



EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING TEACHERS' AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO DEVELOP INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LEARNING

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Abstract:

This study explores the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at Can Tho University, Vietnam, regarding the use of authentic materials in developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in English learning. The research investigates the types of authentic materials EFL teachers employ and evaluates how students perceive these materials in fostering their intercultural understanding and language skills. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from a 33-item questionnaire and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. A total of 120 EFL students participated in the questionnaire, and 7 students were selected for in-depth interviews to provide richer, contextualized data. The results show that students highly value the use of authentic materials, including news reports, literature, and podcasts, as they significantly enhance their cultural awareness and language abilities. What's more, students expressed that authentic materials were more engaging than traditional resources, offering practical exposure to real-world language and cultural contexts. The study also identifies some challenges faced by students, such as the complexity of the materials and the need for guidance in interpreting implicit cultural meanings. Findings suggest that incorporating authentic materials into language teaching can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world intercultural experiences. The study offers valuable recommendations for teachers to refine their strategies in utilizing authentic materials to improve ICC in EFL contexts.

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1. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively across cultures is essential for language learners. Boummaraf and Ghouar (2017) assert that developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) goes beyond linguistic proficiency; it also involves understanding cultural differences, communication styles, and real-world interactions. Despite this, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners face limited exposure to international cultures, primarily due to their monolingual backgrounds and the fact that they study English within their own country (Krieger, 2005). As a result, integrating intercultural elements into EFL education has become increasingly important in equipping students with the necessary skills for effective cross-cultural communication.

A promising strategy for fostering ICC in EFL education is the use of authentic materials—resources that reflect real-world language use, such as newspapers, videos, and digital content. Jain (2023) emphasizes that incorporating materials like media, interviews, and cultural artifacts helps learners engage in authentic cross-cultural exchanges. These materials not only offer valuable linguistic input but also immerse students in the cultural contexts in which the language is used. Similarly, Ginaya, Somawati, Aryana, and Putra (2019) highlight the effectiveness of authentic materials in enhancing students' communicative competence by presenting language in contextually relevant ways. By exposing learners to everyday communication, these materials deepen their understanding of cultural norms, idiomatic expressions, and societal values.

In the context of Vietnamese higher education, particularly at Can Tho University, there is a growing focus on integrating authentic materials into English language courses. EFL instructors incorporate diverse resources to expose students to various cultures and communication styles. However, as Guariento and Morley (2001) point out, factors such as language difficulty, cultural unfamiliarity, and students' varying levels of engagement can influence the effectiveness of these materials in fostering ICC. Understanding students' perceptions of authentic materials is crucial to assess their impact and identify areas for improvement in EFL teaching.

Given the increasing importance of ICC in EFL education, it is vital to explore teaching methods that effectively engage students with cultural content. The role of authentic materials in promoting ICC among EFL students is an area worth exploring, as students' perceptions of these materials can offer valuable insights into their effectiveness and potential challenges. This study aims to contribute to the development of more effective teaching strategies by investigating how authentic materials influence students' engagement and intercultural understanding. Ultimately, the study seeks to clarify how EFL students interact with authentic materials in their learning, thereby enhancing ICC and improving educational practices.

1.2 Research Aim

This study investigated the role of authentic materials in enhancing intercultural communicative competence among EFL students in Can Tho University, Vietnam. It also examined how students perceived these materials in improving their intercultural understanding and language learning.

1.3 Research Questions

The study was designed to answer the following questions:

- 1) What types of authentic materials do EFL teachers use to develop students' intercultural competence in English learning?
- 2) To what extent do EFL students perceive authentic materials as effective in developing their intercultural competence in English learning?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study had significant implications for English language teaching, particularly in the context of developing intercultural communicative competence among EFL learners. In an increasingly globalized world, where communication demands both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness, understanding how authentic materials contributed to students' ICC was vital. The results of this study helped educators select and integrate authentic materials more effectively, ensuring they met students' needs and aligned with their language proficiency levels. Furthermore, teachers adopted more tailored approaches to support students' learning experiences by identifying the challenges students faced when engaging with authentic materials. For students, the study highlighted how authentic materials enhanced cultural awareness and improved their real-world communication skills, enabling them to better understand diverse cultural perspectives and use English naturally in various contexts.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focused on fourth-year students from the School of Foreign Languages (SFL) in Can Tho University (CTU), Vietnam, examining their perceptions of teachers' use of authentic materials and their role in developing intercultural competence in English learning. The participants were drawn from two training programs—Standard and High-Quality—ensuring a broad range of perspectives. The study gathered insights from students with considerable exposure to culture-related courses and intercultural communication, offering a clearer understanding of how authentic materials contributed to their ICC development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Definition of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is a complex and multifaceted concept that lacks a universally accepted definition due to its broad scope. Consequently, various researchers have employed different terms interchangeably to describe this concept. Among the most widely recognized frameworks is Byram's (1997) model of ICC, which outlines five core components: attitudes (including curiosity and openness), knowledge (awareness of cultural norms and practices), skills of interpreting and relating (understanding cultural references), skills of discovery and interaction (adapting to unfamiliar cultural contexts), and critical cultural awareness (reflecting on and assessing cultural differences). Byram (1997) defines ICC as *"the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language"* (p. 71). In a similar vein, Chen and Starosta (1999) define ICC as the ability to *"effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors that negotiate cultural identities in diverse environments"* (p. 28). Bennett and Bennett (2004) describe ICC as *"the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations"* (p. 149), emphasizing its applicability in global communication.

In the context of language teaching, ICC is often defined as *"the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures"* (Wiseman, 2002, as cited in Ghasemi & Ahmadian, 2023). This definition underscores the importance of not only understanding cultural differences but also having the motivation and skills to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Fantini (2001) further emphasizes that ICC is a blend of cognitive and affective dimensions. It involves acquiring cultural knowledge while simultaneously developing empathy and openness to different cultural perspectives. As Ghasemi and Ahmadian (2023) note, ICC is not only about knowing facts but also about the ability to act appropriately in intercultural settings—an essential skill in an increasingly globalized world.

In conclusion, scholars agree that ICC plays a vital role in effective communication in foreign languages. In today's interconnected world, where cross-cultural exchanges are increasingly common, ICC has become indispensable for personal and professional success. Therefore, it is critical for language learners, especially English speakers, to develop ICC to navigate intercultural interactions successfully. Without it, achieving meaningful communication in a second language is unattainable.

2.1.2 The Role of Authentic Materials in Language Learning

Authentic materials have emerged as a crucial tool in language learning, bridging the gap between classroom instruction and real-world communication. These materials, which include resources created for native speakers in real-life contexts rather than for pedagogical purposes, provide learners with exposure to genuine language use, enriching their linguistic and cultural competence (Gilmore, 2007).

Empirical studies consistently highlight the benefits of authentic materials. For instance, Oura (2001) argues that such materials provide a rich source of language input beyond what is typically presented by textbooks or teachers, offering learners an authentic glimpse into how the language is used in everyday life. According to Gilmore (2007), *"authentic materials, particularly audio-visual ones, offer a much richer source of input for learners and have the potential to be exploited in various ways to develop communicative competence"* (p. 22). Moreover, authentic materials enhance reading comprehension by exposing learners to new vocabulary and expressions in context (Bacon & Finneman, 1990; Berardo, 2006). This exposure is invaluable for expanding learners' linguistic repertoire and improving their ability to understand and interpret texts in authentic contexts.

Another advantage is that authentic materials often boost student motivation. As Kilickaya (2004) notes, students are more likely to engage with materials that reflect real-world language use, which makes learning feel relevant and practical. Authentic materials offer students a sense of purpose, as they can see the immediate application of their learning, thereby fostering a deeper connection to the language.

In summary, integrating authentic materials into language instruction is essential for helping students move beyond theoretical knowledge to practical, real-world language use. These materials ensure that learners acquire both linguistic and cultural competencies, preparing them to communicate effectively in diverse settings.

2.2 Types of Authentic Materials in EFL

Integrating authentic materials into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction offers students exposure to real-world language and cultural contexts. These materials can be categorized into several types, each serving a unique purpose in language development.

2.2.1 Printed Materials

2.2.1.1 Newspapers and Magazines

Using articles, advertisements, and opinion pieces from newspapers and magazines exposes students to current events, diverse vocabulary, and cultural nuances. As Rao (2019) observes, such materials provide a broad range of linguistic contexts, helping learners develop reading comprehension skills while also increasing their cultural awareness.

2.2.1.2 Books and Novels

Literary works offer rich insights into diverse cultures, worldviews, and linguistic nuances. Tsai (2012) found that incorporating unabridged novels into college-level EFL curricula led to significant improvements in students' attitudes, confidence, and self-assessed reading abilities, suggesting that literary texts can enhance students' engagement and competence in reading.

2.2.1.3 Instructional Guides and Brochures

Practical materials such as travel brochures, restaurant menus, and user manuals present everyday language used in real-world situations. These materials familiarize students with functional language and expressions they are likely to encounter in daily life.

2.2.2 Audio-Visual Materials

2.2.2.1 Movies and TV Shows

Films and television programs provide authentic language input in context, showcasing colloquialisms, cultural references, and informal speech. Cakir (2006) highlights that video materials allow learners to focus on language in detail while interpreting visual cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and environmental context, which deepen their understanding of the language and culture.

2.2.2.2 Podcasts and Radio Shows

Engaging with podcasts and radio programs immerses students in real-life conversations, debates, and cultural dialogues. Abdulrahman, Basalama, and Widodo (2018) found that podcasts foster critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and a deeper connection to real-world issues, enhancing students' language learning experience.

2.2.2.3 Songs and Music

Music is a powerful tool in language acquisition, offering learners exposure to idiomatic expressions, cultural themes, and a more informal language register. Eslit (2023) emphasizes that music not only aids vocabulary and grammar learning but also helps students connect emotionally to the culture of the language they are studying.

2.2.3 Multimedia and Digital Content

2.2.3.1 Websites and Blogs

Websites and blogs provide learners with opportunities to engage in authentic communication within real-world contexts. Noytim (2010) argues that blogs allow students to practice writing and exchange ideas in a way that mirrors real-world conversations, helping to improve their language proficiency.

2.2.3.2 Social Media Content

Social media platforms offer abundant opportunities for exposure to authentic English usage. As Rao (2019) points out, the dominance of English on social media platforms enables learners to engage with diverse linguistic styles and cultural references, improving their reading, writing, and comprehension skills.

2.2.4 Real-Life Communication

2.2.4.1 Emails and Letters

Emails and traditional letter writing serve as excellent tools for authentic language practice. As Chen (2006) notes, these communication forms provide students with the

opportunity to engage in interpersonal communication, improving both written language skills and cultural awareness.

2.2.4.2 Speeches and Lectures

Exposure to public speeches, TED Talks, and academic lectures introduces learners to formal language use, rhetorical strategies, and complex sentence structures. Yue and Song (2020) found that incorporating TED Talks into EFL instruction significantly enhances students' language skills while also increasing cultural awareness.

2.2.4.3 Interviews and Dialogues

Authentic conversations between native speakers provide valuable insights into informal communication and cultural nuances. Salcedo Borja (2022) highlights that dialogues and conversational exchanges improve fluency by exposing learners to natural language and colloquial expressions.

2.3 The Role of Authentic Materials in Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence

2.3.1 Enhancing Cultural Awareness and Understanding

Authentic materials offer students a direct connection to the culture of the language they are learning. Alisher & Khayrulla (2024) emphasize that language and culture are inseparable, and authentic materials provide learners with a window into the values, customs, and beliefs of native speakers. These insights foster a deeper understanding of intercultural differences, enabling students to interact more sensitively and effectively in cross-cultural situations.

Beresova (2015) further affirms that authentic materials not only improve language skills but also enhance intercultural sensitivity. By engaging with real-world content, students not only improve their linguistic abilities but also develop the cultural knowledge and empathy needed for successful intercultural communication.

2.3.2 Encouraging Critical Thinking and Reflection

Authentic materials promote critical thinking by challenging students to reflect on cultural differences and similarities. As Gilmore (2007) suggests, exposure to genuine materials encourages learners to question their assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, and analyze cultural biases. This type of engagement cultivates critical thinking skills and enhances intercultural competence.

Amirovna and Shakhzoda (2024) also stress the importance of integrating authentic materials into lessons to develop critical thinking. Such materials stimulate deep analysis and provide a natural context for students to practice language while honing their analytical skills.

2.3.4 Bridging the Gap Between Classroom Learning and Real-World Language Use

Authentic materials serve as a bridge between classroom instruction and real-life communication. Reid (2014) argues that authentic materials expose learners to “*real-life-like*” situations, helping them practice language skills in contexts they are likely to encounter outside the classroom. Hadley (2001) echoes this point, emphasizing that materials such as travel documents, menus, and newspapers provide students with practical language exposure that traditional classroom materials often lack.

2.5 Review of Empirical Studies on Authentic Materials and Intercultural Communicative Competence

In recent years, the role of authentic materials in fostering Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners has garnered increasing attention from researchers and educators. Authentic materials, which offer learners direct exposure to genuine linguistic and cultural contexts, are crucial for the development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). These materials—films, articles, songs, advertisements, and social media content—serve as effective tools in providing students with authentic language input and cultural insights (Gilmore, 2007; Berardo, 2006). This section reviews empirical studies that explore how different types of authentic materials contribute to the development of ICC in EFL learners.

Different categories of authentic materials serve distinct roles in promoting intercultural competence:

2.5.1 Visual Materials

Films and television shows are widely regarded as powerful tools for teaching the cultural aspects of language. Herrero and Vanderschelden (2019) argue that films provide rich, contextualized cultural input that extends beyond mere linguistic elements. Through dialogue, non-verbal communication, and visual storytelling, films offer an immersive experience that enhances students' cultural sensitivity. Similarly, Donaghy (2019) found that incorporating films into EFL instruction helped students better understand cultural norms, historical contexts, and social issues in a way that textbooks alone could not achieve.

2.5.2 Authentic Written Texts

Newspapers, literature, and online blogs expose learners to real-world discourse and diverse cultural perspectives. Berardo (2006) highlights that engaging with authentic written texts improves students' ability to recognize cultural references, implicit meanings, and varying viewpoints.

2.5.3 Audio-Visual Materials

Boummaraf and Ghouar (2017) examine the impact of authentic audio-visual materials—such as films, podcasts, and recordings of native speakers—on ICC development. Their research suggests that such materials offer both verbal and non-verbal cues—like tone,

body language, and facial expressions—that are vital for understanding cultural contexts. These resources create an immersive learning experience, enabling students to interpret and respond more effectively to the cultural subtleties embedded in language.

Research has also explored how the use of authentic materials varies across educational levels and cultural contexts. The effectiveness of these materials often depends on students' language proficiency, cognitive abilities, and previous exposure to intercultural experiences. Kozhevnikova (2014) conducted a study examining the impact of authentic materials (films, magazines, and newspapers) on EFL learners over a three-week period. The study found that 85% of students reported increased motivation, attributing this to the engaging and rewarding nature of authentic materials, which allowed them to comprehend real-life language use.

Cultural background also plays a significant role in how students engage with authentic materials. Liu and Laohawiriyanon (2013) compared Chinese and Thai EFL learners and discovered that although both groups valued authentic materials, their cultural backgrounds influenced their interpretation of cultural messages. This study underscores the importance of teaching students to critically evaluate cultural representations in order to avoid stereotyping and misinterpretation. Learners with limited intercultural exposure may need more structured guidance to fully understand the cultural nuances of the materials. This suggests that authentic materials can be most effective when tailored to students' needs and accompanied by instructional strategies that encourage critical engagement with cultural content. Consequently, educators must consider students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds when selecting authentic materials, ensuring that these resources are accessible and beneficial for all learners.

To summarize, authentic materials provide immense value in developing ICC among EFL learners by offering exposure to real-world language and culture. However, their effectiveness depends on various factors, including students' proficiency levels, cognitive abilities, and cultural backgrounds. Educators should carefully select and adapt authentic materials to meet the diverse needs of their students, ensuring that these resources foster a deeper understanding of intercultural dynamics and enhance effective communication.

2.6 Positive Outcomes of Using Authentic Materials

A growing body of research supports the claim that authentic materials significantly enhance ICC development. Guariento and Morley (2001) found that students who engaged with authentic materials exhibited greater motivation and interest in learning about different cultures, which in turn facilitated their intercultural competence. Other studies have explored how authentic materials contribute to the development of key components of ICC, such as cultural awareness, critical thinking, and communicative skills.

2.7 Challenges and Limitations

While authentic materials offer numerous advantages for EFL learners, their implementation poses significant challenges for both educators and students. One of the primary difficulties teachers face is selecting and adapting materials that are not only linguistically accessible but also culturally appropriate. Gilmore (2007) observes that authentic texts often include complex vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and informal speech patterns that may exceed students' proficiency levels, making comprehension challenging without considerable support. Similarly, Treve (2023) explored the impact of authentic materials on ESL/EFL learners and found that while these resources can enhance language acquisition, they may present difficulties for students who are unfamiliar with the cultural context or the linguistic features embedded in the materials. Treve's study suggests that educators must carefully choose materials that align with students' proficiency levels and offer adequate support to aid comprehension.

Additionally, Mohammed (2021) examined how the use of authentic materials influenced language learning outcomes among EFL students. While the study revealed increased motivation and engagement, it also identified challenges related to the linguistic and cultural complexity of the materials. Mohammed concluded that although authentic materials are rich in cultural content and natural language usage, they can overwhelm learners, especially those with lower proficiency levels or limited exposure to intercultural contexts. To address these challenges, Mohammed emphasized the importance of providing contextualization, offering language support, and selecting materials suited to students' current abilities.

These findings highlight the critical need for thoughtful material selection and the provision of adequate support when integrating authentic materials into the classroom. While such materials provide valuable real-world language exposure, their complexity can hinder comprehension without proper scaffolding. Educators must strike a balance between challenging students and ensuring that materials remain accessible, thus fostering learning while minimizing frustration or confusion.

In summary, this section presents a theoretical framework for Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and explores the role of authentic materials in language learning through a review of empirical studies. It defines ICC, outlines its key components, and underscores its importance in effective cross-cultural communication. The part illustrates how authentic materials—such as films, articles, and social media—offer real-world linguistic and cultural exposure, thereby enriching students' language skills and cultural awareness. It also reviews the various types of authentic materials and their contributions to ICC development, highlighting both the benefits and challenges of their integration into language education.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to explore EFL students' perceptions of using authentic materials to enhance intercultural competence in English learning. The main objective was to assess both the impact of authentic materials on students' intercultural competence and their views on the effectiveness of these materials in fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

A descriptive research design was used to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding students' engagement with authentic materials. This design aimed to capture how students interacted with these materials and how they perceived their role in developing intercultural awareness and competence, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives on the value of authentic materials in promoting ICC.

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected through a 33-item questionnaire, adapted from previous research on authentic materials and ICC development (Huynh, N. X., & Dan, T. C., 2022). The bilingual questionnaire was designed to gauge students' perceptions of how authentic materials contributed to their intercultural competence, ensuring clarity and improving response accuracy.

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, a well-regarded method for gaining deeper insights into participants' perspectives (e.g., Dörnyei, 2007; Richards, 2003). Five interview questions prompted students to reflect on their experiences with authentic materials and their impact on ICC. These interviews provided rich, detailed data that complemented the quantitative findings, offering a more nuanced understanding of students' learning experiences and perceptions.

3.2 Research Participants

The participants in this study were 120 EFL students from the School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, most of whom were in their fourth year of the English Studies program. These students were selected because they had completed a range of culture-related courses, such as Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), Culture of English-Speaking Countries, British-American Literature, and Literary Criticism. As a result, they had substantial exposure to various learning materials, making them well-suited for the study.

For the qualitative phase, a smaller group of fourth-year students was purposefully selected to participate in interviews. Given their academic background and experience with authentic materials, they were considered ideal candidates to provide valuable insights into both the benefits and challenges of using such resources in language learning. Their feedback was crucial for identifying potential areas for improvement and suggesting strategies to enhance English language learning in ICC-related courses. By analyzing their perspectives, the study aimed to explore how

authentic materials can support the development of intercultural competence among EFL learners.

A survey was conducted among 120 EFL students from the School of Foreign Languages to examine their perceptions of using authentic materials provided by teachers to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The participants were drawn from three different English-related programs. It can be seen that the largest group of students came from the English Studies - High-Quality Program, representing 48.3% (58 students) of the total respondents. The English Studies program accounted for 30.8% (37 students), while the smallest group, consisting of students majoring in English Translation and Interpretation, made up 20.8% (25 students).

3.3 Research Instruments

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The primary research instrument was a questionnaire designed to assess EFL students' perceptions of teachers' authentic materials in developing intercultural competence (ICC). It explored how students viewed the effectiveness of these materials in enhancing cultural awareness, communication skills, and engagement. The questionnaire also aimed to uncover challenges and attitudes related to using authentic materials for improving ICC.

The questionnaire had two sections:

- **Section A** contained 10 general questions, gathering demographic information, students' prior exposure to authentic materials, and their experience with cultural courses. It also asked about the frequency of encountering authentic materials.
- **Section B** had 33 specific items, divided into three parts:
 - **Part One** (9 items) focused on how authentic materials like news reports and podcasts contributed to English language skills and cultural understanding.
 - **Part Two** (8 items) examined how British-American literature and literary criticism helped students understand cultural values and develop critical thinking.
 - **Part Three** (19 items) assessed whether authentic materials improved intercultural sensitivity, adaptability, and cultural awareness and explored challenges students faced, like complex language or unfamiliar cultural references.

Reliability analysis of the 33-item questionnaire showed strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.878, indicating its reliability in measuring students' perceptions of how authentic materials contribute to ICC development.

3.3.2 Interview

To gain in-depth insights into EFL students' perceptions of using teachers' authentic materials to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC), semi-structured interviews were conducted. This qualitative approach allowed participants the freedom

to express their views while ensuring that the core topics were addressed. The interview consisted of five open-ended questions designed to explore students' experiences, preferences, and evaluations of authentic materials in relation to ICC development. These questions aligned with the research question: *To what extent do EFL students perceive authentic materials as effective in developing their intercultural communicative competence in English learning?*

Seven students, selected from the pool of respondents to the questionnaire, were invited to participate in the interviews. All interviews were conducted in English, allowing for direct engagement with the students in the target language.

The interview questions were categorized into five key themes:

- **Type of Authentic Materials:** This question aimed to identify the types of authentic materials used by teachers and the students' preferences.
- **Effectiveness in Fostering Intercultural Communication:** This question sought to explore students' attitudes toward the effectiveness of authentic materials in promoting intercultural communication.
- **Engagement Strategies:** This question focused on activities and tasks that facilitate students' engagement with authentic materials in ICC-related courses.
- **Comparison with Traditional Resources:** This question aimed to examine how authentic materials compare to textbooks or other educational resources in developing ICC.
- **Improvement Suggestions:** Lastly, this question gathered students' suggestions on how teachers and students could enhance the use of authentic materials to better foster ICC development.

3.4 Procedure of Data Collection

3.4.1 Questionnaire

3.4.1.1 Pilot Questionnaire

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate the clarity, appropriateness, and reliability of the questionnaire. The initial version was reviewed and translated into Vietnamese to ensure that students clearly understood the content. The translation was later verified by the research supervisor.

For the pilot study, 40 students from an English Studies High-Quality program were selected. The researcher personally distributed the pilot questionnaire and explained its objectives in class. To ensure participants understood the instructions, the entire process—including the purpose of the study, item descriptions, and instructions—was presented in Vietnamese. Participants were instructed to complete the questionnaire item by item, ensuring thoroughness in their responses.

3.4.1.2 Administration

After the pilot phase, the questionnaire was administered in the middle of the second semester of the 2024-2025 academic year at the School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University. With approval from both the institution and the lecturers, the researcher

visited various classes to invite students to participate. The questionnaire was distributed in printed format and completed after class. Before beginning, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, ensuring participants understood the nature of the research.

Participants took approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. They were asked to review their responses before submission to ensure all questions were answered. A total of 120 completed questionnaires were collected, with no missing or incomplete responses.

3.4.2 Interview

3.4.2.1 Pilot Interview

Before conducting the main interviews, a pilot interview was carried out to refine the interview questions and test their effectiveness. The purpose of the pilot was to assess the clarity and bias of the questions and help familiarize the researcher with the interview process.

For the pilot, three students were randomly selected from the questionnaire respondents. The interviews were conducted one-on-one, face-to-face, with all questions and responses in English. These students had prior exposure to intercultural communication courses and authentic materials, ensuring relevant and informed responses.

3.4.2.2 Administration

Following the questionnaire phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences with authentic materials in English learning. Seven students were randomly selected for face-to-face interviews, scheduled according to their availability.

In adherence to ethical standards, all participants were informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality before the interview. To protect their privacy, their names were coded prior to analysis. Interviews were conducted individually in a quiet setting to encourage open discussion. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent for transcription and analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Quantitative Approach

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire regarding students' attitudes toward using teachers' authentic materials for improving ICC were processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 28. A reliability analysis was conducted for both individual question clusters and the entire questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.878 indicates high internal consistency, meaning the questionnaire items are highly correlated and reliably measure the same underlying construct.

Descriptive statistics were used to examine students' perceptions of authentic materials. Specifically, frequency analysis was employed to assess the types of authentic materials students were familiar with, their prior exposure to them, and their integration in the English learning process. Percentage and mean values were calculated to identify patterns in students' responses regarding their attitudes toward authentic materials in culture-related courses aimed at fostering ICC. These analyses provided valuable insights into students' overall perceptions, highlighting both common trends and variations in responses.

3.5.2 Qualitative Approach

The qualitative data provided a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions regarding the use of authentic materials to develop intercultural competence. All interview responses were transcribed, reviewed for accuracy, and analyzed in two stages: classification of responses and subsequent analysis.

First, responses were grouped according to recurring themes related to the effectiveness of authentic materials, student engagement, and their experiences applying these materials in intercultural communication. Categories were formed based on students' preferences for certain authentic materials, challenges faced during use, and their perceived impact on ICC development.

In the second stage, the categorized responses were analyzed to identify deeper patterns, meanings, and implications. This thematic analysis aimed to provide insights that complement the quantitative findings, offering a fuller picture of how authentic materials contribute to intercultural learning. The findings from the qualitative data also provided practical recommendations for enhancing the use of authentic materials in EFL classrooms.

4. Findings

4.1. Results from Quantitative Data

4.1.1 The Role of Authentic Materials in Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence Across the Four English Language Skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing

The statements in Table 4.1 capture students' perceptions of the effectiveness of authentic materials in fostering intercultural competence across the four core English language skills. It is clear from the responses that all statements were met with an overall "Agree" interpretation (V.I.). Notably, the highest mean score ($M = 3.97$) was associated with the belief that exposure to real-life accents and intonation patterns helps students improve their listening comprehension of diverse English accents. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Berardo (2006) and Gilmore (2007), who highlighted that authentic materials enhance learners' ability to understand various speech patterns and pronunciation styles in real-world contexts.

Table 4.1: EFL Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Authentic Materials on the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence Through the Four English Language Skills

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	V.I.
1.1 Authentic materials (e.g., videos, podcasts, movies) enable me to understand various native accents and intonation patterns.	3.97	.709	Agree
1.2 Exposure to authentic listening materials, such as news reports and interviews, increases my ability to comprehend real-life conversations.	3.78	.663	Agree
1.3 Listening to authentic audio materials enhances my awareness of cultural nuances in spoken language.	3.80	.702	Agree
1.4 Audio-visual materials, sourced from digital platforms or DVDs, provide more effective intercultural competence training than traditional audio-only materials.	3.69	.696	Agree
1.5 Authentic materials helped me learn natural expressions and colloquialisms, which enhanced the fluency and appropriateness of my spoken communication.	3.70	.728	Agree
1.6 Using authentic materials helps me better understand the effectiveness of idiomatic expressions in real-life contexts.	3.55	.765	Agree
1.7 Using authentic materials helps improve my word usage, phrase structure, and sentence construction for various sociocultural activities.	3.59	.814	Agree
1.8 Authentic materials increase my engagement in learning by connecting language lessons with cultural context.	3.67	.690	Agree
1.9 Authentic materials enable me to relate classroom content to real-life cultural interactions.	3.63	.768	Agree

Similarly, the statement "Exposure to authentic listening materials, such as news reports and interviews, increases my ability to comprehend real-life conversations" ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.663$) also received strong support, suggesting that authentic listening materials are effective in helping students understand not only real-life conversations but also the cultural nuances that are critical in cross-cultural communication.

Regarding speaking skills, English major students at CTU recognized the value of authentic materials in improving their verbal communication fluency and ability to use natural expressions, with a mean score of 3.70 ($SD = 0.728$). Additionally, the use of idiomatic language in communication was rated highly ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.765$). These results indicate that while students acknowledge the advantages of incorporating authentic materials in speaking courses, there are still challenges when it comes to actively applying these skills in real-life conversational contexts.

In terms of reading and writing skills, authentic materials were found to significantly enhance students' word choice and sentence construction in sociocultural contexts ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.814$). Moreover, students agreed that such materials contributed to greater engagement in learning ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.690$) and helped bridge the gap between classroom content and real-life cultural experiences ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.768$). These findings underscore the essential role that authentic materials play in creating a more

immersive learning environment, ultimately supporting the development of intercultural communicative competence among English major students.

4.1.1.2 Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence through British-American Literature Courses

The statements in Table 4.2 reflect students' perceptions of how the use of authentic literary works contributes to their development of intercultural communicative competence in English learning. These perceptions are evaluated through the lenses of cultural awareness, understanding, and self-reflection, with participants sharing their thoughts on the role of literature in enhancing their intercultural insight.

Table 4.2: EFL Students' Perceptions of the Role of British-American Literature Courses in Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	V.I.
2.1 Authentic British-American literary works enable me to visualize and appreciate the diverse cultural landscapes presented in these texts.	3.63	.819	Agree
2.2 Through the use of fundamental literary techniques and theories in fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, literature aids in comprehending characters from diverse cultural backgrounds.	3.70	.784	Agree
2.3 Authentic literary works provide insight into how cultural values influence characters' actions and decisions.	3.73	.730	Agree
2.4 Comparing literary works from different cultures strengthens my ability to identify cultural similarities and differences.	3.71	.780	Agree
2.5 The careful examination, analysis, and interpretation of literary texts, known as literary criticism, deepens understanding of the English language as used in characters' dialogues.	3.58	.866	Agree
2.6 Participating in discussions about literary works in Literary Criticism courses enhances my ability to articulate cultural insights.	3.56	.786	Agree
2.7 Classroom discussions based on British-American literary works enhanced my appreciation for cultural diversity and literary expression.	3.69	.757	Agree
2.8 Analyzing authentic literary works in class encourages me to reflect on my cultural identity and compare it with others.	3.56	.818	Agree

According to the results presented in the table, it is clear that the majority of EFL students agreed with the idea that authentic literary works reflect how cultural values shape characters' decisions and actions ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.730$). These works also provide a natural representation of how people from different cultures express themselves. Moreover, respondents strongly agreed with the statement: "Comparing literary works from different cultures strengthens my ability to identify cultural similarities and differences" ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.780$). This suggests that comparing authentic literary texts from various cultures strengthens students' ability to recognize and appreciate both cultural similarities and differences.

The comparison of literary works not only deepened students' cultural understanding but also contributed significantly to their development of intercultural

communicative competence. Additionally, students felt that discussing these literary works enriched their appreciation of cultural diversity ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.757$).

In conclusion, integrating authentic materials through British-American literature courses plays a crucial role in fostering intercultural competence. By broadening students' cultural awareness and exposing them to diverse cultural backgrounds through a range of literary works, these courses provide valuable opportunities for students to connect with different worldviews. As Pinzón (2020) highlights, *"By reading these literary books, they are expected to learn the structures of the target language and the expressions that speakers of that language are most likely to use."*

4.1.1.3 Authentic Materials Improving Intercultural Communicative Competence through ICC Courses, Culture of English-Speaking Countries, and Other Culture-Related Courses

Table 4.3: EFL Students' Perceptions of Improving
Intercultural Communicative Competence through ICC Courses

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	V.I.
3.1 Authentic materials provide real-life examples of daily intercultural communication scenarios.	3.80	.690	Agree
3.2 Authentic materials expose me to diverse cultural perspectives and practices such as eating and studying habits.	3.72	.663	Agree
3.3 Authentic materials prepare students for real-world interactions in multicultural environments in classrooms such as seminars, workshops, conferences, field trips with many nationalities.	3.89	.673	Agree
3.4 Authentic resources help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical understanding, for example, in internship programs.	3.67	.673	Agree
3.6 Using a mix of textbooks and authentic materials helps me grasp cultural nuances more effectively, for instance, by combining illustrations in textbooks with real-life scenes in videos.	3.83	.714	Agree
3.8 Incorporating authentic materials into classroom instruction is essential for effectively improving intercultural competence when communicating with both native and non-native English speakers.	3.85	.706	Agree
3.9 Incorporating authentic materials into EFL students' self-study is essential for effectively improving their intercultural competence when interacting with native and non-native English speakers.	3.78	.637	Agree
3.10 I prefer that my teachers use authentic materials as primary instructional resources.	2.47	.925	Disagree
3.11 Authentic materials make classroom discussions more interactive and reflective of real-life situations through various authentic learning materials namely pictures, textbooks, films, etc.	3.60	.770	Agree
3.12 Using authentic materials in class increases my motivation to engage in intercultural discussions through video clips, role plays, and other interactive activities.	3.63	.733	Agree

3.13 Authentic materials inspire me to continue learning outside the classroom through lecturers' advice in looking for varied learning resources towards ICC.	3.69	.731	Agree
3.14 I feel more confident in interpreting content related to culture after engaging with authentic materials compared to using textbooks alone.	3.57	.752	Agree
3.15 Authentic materials expose me to informal language (Colloquialisms) and real-life expressions that textbooks often omit.	3.71	.650	Agree
3.17 Some of authentic materials contain difficult and complex language structures which create problems for EFL students to deeply understand each of them	3.75	.677	Agree
3.18 The informal and colloquial language in some authentic materials can be challenging to understand and use correctly without proper guidance from classroom lecturers.	4.02	.641	Agree
3.19 Some of authentic materials with unclear origins need to be verified by guidance of lecturers and experts.	3.63	.766	Agree

The statements presented in Table 4.3 reflect students' perceptions of how authentic materials contribute to the development of intercultural competence (ICC) in courses such as *Cultures of English-Speaking Countries* and other culturally-focused subjects. The table includes items that explore how authentic materials enhance ICC, their effectiveness in real-life language use, and the potential challenges students encounter.

The data shows that respondents generally agree that authentic materials provide real-life examples of daily intercultural communication scenarios ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.690$) and help prepare them for multicultural interactions in seminars, workshops, and field trips ($M = 3.89$). Additionally, students expressed recognition that combining authentic materials with textbooks enhances their ability to grasp cultural nuances ($M = 3.83$). This suggests that students perceive a blended learning approach as more effective than relying solely on a specific type of material.

EFL students also demonstrated a positive attitude toward using authentic materials to develop ICC, both in classroom instruction ($M = 3.85$) and self-study ($M = 3.78$). These findings indicate that authentic materials are essential resources for enhancing ICC, particularly in communication with both native and non-native English speakers. This aligns with Hoang (2022), who found that students valued the practical nature of learning from authentic language use. The study highlighted those authentic materials motivated many participants to spend more time practicing English outside the classroom.

Moreover, students noted that authentic materials foster increased classroom engagement by making discussions more interactive ($M = 3.60$) and motivating participation in intercultural activities ($M = 3.63$). However, the data also reveals that students do not consider authentic materials as their primary instructional resource ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.925$). While they recognize the benefits of authentic materials, they still view textbooks as essential for developing ICC in English learning. This suggests that authentic materials should complement, rather than replace, traditional textbooks.

In terms of challenges, students reported difficulties with some authentic materials, noting that they often contain complex language structures ($M = 3.75$). They also highlighted challenges with informal language (e.g., colloquialisms), which can be hard to understand and use accurately without proper guidance ($M = 4.02$). Additionally, respondents expressed concerns about the credibility of certain materials, emphasizing that materials with unclear origins should be vetted by lecturers or experts ($M = 3.63$).

4.1.2 Results from Qualitative Data

Following the collection of quantitative data through the questionnaire, 10 respondents were purposefully selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. These interviews aimed to gain deeper insights into students' perceptions of using authentic materials to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The primary focus was on exploring their preferences, perceived benefits, challenges, and suggestions for enhancing the use of authentic materials in both classroom instruction and self-study. Additionally, the interviews sought to uncover how authentic materials contribute to fostering intercultural competence beyond what traditional textbooks provide.

4.1.2.1 Students' Preferences and Perceptions of Using Authentic Materials in the Classroom to Foster ICC

The qualitative data from the interviews supported the quantitative findings, showing that students have positive perceptions of using authentic materials to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC). All interviewees acknowledged that authentic materials are essential for understanding cultural perspectives, with many expressing preferences for certain types of materials that they found more engaging and effective.

From the interviews, it was clear that teachers use a variety of authentic materials, including newspapers, TV programs, movies, speeches, music lyrics, and more, to help students enhance their intercultural competence. However, four out of seven participants specifically highlighted movies as their preferred type of material. Movies provide an immersive learning experience that combines visual imagery, sound, and storytelling, making it easier to understand cultural nuances. For example, Interviewee 6 noted:

"In class, teachers often use newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, social media posts, music lyrics, advertisements, and brochures to expose students to genuine cultural perspectives and real-life contexts. Among these, I prefer movies the most. They provide an immersive experience that combines visual, auditory, and narrative elements, making it easier to grasp cultural nuances and context in a memorable way."

Similarly, Interviewee 2 emphasized the value of movies for improving cross-cultural communication by showcasing cultural practices:

"Teachers often use newspapers, movies, and TV programs. I prefer movies because they visually and emotionally showcase cultural norms, traditions, and communication styles in an engaging way."

Interviewee 5 also highlighted the impact of movies on maintaining attention and facilitating language learning:

"In movies, the movement, plot, and background attract my attention, so I can focus on the lessons and learn some sentence structures used in daily contexts."

Moreover, Interviewee 7 discussed how movies and TV programs offer a realistic and engaging portrayal of cultural elements beyond language:

"I personally prefer TV programs and movies because they provide a realistic and engaging way to experience different cultures. They show not only language but also tone, gestures, traditions, and social behaviors in context. Watching movies from different countries makes cultural learning more natural and enjoyable."

In addition to movies, some students found talk shows and TV programs particularly valuable in broadening their understanding of different cultures. Interviewee 4 shared:

"Watching talk shows is my preferred option because every speaker gives me great impressions. They provide me with valuable insights into various aspects of life, which is an asset for students like us to hone our intercultural communicative competence."

Music also emerged as a significant tool in helping students understand different perspectives. Interviewee 3 noted:

"Song lyrics often contain idioms, slang, and cultural references, making language learning more natural and engaging. Additionally, songs are easy to remember and enjoyable, boosting memorization and motivation. Through music, learners can explore historical and social issues, deepening their intercultural awareness in a meaningful way."

4.1.2.2 Students' Attitudes Towards Using Authentic Materials to Develop ICC

EFL students at Can Tho University generally held favorable views regarding the use of authentic materials to foster intercultural communicative competence (ICC). It is widely acknowledged that authentic materials play a crucial role in building confidence for cross-cultural interactions. Interviewee 1 stated:

"I feel more confident talking to foreigners because I understand their culture and etiquette. For example, TV shows like Friends help me communicate better by teaching me the

language and context. Social media posts also keep me updated on the latest trends and ways of speaking."

Participants consistently noted that authentic materials provide real-life exposure to linguistic diversity, sociocultural norms, and communicative conventions that are often missing in traditional textbooks. Interviewee 3 mentioned:

"I'm convinced that incorporating authentic materials is crucial for promoting intercultural communication because they offer a genuine window into the language, beliefs, and daily practices of various cultures... Movies draw learners in by showcasing cultural stories, body language, and visual symbols that textbooks simply cannot convey."

Additionally, students acknowledged that authentic materials like movies and TV programs offer genuine depictions of cultural behaviors, discourse strategies, and non-verbal communication patterns, which are essential for navigating diverse cultural settings and avoiding misunderstandings. Interviewee 4 explained:

"Movies enable me to learn about colloquial language, communication styles, and gestures. Understanding these elements helps me avoid unintended misunderstandings."

Digital platforms also serve as valuable tools for cultural exchange, allowing students to engage with diverse communication styles and societal norms. Interviewee 6 emphasized:

"Social media is currently the most powerful platform for cultural exchange, where people from various countries share perspectives, trends, and communication styles. For example, on TikTok and Instagram, cultural trends like greetings, customs, and ways of expressing opinions spread rapidly."

4.1.2.3 Students' Comparison Between Using Authentic Materials and Traditional Textbooks to Foster ICC

When comparing authentic materials with traditional textbooks, students expressed a clear preference for integrating authentic materials into their learning experiences. Interviewee 4 shared:

"I think authentic materials are more effective than traditional textbooks because they provide real-life context, current cultural insights, and natural language use. For example, movies and news articles expose me to authentic expressions, slang, and cultural nuances that textbooks often lack."

Interviewee 1 also emphasized the value of authentic materials for real-world communication:

"Authentic materials help me get an initial exposure to culture and practical communication skills, preparing me for real-life situations. They also broaden my understanding of cultural diversity and make me more open-minded."

Despite their benefits, some students pointed out challenges with authentic materials, particularly in understanding colloquial expressions, local accents, and the complexity of language. Interviewee 7 noted:

"They capture the dynamic nature of communication and expose us to everyday cultural expressions that textbooks might overlook. However, without proper guidance, they can sometimes be challenging due to complex language or culturally specific references."

In response, students who acknowledged these challenges emphasized the need for guidance from instructors. They believed that combining authentic materials with traditional textbooks offers a balanced approach to developing ICC, ensuring exposure to real-life language use while maintaining structured learning support. Interviewee 5 explained:

"From my viewpoint, a combination of authentic materials and textbooks is an ideal approach for fostering ICC."

4.1.2.4 Students' Recommendations for Enhancing the Use of Authentic Materials

While students recognized the immense value of authentic materials for developing ICC, they also offered recommendations on how to optimize their use. Many students noted that the effectiveness of authentic materials depends largely on how they are introduced and integrated into the learning process. Interviewee 1 suggested:

"In my opinion, to improve the use of authentic materials in English learning, teachers should provide cultural context and gradually introduce more complex content. Facilitating discussions to help students reflect on cultural differences is also beneficial."

Interviewee 2 added:

"I believe some authentic materials require teachers' instruction and support to maximize their benefits and apply them effectively in intercultural communication."

Beyond teacher guidance, students emphasized the importance of self-study. Interviewee 3 stated:

"Students can also use other media, like newspapers, music, and TV shows, in their self-study to improve their ICC."

Some students also suggested tailoring the use of authentic materials to individual needs. Interviewee 2 explained:

"You need to identify what skills or aspects you want to improve and choose materials that align with your proficiency level and cultural learning goals. You can also consult your teachers for guidance."

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Types of Authentic Materials Used by EFL Teachers to Develop Students' Intercultural Competence

Authentic materials have long been recognized as a crucial tool in language learning, particularly for developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Incorporating such materials into language education is essential for preparing students to engage effectively in cross-cultural communication within diverse global contexts (Jain, 2024). The increasing attention to authentic materials in EFL classrooms stems from their ability to bridge the gap between theoretical language instruction and real-world language use. These materials—ranging from articles and videos to podcasts—expose students to genuine cultural contexts and varied communication styles (Treve, 2023).

According to qualitative data from the interviews, EFL teachers utilize a broad spectrum of authentic materials to enhance ICC. The most frequently employed resources include movies, TV programs, talk shows, music lyrics, and newspapers. For example, one student reported that their teacher used TED Talks to introduce diverse global perspectives while helping students familiarize themselves with different speech patterns and rhetorical styles. These materials were often supplemented with guided analysis, discussions, or presentations, encouraging students to engage critically with intercultural communication.

The types of authentic materials used in EFL instruction vary depending on the specific topic or skill being taught, ensuring alignment with course learning objectives. Teachers expose students to cultural diversity and real-world communication by incorporating print media, audiovisual content, digital resources, literary works, and real-life documents. These materials are integrated into the curriculum through structured activities, discussions, and reflective exercises, allowing students to interact with authentic language in meaningful cultural contexts. Additionally, the use of authentic materials has been shown to motivate students, fostering not only linguistic competence but also a curiosity and deeper appreciation for different cultures.

4.2.2 EFL Students' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Authentic Materials in Developing ICC

To understand the effectiveness of authentic materials in fostering ICC, both survey responses and interview data were analyzed. The results consistently indicated that all students had a positive attitude toward using authentic materials to develop ICC, both in the classroom and through self-study.

As shown in Table 4.1 earlier, all survey items received high mean scores, particularly those related to exposure to real-life conversations, idiomatic expressions, and cultural contexts—key elements for ICC development. Specifically, the statement that received the highest mean score ($M = 3.97$) reflects students' belief that exposure to various authentic materials, including those featuring diverse accents and intonation patterns, enhances their ability to understand different native accents in spoken language. This aligns with Nuralisa (2025), who emphasized that authentic materials help students comprehend real-world spoken language, thus improving their listening skills by exposing them to native accents and speech patterns. Likewise, students in this study echoed the importance of diverse accents and intonation in improving their listening comprehension, supporting Jain's (2024) recommendation to integrate authentic media in EFL classrooms to enhance listening competence.

In addition, many students highlighted the role of multimedia-based authentic materials—such as movies and music—in shaping both language proficiency and cultural understanding. One interview participant (Interviewee 3) stated:

"Movies draw learners in by showcasing cultural stories and non-verbal signals such as body language and visual symbolism that textbooks simply cannot convey."

Indeed, movies provide valuable cultural insights and contextualized language exposure, underscoring the importance of authentic materials in both language acquisition and cultural understanding (Rao, 2019). The findings also revealed that authentic materials were acknowledged for boosting learners' motivation and confidence, particularly in multicultural environments or when discussing and presenting culture-related topics in class, as reflected by a mean score of 3.57 in Table 4.3 above. One interviewee (Interviewee 1) expressed:

"I feel more confident striking up a conversation with foreigners because I understand the culture and different etiquettes in communication..."

This finding is consistent with research by Husnawati (2024), which found that authentic materials not only improve language skills but also enhance students' intrinsic motivation and engagement. The integration of films, music, and podcasts, for instance, has been shown to bolster students' confidence in using English in real-life contexts (Vinh, 2022).

Moreover, the interview responses revealed that students found authentic materials particularly valuable in offering meaningful cultural insights. These materials helped them better understand idioms, humor, and other cultural expressions. Interviewee 4 highlighted this benefit:

"I think authentic materials are more effective than traditional textbooks because they provide real-life context, current cultural insights, and natural language use. For example,

movies and news articles expose me to authentic expressions, slang, and cultural nuances that textbooks often lack..."

However, the use of authentic materials can vary across different cultural and linguistic contexts (Treve, 2023). Consequently, students require proper guidance from instructors who possess expertise in language and intercultural communication to overcome potential challenges and maximize the effectiveness of these materials for ICC development. In line with this, quantitative data in this study indicated strong agreement with the statement:

"The informal and colloquial language in some authentic materials can be challenging to understand and use correctly without proper guidance from classroom lecturers,"

The statement received the highest mean score among the items ($M = 4.02$). This underscores the need for instructional support when integrating authentic materials into language learning. Some students face difficulties in interpreting idiomatic expressions, slang, and culturally embedded meanings, which may require additional explanation or scaffolding from educators. Additionally, some students expressed a preference for combining authentic materials with traditional textbooks. Interviewee 5 remarked:

"... From my viewpoint, the combination of both authentic materials and textbooks is an ideal approach for fostering ICC..."

Therefore, a hybrid approach—integrating structured learning with textbooks and immersive exposure to authentic materials—appears to be the most effective way to enhance both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence. This combination helps bridge the gap between theoretical language learning and real-world application, preparing students to use their language skills in diverse cultural settings.

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1 Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that EFL students view authentic materials—ranging from printed resources (e.g., newspapers, magazines, books, and literary texts) to audiovisual content (e.g., TV programs, movies, music, and podcasts), as well as digital materials from websites, blogs, and social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram), and real-life communication (e.g., interviews, speeches, and dialogues)—as highly effective in developing their intercultural communicative competence (ICC). These materials provide invaluable exposure to real-world language use, cultural nuances, and communication practices that are often absent in conventional textbooks.

The findings suggest that EFL students at Can Tho University prefer authentic materials over simplified textbooks due to their practicality, relevance, and ability to

create an interactive and immersive language-learning environment. Moreover, the majority of students believe that authentic materials not only contribute to improving their language proficiency and cultural understanding but also boost their confidence in expressing themselves in multicultural contexts. Thus, authentic materials serve as both a learning tool and a motivational resource, encouraging students to engage deeply with both the language and the culture in a meaningful and rewarding way. By increasing exposure to diverse communication styles and cultural expressions, these materials help learners become more flexible and receptive to various linguistic and social conventions, which is particularly crucial in intercultural communication. Understanding implicit meanings, gestures, and sociocultural references can significantly enhance the effectiveness of communication.

In line with the study's objectives, the results clearly indicate that authentic materials play an integral role in developing ICC by offering immersive, engaging, and culturally rich language experiences. As a result, learners gain the essential skills and confidence needed to navigate complex intercultural situations, preparing them for success in a globalized and culturally diverse world (Jain, 2024). Therefore, the integration of authentic materials into the curriculum is essential for promoting effective and meaningful intercultural communication skills among EFL learners. While these materials are highly valued for their real-world relevance, students also recognize the importance of traditional textbooks in providing the structural foundation necessary for language acquisition. Consequently, combining both authentic materials and textbooks in the curriculum is key to creating a well-rounded, effective language-learning experience that prepares students to communicate confidently and competently in intercultural settings.

5.2 Implications

The integration of teacher-selected authentic materials into EFL instruction is crucial for developing students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). As discussed earlier, these materials offer the practical, immersive, and engaging experience that traditional textbooks often lack, making them essential for maximizing student engagement and strengthening ICC.

One key implication is the gradual introduction of authentic materials to prevent students from feeling overwhelmed. Some students, especially those unfamiliar with how these materials are incorporated into the learning process, may initially struggle with the cultural complexities they introduce. Therefore, it is important to start with simpler, more accessible resources and progressively introduce more complex materials. Teachers should carefully sequence lessons to align with students' needs and learning contexts, ensuring a smooth progression that enhances students' cultural awareness and competence. When implemented effectively, authentic materials serve as a bridge to real-life experiences, motivating students to improve their ICC.

Another critical aspect is the role of teacher guidance in helping students navigate diverse cultural landscapes. Authentic materials often contain implicit and idiomatic

expressions, as well as varied communication styles, which can pose comprehension challenges. Teachers should act as facilitators, providing clear explanations, contextual support, and opportunities for discussion to help students interpret cultural knowledge accurately. Structured classroom interactions can further enhance students' intercultural communication skills, allowing them to engage more effectively in real-world scenarios. Additionally, teachers must clarify linguistic and cultural elements to prevent misunderstandings, demotivation, or negative perceptions toward the target culture or the materials themselves. By fostering an open-minded and receptive learning environment, educators can ensure that students engage fully with authentic materials. Moreover, teachers should design task-based activities that maximize the impact of authentic materials on ICC development. Interactive activities such as role-plays, group discussions, collaborative projects, and presentations encourage students to immerse themselves in real-world situations. These activities promote critical thinking, spontaneous responses, and insightful questions about various cultural issues (Oura, 2001). Even though students may not directly encounter such roles in real life, these activities provide valuable opportunities to practice communication skills and develop intercultural competence.

Ultimately, the thoughtful and selective integration of authentic materials into lessons is essential for enhancing students' ICC. While challenges may arise, especially for students unfamiliar with this approach, teachers play a vital role in guiding them through the learning process and helping them navigate cultural knowledge effectively.

5.3 Limitations

This study, while informative, has certain limitations. These limitations primarily relate to the study's scope, sample size, time constraints, and challenges in assessing the long-term impact of authentic materials.

Initially, the study aimed to gather data from final-year students across all English-related majors within the School of Foreign Languages. However, due to scheduling conflicts, students from the English Teacher Education program, who had already completed their coursework and were engaged in off-campus internships, could not participate. As a result, the study lacks insights from future English teachers, which may have offered a more comprehensive understanding of how authentic materials can influence ICC development in future educators.

Additionally, some participants may have provided responses they believed to be more favorable, rather than accurately reflecting their true experiences. Furthermore, the absence of direct classroom observations or experimental interventions limits the study's ability to objectively assess how authentic materials impact ICC development in real-world learning environments.

The time constraints of the research also posed challenges. Since the study was conducted within a single academic term, the long-term effects of using authentic materials on students' ICC could not be measured. Future research with extended time

frames and additional resources would allow for a deeper exploration of the sustained impact of authentic materials on ICC development.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

Given the aforementioned limitations, future research could explore several new directions, which are outlined below:

Firstly, future studies should consider broadening the study population to include a larger and more diverse group of participants. Research could involve students from different universities, proficiency levels, or even non-English major backgrounds. A larger sample size would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more nuanced understanding of how authentic materials influence students from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Secondly, future research could expand its scope to investigate additional factors contributing to ICC development beyond authentic materials. Psychological aspects such as self-confidence, adaptability, and openness to cultural differences, as well as motivational factors and teacher-related influences, are likely to play significant roles in shaping ICC. Investigating these factors would allow educators to adopt more effective strategies for enhancing students' ability to communicate effectively in intercultural contexts.

Lastly, future studies should compare various pedagogical strategies for implementing authentic materials in EFL classrooms. While this study focused primarily on students' perceptions, future research could identify the most effective instructional methods for integrating authentic materials to enhance both linguistic proficiency and ICC. Comparative research would offer educators practical guidance on optimizing the use of authentic materials to foster deeper cultural awareness and communication skills in EFL learners.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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