INTERDEPENDENT THEORY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

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Abstract:

Intercultural Communication Competence is essential in creating healthy relations and prevent conflict across numerous cultures. It also emphasizes the essence of accurate and proper information transmission among people. This study aimed to analyze existing literature and derive the perfect formula for learners to develop their Intercultural Communication Competence. A theory on Intercultural Communication Competence was generated using the deductive axiomatic approach. After the analysis and synthesis of related literature and studies, twelve axioms were formulated. From there, four propositions were identified: (1) Intercultural Communication Competence entails cultural actualization; (2) Intercultural Communication Competence calls for a comprehensive curriculum and assessment; (3) Digitalization boosts Intercultural Communication Competence; (4) Upskilled instructors are confident in refining learners' Intercultural Communication Competence. With these propositions, the Interdependent Theory of Intercultural Communication Competence was generated. This theory highlights the importance of the interdependence among cultural actualization, comprehensive curriculum, digitalization, and upskilled instructors in realizing the full potential of Intercultural Communication Competence of learners.

Keywords: culture, language learning, language teaching, intercultural communication competence

1. Introduction

Globalization has brought nations closer and Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) is required to address the communication with various groups of people around the globe (Griffith, Wolfeld, Armon, Rios, & Liu, 2016). Presently, ICC is an important

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topic in English Language Teaching (ELT) because language learners are expected to communicate in English with people of different lingua-cultural backgrounds (Nieto, 2010; Widodo, Wood, & Gupta, 2017). Scholars have stressed the key role of culture in language teaching and have claimed that the absence of culture will lead to failure in achieving ICC (Little, Devitt, & Singleton, 1989; Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2008; Atay, Kurt, Camhbel, Kas, & Ersin, 2009).

Intercultural Communication Competence encompasses one's skills, behavior, and understanding vital in suitable communication "*across differences*" at a cultural level (Deardorff, 2019). Byram (1997) stated that ICC is composed of Intercultural Competence (IC) and Communicative Competence (CC); which denotes one's capacity to effectively communicate with foreign speakers of a different culture. Moreover, he outlined five grouped *"saviors"* of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC): attitude, knowledge, skills of interpreting, skills of discovering, and critical awareness. Among the five *"saviors,"* critical awareness is a significant foundation in the relationship of teaching practices and learning strategies in both social and psychological aspects. The social aspect is concerned with involving the learners in an "*open learning environment*" to strengthen their knowledge about spatial and social relations to expand their learning horizons. Therefore, this leads to assisting the learners in discovering networks and establishing relationships to refine their sense of belonging. Anyone can only effectively communicate in the foreign language if he/she has developed his/her ICC in accordance with the *"saviors"* that Byram (1997) had postulated.

Approximately 1.35 billion people around the world speak English with 360 million as their first language and there are more than 50 English-speaking countries. While it is not an official language in most countries, it is currently the language most often taught as a foreign language. It is used as a communication language due to the convenience and ease it provides and its widespread nature (Ilie, 2019). With its international distinction, Kachru (1992) has claimed that the English language increased its "*intranational use*" in conventional "*inner- and outer-circle*" settings and encouraged its wide global usage in communication (Jenkins, 2007; Seidhofer, 2011).

Consequently, there are more "*non-native*" English speakers compared to that of "*native*" English speakers which makes the English language the property of native speakers and non-native speakers (Widdowson, 1994; Graddol, 2006; Seidhofer, 2011). The expansion of English as a "*lingua franca*" (ELF) (Jenkins, 2007; 2014; Seidhofer, 2011) brought interest to the methods in English Language Teaching in a multi-cultural level internationally (Baker, 2012; 2015; Corbett, 2003; Fang, 2011; 2017).

With the dawn of globalization, knowing that English serves as a lingua franca by many non-native speakers in a multicultural level, the question among scholars in the field is whether English language classes must be patterned with Anglophone cultures as the "*only norm*" (Baker, 2015; Wen, 2016). In this notion, the challenge to ELT is on how to ensure that the learners will develop their ICC and use it in the real world since the gap between theory and practice remains.

2. Literature Review

Intercultural communication was a consequence of the multiculturalism crisis. Edward Hall (1959) defines intercultural communication as "*a new discipline in human sciences*". For scholars Barnett and Lee (2002), intercultural communication refers to exchanging data amongst people from diverse cultures. In the middle of the 1970s, the term "*intercultural communication*" was swiftly in the field of communication studies. Later, American universities having schools in communication studies made this a compulsory course in offerings. Looking from a realistic perspective, people of all walks of life must form a network and communicate with people from different and other cultures across different states and countries. In the ESL/EFL classroom, the learners are trained to use the target language so they can effectively communicate in English once they are out in the real world. Therefore, success in communication chiefly rest on "*cross-cultural understanding*" (Liton, 2016). This is where the importance of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) comes into the picture.

In the ESL/EFL setting, the nature of "*intercultural education*" could include pragmatic, dialogic, and student-centered methods (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). Bakhtin (1981) asserts that in dialogic activity, the learners are engaged "*in a dialogue*" involving the manuscript, individuals, and the several voices embodied in the manuscript. With dialogues, the learners are able to co-create understanding through discovering, widening, and productively stimulating each other's concepts (Alexander, 2008; Littleton & Mercer, 2013). To cultivate ICC, dialogue entails the learners to be considerate and attentive with others' viewpoints (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Delanoy, 2008; Matos, 2011; Vrikki, Wheatley, Howe, Hennessey, & Mercer, 2019). Also, experiential activities such as games and drama let the learners create using their individual experiences (Kohonen, Jaatinen, Kaikkonen, & Lethovaara, 2017). Furthermore, dialogue emphasizes learning through documentary, actual or virtual conferences with other learners using the target language of a different nationality and culture (Secru, Bandura, & Castro, 2005). Among the materials used in dialogues, fictional materials (text) are preferably and rationally used compared to non-fictional materials. Since dialogues are learner-centered, experiential teaching is given less attention. This claims that the instructor's knowledge on the purpose of diverse text genres may help in facilitating the learners' intercultural knowledge and lead to further examination on instructional methods that will clarify the process of intercultural learning (Heggernes, 2021).

Although interacting with "*other cultures*" does not ensure the development of ICC, the subsequent reflection may encourage learning (Kohonen, Jaatinen, Kaikkonen, & Lethovaara, 2017). Critical instruction supporters emphasized the transformational probability of reviewing one's lived experience using analytic and insightful views leading to intercultural knowledge (Arizpe, Bagelman, Devlin, Farrell, & McAdam, 2014). Lastly, learner-centered tasks intend to convert passive learners to active learners who are self-makers of knowledge and others as well (Kohonen, Jaatinen, Kaikkonen, & Lethovaara, 2017). It is believed that various methods of instruction can be equally useful

in fostering ICC-related behaviors like inquisitiveness, honesty, familiarity, negotiation and open-mindedness, objectivity, and compassion (Byram, 1997; 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Imahori & Lanigan, 1989).

Formal schooling improves learners' ICC (Hismanoglu, 2011). A study reported that although English language instructors have encouraging attitudes towards ICC, they faced some hurdles during its application to their classes and lessons; namely time inadequacy, scarcity of instructional materials, and inadequate student exposure and interaction to "*foreigner environment*" (Vo, 2017).

In a retrospective study of articles from 2003-2013, Arasaratnam (2014) reported that most studies on ICC have inadequate cross-referencing. On a lighter note, the following studies have common findings regarding the role of empathy in developing the learners' ICC. Arasaratnam (2006) identified "*cultural empathy*" being the main aspect that leads to ICC, as seen in Arasaratnam & Banerjee (2011) and Arasaratnam & Doerfel (2005) Integrated Model of ICC. Considering cultural empathy as a feature of intercultural effectiveness provides negative relation to ethnic prejudice (Nesdale, De Vries Robbe, & Van Oudenhoven, 2012). It was also reported that cultural empathy is connected to intercultural effectiveness (Herfst, Van Oudenhoven, & Timmerman, 2008). Furthermore, cultural empathy is constructively linked with collaboration leading to increased skills in problem-solving and ICC (Euwema & Van Emmerik, 2007). Similarly, Hongling Zhang (2012) claimed that cooperative learning enhances the students' ICC; collective volunteer involvement supplements the progress of ICC among learners (Yashima, 2012).

Additionally, with the use of technology, the ICC of the learners is further developed through telecollaboration since the learners are exposed to other cultures even inside the classroom (Helm, 2009). Another similar finding among the studies of Arasaratnam (2006), Arasaratnam, Banerjee, & Dembek (2010), Arasaratnam & Doerfel (2005), and Matveev (2004) cited that the learners' interest in individuals from other cultures was recognized as a major component in the development of their ICC. Meanwhile, there are exceptional advantages to develop the teachers' ICC when they are given the opportunities in incorporating technology in class and experiencing online learning (McCloskey, 2012). Also, numerous studies on ICC were contextualized and specified either in the classroom, a certain country, or profession limiting our knowledge of ICC in a multi-disciplinary context (Arasaratnam, 2014). Looking at the pedagogical perspective, Intercultural Communicative Competence is simply a collection of views and measures which requires multidisciplinary scholarly explanation and development. Therefore, wider academic thinking anchored on research and a multidisciplinary strategy accepting cross-cultural openness with an inclusive appreciation of the value of intercultural communication in this globalized era is desirable to deliver what is expected from English language courses in developing the learners' ICC (Cetinavci, 2012).

A prior review investigated the standing of English Language Teaching in relation to the expected skills to be learned by the students. The study revealed that the enthusiasm, information, and skills in ICC are important to correctly and effectively socialize with people from varied cultures which makes ICC the ideal type of competence

third to linguistic and communicative competence (Wiseman, 2002). The review mainly reported that despite the large number of published articles that profoundly focused on ICC, these studies were unclear on their differences from the principles of its "*highly criticized*" forerunner such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and the specifics of teaching the language on a cultural level (Cetinavci, 2012). Consequently, students majoring in English have problems with information as an element of ICC. As information has three sources which encompass the textbook and the teacher as the main sources of information in class, the "*teaching content*" has varied interpretations. The two differing attitudes regarding information propose that "*classroom knowledge*" may be biased yet essentially advantageous. The external viewpoint illustrations, numerical terms, and choice of some tactful situations appear to show both positive and negative pictures of the "*target and native cultures*" which may cause illogical outlooks towards intercultural communication. Hence, it has to be stressed that one's mental capacity of distinguishing, noticing, and exchanging meaning needs polishing to lessen discrimination or bias towards any cultural group (Liu J., 2009).

Although scholarly studies and reviews have consolidated information on Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), the methods behind concept and application remain hazy and invite further investigation, especially in a multidisciplinary context. Thus, there is a need for research to examine how theory is interpreted in the field (Byram, Holmes, & Savvides, 2013; Duncan & Paran, 2018). The aforementioned literature and studies provide a substantial understanding of why a theory in Intercultural Communication Competence should be developed. These gaps call for a theory in Intercultural Communication Competence which is the Interdependence Theory.

Accordingly, the focus of this study is on generating an interdependence theory of Intercultural Communication Competence. Due to the increasing focus on ICC in ELT, it is pertinent to map and critically analyze relevant studies and theories to detect what they reveal about the processes of ICC in various aspects.

3. Research Objective

The purpose of this study was to generate a theory that would assist to develop and enhance learners' Intercultural Communication Competence.

3.1 Relevance of the Study
Despite the increasing focus on ICC in ELT and language teaching as a whole yet the vague pool of knowledge, it is pertinent to map and critically analyze relevant studies and theories to fill the gap pertaining Intercultural Communication Competence.

4. Materials and Methods

This section consists of the sources of data along with the research design and framework.

4.1. Sources of Data

Through purposive sampling (Patton, 2002), data for this this study were taken from published articles and theories / models related to Intercultural Communication Competence. The inclusion criteria are: (1) articles published from June 2002 to June 2021; (2) theories related to culture and communication, and Intercultural Communication Competence; (3) studies focused on intercultural communication and/or ICC concerning language teaching and other fields; (4) studies published in English. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria are news articles, opinions, unpublished thesis, and dissertations. After an exhaustive desktop research, 52 selected sources were analyzed for this study *(Appendix 1)*.

4.2. Research Design and Framework

This study utilized the deductive approach in theory development. The deductive approach begins with the formulation of universal ideas down to "*specific conclusions*" (Gilgun, 2009). Bayne (2018) labeled this approach as "*top-down thinking*" which generally starts with various axioms or "*primitive assumptions or propositions*" (Delaram & Valilai, 2018).

For Marciszewski (1981), axioms are claims or "*basic theorems.*" These are assertions that may be recognized in the theory under investigation in the absence of any "*demonstration from all other statements*" where the theory was construed (Lehrer, 2018). Once the axioms are formulated, these axioms are managed and integrated into propositions (Zhang, Peng, Shen, Zhinan, & Tao, 2019). In short, propositions are the outcome of various axioms. In this study, the process in formulating the Interdependent Theory of Intercultural Communication Competence is anchored on the deductive axiomatic approach illustrated below following the steps in generating a theory adapted from Padua (2012).
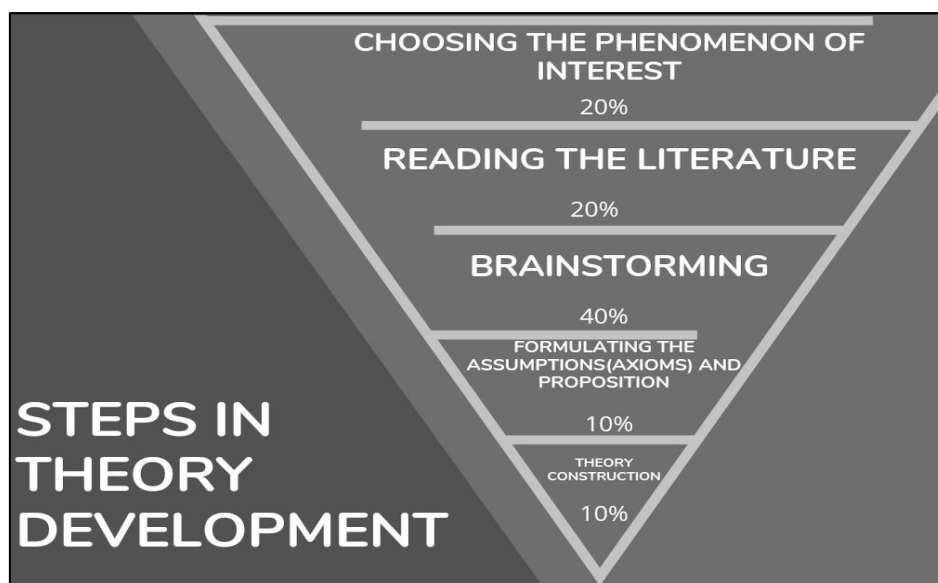

Figure 1: Deductive Axiomatic Approach Steps in Theory Development
(Adapted from Padua, 2012)

The following are the steps in theory development using deductive-axiomatic approach adapted from Padua (2012):

1) Choosing the Phenomenon of Interest. The first step in theory development utilizing the deductive axiomatic approach is choosing the point of interest which is imperative because this will serve as the focus of the theory development which might involve diverse primary concepts (George, 2019).

2) Reading the Literature. It is important to find resources that will provide substance in developing a theory. Thus, looking through the various published articles and researches is the second step that a theorist must importantly ponder (Selden, 2016). In this phase, the phenomenon of interest can be tackled, extensively elaborate the gist, and expansively discuss the relevant information to expand the phenomenon's information base (Bennett & Royle, 2016). The most significant purpose in reading the literature is to increase the information base that will support in contextualizing the sense of the nature on the aim of theory development. With this, Mintzberg (2017) stressed that discovering "*solutions and recommendations in addressing the gap*" would be less challenging and interpreting the axioms and propositions will be reinforced.

3) Brainstorming. This is the procedure of getting related and relevant evidence which links other concepts and offers diverse standpoints that gives emphasis to different features which could help the axioms and propositions to emerge (Paulus & Kenworthy, 2019). This step encourages consistency and unity of usable data to be utilized in the course of theory development (Henningsen & Henningsen, 2018). Partaking in brainstorming is significant to concurrently organize factual data and relevant studies to demonstrate the significance of the phenomenon (Seeber, de Vreede, Maier, & Weber, 2017).

4) Formulating the Axioms and Propositions. Once all the relevant and related research articles and studies were gathered, considerably expounding their importance, and carefully organizing and connecting these pieces of evidence and concepts, what follows is formulating the axioms and propositions (Prasad, Reddy, & Nizami, 2018). Identifying the axioms and propositions is a crucial stage in theory development. Basically, axioms are "*basic theorems and primitive assumptions*" which lead the proposition, whereas propositions are the statements that are made from the axioms (Novikov, 2011). Both axioms and propositions are indispensable foundations to generate a theory. After the thorough analysis and brainstorming, twelve axioms and four propositions were formulated respectively.

5) Theory Construction. The last stage in theory development via the deductive axiomatic approach is the arrangement of all the formulated propositions to classify and generate a theory (Stergiou & Airey, 2018). The generated theory encompasses interconnected proofs and notions, propositions, ideas, and meanings which leads in discussing a methodical understanding of forecasting and elucidating a phenomenon (Kivunja, 2018). After combining the four

propositions relating to intercultural communicative competence, the interdependence theory emerged.

5. Results and Discussion

This section contains the phenomenon, axioms, propositions and the generated theory.

5.1. Phenomenon

The phenomenon that was investigated in this paper is Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC). A multiracial and international community makes ICC an essential element of communication. In the realm of English Language Teaching, ICC has significant weight to make language learners confident in interacting with native speakers. However, helping the learners in developing ICC is still vague despite the amount of research and literature in this field. Hence, the researchers would like to develop a theory that will serve as the blueprint in helping the learners achieve ICC.

5.2. Axioms

The literature and theories related to Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) were reviewed and twelve axioms were identified: (1) ICC requires Identity, socialization, and safety; (2) ICC is boosted when learners are provided opportunities to learn and reflect; (3) Learners need the right attitude and cultural skills to develop ICC; (4) Cross-cultural awareness helps immerse students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC); (5) ICC needs accommodating linguistic and non-linguistic aspects in ELT; (6) ICC is language learning (to learn and not to do is really not to learn); (7) There are various Teaching models for ICC development; (8) Curriculum updating is needed for the successful acquisition of ICC; (9) Utilizing technology enhances ICC; (10) Teachers need to be proactive and flexible to enhance leaners' ICC; (11) Teachers face challenges towards ICC, and (12) Teacher training will boost their confidence in refining learners' ICC.

Axiom 1: ICC requires cultural identity, socialization, and safety.

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) is profoundly ingrained in a person's observations and consciousness of "*home culture*" because it involves vital parts in interacting with speakers from other backgrounds (Liu & Fang, 2017; Giles, 2008). Once cultural identity is established, people adjust their communication according to situations and people involved considering cultural diversity by employing intercultural sensitivity (Yuges, 2020). With this, maintaining face according to culture, situation, and individual is easier (Ting-Toomey, 1988). However, when learners feel uneasy and intimidated, they do not express themselves (Gudykunst, 1995). It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure a conducive and friendly environment for the learners to develop their ICC. Therefore, ICC is practiced when each speaker's culture is represented, without being dominated during interaction (Al-Araki, 2015).

Axiom 2: ICC is boosted when learners are provided opportunities to learn and reflect.

It is important to immerse learners in an intercultural environment where they are given the chance to express their and others' identities and cultural views, then reflect on it (Терещук, 2015). English language teachers need to provide opportunities for students to have learning experiences and intercultural encounters (Jin, 2014). This way, students are given the chance to learn and reflect about other cultures through experience. One way of achieving this is through the creation of the intercultural educational space in higher education institutions which has a positive effect on the process of ICC formation (Pryshliak, Polishchuk, & Lupak, 2020). Another is the integration of cultural education into ESL/EFL classes and get students involved in the intercultural communication activities in the learning process. Integrating culture in class with a variety of activities; like brainstorming and role-playing help enhance ICC (Mitchell, Pardinho, Yermakova-Aguiar, & Meshkov, 2015). Thus, the incorporation of culture into language teaching is a must because it highlights the importance of learning through communication and culture, enabling learners to identify with both the target language and culture, while making use of a wide range of target language learning activities (Pryshliak, Polishchuk, & Lupak, 2020). One more way to expose learners to other cultures is through "*study abroad or immersion programs*" (Nguyen, 2021). The "*overseas experience*" intensifies learners' ICC (Hismanoglu, 2011; Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Sobkowiak, 2019). Intercultural exposure supports learners to enhance their ICC and optimistic views about human diversity (Peng & Wu, 2016; Waal, Born, Brinkmann, & Frasch, 2020). Possessing the knowledge and experience of life overseas equates to added chances of mingling with individuals from other language cultures in the target language (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). Also, this overseas experience helps increase students' skills in dealings with locals by the day (Hismanoglu, 2011; Karabinara & Guler, 2013). However, intercultural and international experiences do not guarantee growth in ICC when there is no reflection (Kim, 2017; Akdere, Acheson, & Jiang, 2021).

Axiom 3: Learners need the right attitude and cultural skills to develop ICC.

There is an inverse connection between ICC and disinterest (Yeke & FatihSemerciöz, 2016; Badrkoohi, 2018; Bingzhuan, 2018) which means that a learner who lacks ICC has low motivation to learn a new language, in short, reluctance to learn due to pessimism. To battle this, learners need to be prepared for ICC on a behavioral level. They have to set communication and interest with other cultures as sources of motivation in English language learning to develop their ICC (Szerszeń & Romanowski, 2018). Another aspect to consider in developing ICC is open-mindedness towards different cultures and enjoying the interaction with people of different cultures (Galante, 2015; He, Lundgren, & Pynes, 2017). After obtaining the right knowledge on intercultural communication during language courses, learners can now express their identities while engaging in meaningful discussions about cultural views and value interacting with people from other cultures while manifesting sensitivity towards cultural differences and complexities (Popescu & Iordachescu, 2015; Köroğlu, 2016).

Axiom 4: Cross-cultural awareness helps immerse students' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).

Cultural and intercultural dimensions integration into ESL/EFL instruction enables both language learning and effective ICC (Liton, 2016; Abdulrahman, Usu, & Tanipu, 2016). To attain a well-rounded development of students' ICC, it is imperative to use "*culturally appropriate*" communication etiquette such as salutations, courtesy, addressing modes, expressions, etc. as well as to explore aspects of another language's culture (Makhmudov, 2020; Karabinara & Guler, 2013). Learners must be mindful of the language skills and culture of the country where the language is studied. They must also be aware of common cultural differences and stereotyping, and that knowledge of the language alone is not a guarantee of success in an international environment (Hismanoglu, 2011; Candel-Mora, 2015). It is important to remember that knowledge and critical cross-cultural awareness are crucial dimensions of ICC (Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai, 2016).

Axiom 5: ICC needs accommodating linguistic and non-linguistic aspects in ELT.

Thought is made from language: what people see is based on what you say; all languages do not translate to each other (Pryshliak, Polishchuk, & Lupak, 2020). One's Intercultural Communication Competence manifests upon speaking to someone from another culture. One can be seen as polite, rude, or indifferent not only with words but also with actions (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956). This is where the role and importance of understanding, lenience, and compassion concerning the communication standards of others should be manifested to achieving success and establishing relations while learning a new language (Suchankova, 2014).

Axiom 6: ICC is a manifestation of Language Learning.

Being able to convey your ideas and have it received clearly is an indicator that language is power (Терещук, 2015). Having that power to influence the minds and people of different culture is proof of one's ICC and Intercultural Communication Competence leads to language learning. (Candel-Mora, 2015).

Axiom 7: There are various Teaching models for ICC development.

There are tested teaching models to help learners develop their ICC: multi-strategy or integrated approach of conventional and traditional teaching while including culture during language classes (Tran & Duong, 2018; Liton, 2016; Romanov & Snegurova, 2017; Andryukhina, Fadeeva, & Negri, 2017; Mitchell, Pardinho, Yermakova-Aguiar, & Meshkov, 2015); explicit teaching such as providing a list of terms then followed by discussion for gradual formation of ICC (Szerszeń & Romanowski, 2018; Hirotani & Fujii, 2019; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012); and use of literature (Aksyonova & Akhtambaev, 2014; DevísArbona & Silvia-Maria, 2015) to examine the motifs contained in any country's folk literature, link them together employing similarity (to local culture), which would greatly facilitate ICC during language classes. Teachers should ponder on utilizing texts and "literary translation" activities for intercultural learning development. It was noted that

fictional manuscripts are much commonly employed and ideally preferred for usage than nonfictional manuscripts. Furthermore, it is also significant to "contextualize" the teaching of the English language (Reid, 2015) based on a country's culture like British English versus American English and its other variants.

Axiom 8: Curriculum updating and holistic assessment is needed for the successful acquisition of ICC.

There needs to be a shift from traditional to intercultural teaching practice in ESL/EFL (Jin, 2014; Hirotani & Fujii, 2019). Updating the content of the discipline allows possibilities to explore the use of the English language in different contexts (Andryukhina, Fadeeva, & Negri, 2017; Galante, 2015). The methods of forming the Intercultural Communication Competence of learners need a change in approach to instruction and scholarship due to the swift variations occurring within the community of the English language (Havril, 2015; Pryshliak, Polishchuk, & Lupak, 2020). The English Language Teaching curriculum has to evolve along with the global society. Alongside an updated curriculum and instruction, language teachers have to implement a well-rounded and varied form of assessment to allow students' discovery of culture in actual practice which may lead to highly developed and improved ICC levels (Fantini, 2009; Fong & De Witt, 2019). Mitchell et al. (2015) mentioned the use of varied activities that makes the learning process motivating and enables learners to identify with both the target language and culture.

Axiom 9: Utilizing technology enhances ICC.

The application of technology assists learners to become skillful and independent users of a language (Thomé-Williams, 2016). Connecting to another part of the globe (even at home) is made possible with technology. Hence, the use of emails, telecollaboration, virtual reality, video conferencing, social networking sites such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc. help students explore other cultures. With these technologies, with video conferencing and email being frequently used, learners' interest in communicating with speakers from other cultures enhances ICC (Терещук, 2015). Students are able to consider their perceptions about their peers and themselves through a new lens. In this "*superb venue,*" the learners ponder about their own culture and share their ideas and involvements in a much profound outlook (Lee & Markey, 2014; Bingzhuan, 2018).

The use of technology helps overcome "*time and space,*" allows language learning and cultural learning, offers personalized instruction and offers a "*sense of accomplishment*" in learning the target element of verbal communication at an intercultural level (Hamilton & Woodward-Kron, 2010; Hřebačková, 2019). The "*virtual exchange*" helps promote critical thinking, individual commitment, teamwork, and delegation within the team when using telecollaboration (Szerszeń & Romanowski, 2018; Shadiev, 2020; Akdere, Acheson, & Jiang, 2021). It also enables students to explore authentic understanding, knowledge, and exposure to other cultures. Employing multi-media, simulated interactions, and Virtual Reality (VR)-based learning atmosphere

seems to have encouraged learners to develop a more realistic self-assessment of their level of Intercultural Communication Competence (Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai, 2016).

Axiom 10: Teachers need to be proactive and flexible to enhance leaners' ICC.

O'Toole (2018) emphasized that teachers and learners need to "abandon the path of resistance" and choose a more authentic path to achieve ICC (Popescu & Iordachescu, 2015). Reflective listening skills, prior cross-cultural experiences, having a global outlook, recognize the variation in learner expectations, develop intercultural learning styles, employ effective intercultural communication settings require flexible classroom management, serious disciplines, and clear instructions from the beginning of the course (Nguyen, 2021; Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005). Language teachers should be flexible, open-minded, creative, and unbiased during classes (Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai, 2016). They have to show openness towards teaching cultural aspects to learners (Heggernes, 2021).

Teachers must ensure a supportive learning environment to enable the learners to enhance their skills (Ledwith & Seymour, 2001) as well as a harmonious and encouraging atmosphere (Mitchell, Pardinho, Yermakova-Aguiar, & Meshkov, 2015) that would support in developing the learners' ICC in a global orientation. Aside from this, it is indispensable to integrate intellectual, emotional, and social frameworks of studying and teaching the English language to obtain supreme efficiency of Intercultural Communication Competence (Ali, Kazemian, & Mahar, 2015).

Axiom 11: Teachers challenges towards ICC.

The concept of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) seems to be unclear to teachers (Ghanem, 2017). Francis & Jean-François (2010) reported that teachers do not fully comprehend the principles of ICC and do not know how to teach it. In turn, language teachers had difficulty including ICC in the classroom (Kuplevatskaya, 2019). They also did not have enough teaching materials such as books to implement and incorporate concepts of ICC in classes (Karabinara & Guler, 2013). Some of them had existing intercultural biases which may lead to frequent communication problems when learners adopt this and face the real world (Bagui & Adder, 2020). Since teachers cannot provide optimum instruction, the learners did not always execute the right expressions in fitting situations during class activities such as role-plays. When these issues continue to be unsolved, Intercultural Communication Competence would stay still and can lead to culture shock among other negative effects (Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai, 2016).

Axiom 12: Teacher training will boost teacher confidence in refining learners' ICC.

It is important to train teachers to be willing to and have the confidence in including ICC during class/ lessons (Abdulrahman, Usu, & Tanipu, 2016). It is vital for teachers to have the professional and practical measures to test and assess intercultural knowledge and competence appropriately which are in alignment with the content of the curriculum (Pryshliak, Polishchuk, & Lupak, 2020). For them to help refine the learners'

ICC, it is a requirement for teachers to have professional knowledge on Intercultural Communication Competence themselves (Ghanem, 2017; Kuplevatskaya, 2019; Nguyen, 2021).

5.3. Propositions

After synthesizing the axioms, the authors generated four propositions. These were: (1) Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) entails cultural actualization; (2) Intercultural Communication Competence calls for a comprehensive curriculum and assessment; (3) Digitalization boosts Intercultural Communication Competence; and (4) Upskilled instructors are confident in refining learners' ICC.

Proposition 1: Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) entails cultural actualization.

Having the discernment of one's culture is important to understand and differentiate other cultures. Learners need the right "cultural information," ability, and attitude to develop ICC (axiom 3) since multicultural awareness helps immerse learners' Intercultural Communication Competence (axiom 4). Moreover, ICC is boosted with socialization and chances for exposure ensuring safe expression and reflection (axioms 1 & 2). It should be remembered that ICC needs to accommodate the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of EFL/ESL (axiom 5). As a manifestation of language learning, **ICC entails cultural actualization**.

Proposition 2: Intercultural Communication Competence calls for a comprehensive curriculum and assessment.

There is a need for curriculum updating and all-inclusive assessment for the successful acquisition of ICC (axiom 8). Administrators must see to it that there are enough and suitable materials for infusing culture in ESL/EFL classes to develop ICC. Aside from that, various teaching approaches can be utilized for effective ICC development such as integrative, explicit, hands-on, and contextualized approaches (axiom 7). Therefore, enhancing the learners **Intercultural Communication Competence calls for a comprehensive curriculum and assessment**.

Proposition 3: Digitalization boosts Intercultural Communication Competence.

Gone are the days where the teacher is the sole source of knowledge and information, the 21st century is the era of technology. With technology, the world is brought closer. Teachers and educators are now utilizing technology to improve ICC of learners. The different online platforms allow learners to communicate with other cultures within a click at the comforts of their homes without requiring international travel, especially for those who cannot afford it (axiom 9). Teachers and Learners need to be proactive and flexible to enhance ICC. They have to adapt and adjust to exhaust the full benefits of technology and creativity to enhance ICC (axiom 10). Thus, **digitalization boosts Intercultural Communication Competence**.

Proposition 4: Upskilled instructors are confident in refining learners' ICC.

Teaching culture along with the target language is not easy. Factors such as the scarcity of materials that could fit the student's needs could fail the goal of achieving ICC and language learning. Additionally, instructors have some challenges with ICC concept; they do not know what and how to teach the competency because they do not know it themselves (axiom 11). There is a call for the professional training on ICC to boost teacher confidence in refining learners' ICC. As the responsibility of the administrators, providing technical and professional training on ICC may help equip language teachers on the appropriate materials and methods that they can employ to ensure the quality of instruction (axiom 12). Hence, **upskilled instructors are confident in refining learners' ICC**.

5.4. Generated Theory

Intercultural Communication Competence is **interdependent** on cultural actualization, comprehensive curriculum and assessment, digitalization, and upskilled instructors. All these elements must be present to effectively develop and enhance the Intercultural Communication Competence of learners. The interdependence of all these elements strengthens interculturally oriented teaching-learning practice in the development of Intercultural Communication Competence in ESL/EFL classes. Moreover, the interdependence of these elements emphasizes technically and academically equipped teachers to utilize appropriate materials, techniques, and strategies to enhance learners' ICC. This last component of this theory is vital and needs attention to deliver the objectives of ELT in relation to Intercultural Communication Competence. Thus, this theory is developed and shall be called the **Interdependent Theory of Intercultural Communication Competence** (Figure 2).
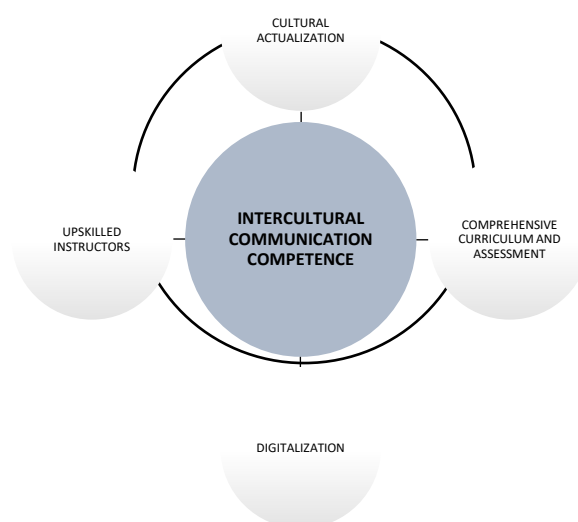

Figure 2: Conceptual Model of Interdependent
Theory of Intercultural Communication Competence

6. Recommendations

Further studies on ICC and validation of the interdependent theory are suggested by the proponents.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to generate a theory that would help learners to develop and enhance their Intercultural Communication Competence. According to the interdependent theory, the four foundations in achieving and enhancing Intercultural Communication Competence must be all present to ensure success. Since cultural actualization and digitalization are already given attention, administrators may want to consider paying attention to the curriculum, assessment, and teacher support to fully exhaust their capacity in developing the learner's ICC using all available resources. The theory may serve as a reference to everyone who is interested in developing the learners' ICC not only in the academe but also in other disciplines requiring ICC to connect to the world for better and improved communication.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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Appendix 1: Sources of Data

No.	Author (s), Publication date	Title
1.	Tran, T.Q., Duong, T.M. 2018	The effectiveness of the intercultural language communicative teaching model for EFL learners
2.	Donna Humphrey 2002	Intercultural communication: a teaching and learning framework
3.	Ana Clotilde Thomé-Williams 2016	Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence in Portuguese through Skype and Facebook
4.	Hussain Ahmed Liton 2016	Adopting Intercultural Communication Issue in Teaching English
5.	Triyanti Abdulrahman, Novi Rusnarty Usu, Zulkifli Tanipu 2016	Teachers' Perspectives on the Integration of Culture and EFL
6.	Yuriy A. Romanov , Tatyana A. Snegurova 2017	Intercultural Communication and Teaching Russian to International Students at Language Summer Courses
7.	Діана Терещук 2015	Developing Intercultural Communication Competence Through Intercultural Communication
8.	L. M. Andryukhina, N. Yu. Fadeeva, Gérard De Negri 2017	Development of Ecological Culture of Students in The Process of Intercultural Communication in Foreign Language
9.	Peng Bingzhuan 2018	Study on Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Competence of College English Based on Modern Information Technology
10.	Carla Ghanem 2017	Teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence: The Perspective of Foreign Language Graduate Student Instructors
11.	Azam Badrkoohi 2018	The relationship between demotivation and intercultural communicative competence
12.	Pawel Szerszeń, Piotr Romanowski 2018	Do contemporary e-learning solutions support the development of intercultural competence? Insights from European projects
13.	Chris O'Toole 2018	Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Intercultural Competence: A Phenomenological Exploration of Trainees' Experiences within Global Virtual Training Environments
14.	Maki Hirotani, Kiyomi Fujii 2019	Learning proverbs through telecollaboration with Japanese native speakers: facilitating L2 learners' intercultural communicative competence
15.	Galante, Angelica 2015	Intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching: towards validation of student identity
16.	Zeynep Çetin Köroğlu 2016	Measuring English Language Teacher Candidates' Intercultural Sensitivity: A Key Element to Foster Intercultural Communicative Competence
17.	Liubov Kuplevatskaya 2019	Teacher's professional linguo-communicative competence in the context of intercultural communication
18.	TMonika Hřebačková 2019	Teaching intercultural communicative competence through virtual exchange
19.	Ozlem Yuges 2020	Enhancing the development of intercultural communicative competence in business and study environments

20.	Hayat Bagui, Fatima Zohra Adder 2020	Promoting Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence through English Literary Texts: Students' Attitudes and Teachers' Challenges
21.	Tinghe Jin 2014	Getting to know you: The development of intercultural competence as an essential element in learning Mandarin
22.	Kudratbek Makhmudov 2020	Ways of Forming Intercultural Communication in Foreign Language Teaching
23.	Oksana Pryshliak, Vira Polishchuk, Natalia Lupak 2020	Impact of Intercultural Educational Space on the Formation of Intercultural Competence of Future Teachers at a Pedagogical Higher Education Institution
24.	Hong-Thu Thi Nguyen 2021	Project-Based Assessment in Teaching Intercultural Communication Competence for Foreign Language Students in Higher Education: A Case Study
25.	Lily A. Arasaratnam; Marya L. Doerfel 2005	Intercultural communication competence: Identifying key components from multicultural perspectives
26.	Jiajia Liu; Fan (Gabriel)Fang 2017	Perceptions, awareness and perceived effects of home culture on intercultural communication: Perspectives of university students in China
27.	Verena Behrnd; Susanne Porzelt 2012	Intercultural competence and training outcomes of students with experiences abroad
28.	Prue Holmes; Gillian O'Neill 2012	Developing and evaluating intercultural competence: Ethnographies of intercultural encounters
29.	Anna DevísArbona; Silvia-Maria Chireac 2015	Romanian Folk Literature in Our Classes: A Proposal for the Development of Intercultural Competence
30.	Jan Hamilton; Robyn Woodward-Kron 2010	Developing cultural awareness and intercultural communication through multimedia: A case study from medicine and the health sciences
31.	Agnes Katalin Havril 2015	Improving Intercultural Competence of Female University Students in EFL within Saudi Arabia
32.	Elena Ye. Aksyonova; Roman Akhtambaev 2014	Literary Translation Learning as an Aspect of Intercultural Communication
33.	Ren-Zhong Peng; Wei-Ping Wu 2016	Measuring intercultural contact and its effects on intercultural competence: A structural equation modeling approach
34.	Murat Hismanoglu 2011	An investigation of ELT students' intercultural communicative competence in relation to linguistic proficiency, overseas experience and formal instruction
35.	Miguel Ángel Candel-Mora 2015	Attitudes towards Intercultural Communicative Competence of English for Specific Purposes Students
36.	Selma Karabinara; Cansu Yunuslar Guler 2013	A Review of Intercultural Competence from Language Teachers' Perspective
37.	Eva Reid 2015	Techniques Developing Intercultural Communicative Competences in English Language Lessons
38.	Selçuk Yeke; FatihSemerciöz2016	Relationships Between Personality Traits, Cultural Intelligence and Intercultural Communication Competence
39.	Ye He; Kristine Lundgren; Penelope Pynes	Impact of short-term study abroad program: Inservice teachers' development of intercultural competence and pedagogical beliefs

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40.	Teodora Popescu; Grigore-Dan Iordachescu. 2015	Raising Students' Intercultural Competence through the Process of Language Learning
41.	Hana Suchankova 2014	Developing Intercultural Competences during the Language Tuition. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences. 116; 1439-1443. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.412
42.	Rustam Shadiev 2020	A review of research on intercultural learning supported by technology
43.	Monika F.de Waal; Marise Ph. Born; Ursula Brinkmann; Jona J.F.Frasch 2020	Third Culture Kids, their diversity beliefs and their intercultural competences
44.	Somyos Fungchomchoei; U-maporn Kardkarnklai 2016	Exploring the Intercultural Competence of Thai Secondary Education Teachers and its Implications in English Language Teaching
45.	Mesut Akdere; Kris Acheson; Yeling Jiang 2021	An examination of the effectiveness of virtual reality technology for intercultural competence development
46.	Sissil Lea Heggernes 2021	A critical review of the role of texts in fostering Intercultural Communicative competence in the English Language classroom
47.	Ting-Toomey, S. 1988	Intercultural conflict styles: A face-negotiation theory
48.	Giles, H. 2008	Communication accommodation theory
49	Gudykunst, W. B. 1995	Anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory: Current status
50.	Young Yun Kim 2017	Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation
51.	Sapir, Edward 1921	Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech
52.	Whorf, Benjamin L. 1956	Language, Thought, and Reality