	Interpretati	x̄ ± S.D.	CV (%	Interpretation
3. IC through EL communication*						
3.1 Using non-verbal language appropriately to a particular context is a part of IC	4.66±0.	11	Fully agree	4.69±0.	10	Fully agree
3.2 Using verbal language appropriately to a particular context is a part of IC	4.43±0.	15	Agree	4.89±0.	7	Fully agree
3.3 Using a tone of voice appropriately to a particular context is a part of IC	4.26±0.	14	Agree	4.66±0.	12	Fully agree
3.4 Intercultural communication requires knowledge on factors mutual understandings	3.57±1.	34	Agree	4.17±0.	6	Agree
3.5 Awareness of the culture helps reduce a chance a miscommunication	4.11±0.	21	Agree	4.43±0.	12	Agree

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3.6 Awareness of English culture helps promote a successful communication across	3.57±1.	30	Agree	4.26±0.	10	Agree
3.7 Awareness of others' cultural attitudes is necessary for intercultural communication	2.91±0.	1	Neutral	3.70±0.	8	Agree

In conclusion, after the treatment, the participants' view changed and reflected a more flexible and realistic perspective of culture: both visible and invisible, not static, acquired naturally without being taught, and also formally learned through education or in formal contexts. The teachers were fully aware that culture was a core knowledge to be incorporated into ELT, and cultural aspects were key elements to develop intercultural competence.

Finding 2: The Participants' Cultural Awareness IncreasedTo answer RQ2, the qualitative data on cultural aspects to be learned, learning objectives, teaching methods, activities, and teaching and learning media suitable for learning language and culture were observed during the participants' presentations. The data were assessed to identify the level of cultural awareness using the criteria and indicators in Table 4.

Table 4
Criteria and Indicators for Assessing Cultural Awareness

Indicators of Cultural Awareness		Degree of Cultural Awareness
Intercultural Attitudes (ICA)		
4	Sharing a sense of a cultural group member	1-4 = Highest
3	Open-minded and curious in learning a new cultural experience	1-3 = Moderate
2	Valuing cultural diversity	1 = Low
1	Appreciating and respecting Thai and other cultures	
Cultural Knowledge (CK)		
3	Correctly explained the factors potentially influences a well-**and** a misunderstanding of intercultural communication through English	1-3 = Highest
2	Correctly explained the factors potentially influences a well- **or** a misunderstanding of intercultural communication through English	1-2 = Moderate 1 = Low
1	Correctly explained the characteristics of language and culture	
Skills of Interpreting and Relating (Itpr & Rlt)		
3	Choosing a teaching-learning materials or resources suitable to stimulate the learners to relate the new and the existing knowledge of language and culture in the lesson through different cultural **with consideration of the factors possibly affected the success in**	1-3 = Highest 1-2 = Moderate 1 = Low
2	Choosing a teaching-learning materials or resources suitable to the learners to **analyze**, and relate the new and the existing language and culture in the lesson through different cultural	
1	Choosing a teaching-learning materials or resources suitable to the learners to **compare** the new and the existing knowledge of and culture in the lesson through different cultural perspectives	

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Skills of Discovery or Interaction (Dscv/Interac)	
3	Being able to operate cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, and skills real-time communication and interaction	1-3 = Highest
2	Promoting the integration of the new into the existing cultural	1-2 = Moderate
1	Choosing a teaching-learning materials or resources suitable to the	1 = Low
	to collaboratively seek a new knowledge on language and culture in the lesson	

Table 5 shows that all five groups expressed cultural awareness covering all criteria, with 100% of them showing the highest degree on skills of discovery or interaction, and moderate degree on cultural knowledge. Meanwhile, 60% and 40% of them communicated moderate degree, and low degree, respectively, for skills of interpreting and relating. Moreover, 60%, 20%, and 20% placed moderate degree, the highest degree, and low degree, respectively, on intercultural attitudes.

The answer to RQ2, which indicated that the teachers' degree of cultural awareness increased, supports the answer to RQ1, which statistically indicated the changes.

Table 5 *The Participants' Degree of Cultural Awareness after Lesson Design Activities Focusing on Language and Culture*

Topics	Reasons	Learning objectives	Cultural aspects to be taught	Reasons to use the media	Cultural awareness
Group 1 Food	-Ways of life, -Knowledge of Thai and international dishes	*K**: Correct pronunciation, word order, punctuation, use of words, meanings *P**: Communication using Y&N questions appropriately *A**: Curious in learning	-English names of Thai menu -Food tastes, texture, -Politeness in communication	*Strategy*: to identify food nationality to raise knowledge on food i.e., tastes, texture, appearance, cooking	CA* at moderate level CK* at moderate level Itpr & Rlt* at moderate level Dscv/Interac* at the highest level
Group 2 Thai Herbs- Thai Food	-Popular local menu: mango spicy salad (Ma Muang Yum) with Thai herbs as ingredients -Mango trees and Thai herbs as ingredients are commonly found in every house of Thai people in Thailand	*K*:* Correct pronunciation, word order, use of words for ingredients, usage of grammar *P*:* Speaking with appropriate gestures, & tone of voice *A*:* Curious in learning	-Introducing cooking using correct words, sentences, & pronunciation -Thai culture: mango spicy recipe, Thai herbs for cooking	Strategy: how to make Ma Muang Yum valuable around the world: to local Thai mango spicy for foreigners	CA* at moderate level CK* at moderate level Itpr & Rlt* at low level Dscv/Interac* at the highest level
Group 3 Foods and Drinks	-Thai vs English food -Cultural practices/ international social manners in ordering	*K*:* Correct spellings, meanings pronunciation, grammar, correctly telling cultural practices/international Social manners in food *P*:* Appropriate use of language for short conversation in ordering food *A*:* Correctly tell the result of impolite manners	-Vocabulary, sentence for -Function of idiom: "here you" -Function of "thank you" -Famous traditional Thai F&B -Famous traditional British -International social manners in ordering food	*Strategy*1: role playing >to raise the learners' awareness of culture practices/international manners in ordering food *Strategy*2: activity what >to tell more about famous traditional Thai/British F&B the learners know	CA* at the highest CK* at moderate level Itpr & Rlt* at low level Dscv/Interac* at the highest level

*K = Knowledge, *P= Psychomotor (Skills), *A=Attitudes

*ICA = Intercultural Attitudes, *CK= Cultural Knowledge, *Itpr & Rlt = Skills of Interpreting and Relating , *Dscv/Interac = Skills of Discovery or Interaction

Table 5 *The Participants' Degree of Cultural Awareness after Lesson Design Activities Focusing on Language and Culture (continued)*

Topics	Reasons	*Learning objectives*	Cultural aspects to be taught	Reasons to use the media	Cultural awareness
Group 4 Giving the Directions	-Hometown tourist attractions -Giving directions to important places in town -Hometown appreciation	*K*:* Correct use of words for direction, names & info of places, correct word order & pronunciation *P*:* Asking & giving directions to places in town correctly *A*:* Eager to expressing knowledge of the famous places in hometown	-Vocabulary, politeness in asking & giving directions -Knowledge on the famous places in hometown	*Strategy1*: role playing >to create a sense of belonging in hometown famous places *Strategy2*: discussion >how to introduce our hometown to the world	CA* at low level CK* at moderate level Itpr & Rlt* at moderate level Dscv/Interac* at the highest level
Group 5 How to make Thai Pink milk (sweetened iced milk with red syrup)	-Thai wisdom: popular soft drink -Cultural knowledge -Sala fruit : native to Southeast Asia	*K*:* Correct use of words for making Thai Pink milk, pronunciation, word order, correct information on the origin of Sala syrup *P*:* Correctly speaking how to make the milk step by step *A*:* Enthusiastic to participate in seeking/introducing new knowledge	-Appropriate word choice, gestures, tone of voice -Thai wisdom of making cold drinks on a hot summer day -Natural food color of red from Sala fruit -The origin of Sala fruit	*Strategy1:* Let' make iced Pink Milk activity >to provide an opportunity for students to translate information from Thai to English and make oral presentation *Strategy2*: Search More >What are the natural sources of food colors in other countries?	CA* at moderate level CK* at moderate level Itpr & Rlt* at moderate level Dscv/Interac* at the highest level

*K = Knowledge, *P= Psychomotor (Skills), *A=Attitudes

*ICA = Intercultural Attitudes, *CK= Cultural Knowledge, *Itpr & Rlt = Skills of Interpreting and Relating , *Dscv/Interac = Skills of Discovery or Interaction

Conclusion

The findings can be summed up as follows:

1. The teachers' perceptions of characteristics of culture, the roles of culture in ELT, and intercultural competence changed after participating in lesson design activities changed. They developed a more realistic view that culture as dimensional, understanding it as closely related to a community's social practices, values, and products. Thus, they recognized it as core knowledge necessary to be incorporated into a language learning lesson to enhance intercultural competence for learners.

2. The teachers' cultural awareness increased after the lesson design activities. The findings revealed that all the teachers possessed cultural knowledge and skills of discovery or interaction to the highest degree. They correctly explained the factors potentially influencing both effective and ineffective intercultural communication. They were also able to operate cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, and skills during real-time communication and interaction.

Most of them maintained skills of interpreting and relating and intercultural attitudes at the moderate level, demonstrating open-mindedness and curiosity in learning about a new cultural experience. They selected teaching-learning materials or resources that stimulated the learners to analyze and relate the new and existing knowledge of language and culture in the lesson through different cultural perspectives.

Discussion

Discussions on the main findings are presented with respect to each RQ.

RQ1: The changes in the teachers' perceptions reflected a more flexible conceptualization of culture in terms of its nature, understanding of its roles in ELT and in intercultural communication. After the lesson design activity, their focused topics varied widely from big-C or invisible cultures (i.e., the history of Christmas) to little-c or visible cultures dealing with social practices, values, and products: Food, Thai Herbs-Thai Food, Foods and Drinks, Giving Directions, and How to Make Thai Pink Milk. Additionally, their view of culture as lesson content was modified to include different cultural perspectives by comparing self and other cultures, specifically Thainess and British or American cultures. This view was demonstrated through their topic selection criteria: 1) relevant to the learners' backgrounds, 2) connected to specific Thainess or local lifestyle, 3) comparable between Thai and UK/ US cultures, 4) suitable teaching materials, and 5) aligned with Thailand basic education core curriculum in use. Criteria 1-3 reflected the teachers' concern with the role of culture as knowledge in lesson contents and the criteria 4-5 indicated their awareness of the approach to successfully incorporate cultural aspects into EFL classrooms.

RQ2: The teachers' level of cultural awareness increased. From the discussion of the teachers' lesson designs, their cultural awareness was reflected as follows.

Cultural knowledge and skills of discovery or interaction at the highest degree

The teachers were able to explain the factors that may cause a misunderstanding of intercultural communication such as verbal and non-verbal languages used in different contexts, which varied according to the selected topic, learning objectives, and activities. The designed lessons and the discussion indicated that, through their perspective, the teaching of culture tended to be effective when teachers provided the learners with linguistic and cultural knowledge through explicit teaching followed by implicit learning: role-playing, demonstration, and comparison of cultures. Thus, they were able to operate cultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes, and skills in real-time communication and interaction.

Skills of interpreting and relating and intercultural attitudes at a moderate degree

The teachers demonstrated open-mindedness and curiosity in bridging a new and existing cultural experience by choosing teaching resources suitable to stimulate the learners to compare and analyze the knowledge through different cultural perspectives. As observed, the teachers maintained a theoretical view in selecting a topic for teaching of culture. Each lesson plan was initiated based on their cultural knowledge and ELT experiences rather than textbooks, in order to be suitable to the learners. This finding was different from the studies by Baker (2008) and Ulla (2019), which reported that Western-published textbooks were popular among Thai EFL teachers as they contained a reliable model of correct English and were more practical for teaching. However, the difference possibly arose from the complexity of the contents and language designed for different education levels: primary, secondary, and higher.

Moreover, to help learners to achieve the learning goals, both non-authentic and authentic materials were applied. The authentic materials were primarily used, such as all ingredients for cooking, while the non-authentic were provided only when it was costly or not commonly available in their contexts, such as pizza and spaghetti. Additionally, activity-based learning was considered the most suitable approach to developing intercultural communication skills contextually, and appropriate use of language was an integral part of the learning. Thus, the teachers' skills of interpreting and relating and intercultural attitudes were evident.

The findings were in line with Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak (2017), which stated that authentic materials and learning-by-doing activities were effective for developing Thai EFL learners' ICC since the use of authentic materials helped learners develop intercultural attitudes through their own interpretation (Byram, 1997). Thus, promoting the development of local-culture-oriented English lessons was one of the effective ways to encourage the teachers to understand the nature of culture and be able to incorporate cultural aspects into their EFL classroom with cultural awareness and ICC skills.

Implications

Since most of the participating teachers typically established learning objectives based solely on the core curriculum indicators for language for communication strand, the other three were often overlooked. Consequently, the concept of intercultural communication within a culturally diverse world was less likely to be incorporated into ELT. Furthermore, intercultural competence involves not only linguistic and cultural knowledge but also intercultural attitudes, intercultural skills, and cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). Thus, the ICC concept should be an essential part of Thai EFL teaching. These observations suggest that the teachers' intercultural attitudes, knowledge of cultural diversity, and skills of interpreting and relating need to be promoted.

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