Intercultural Communicative Competence among Malaysian Primary ESL Learners from Teachers' Perspective

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Abstract
Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has emerged as a prominent educational objective globally, emphasising the importance of effective communication in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. Recognising the influential role educators play in learners' development and achievements, this study explores ICC from English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' perspective in primary education setting and investigate their perceptions and pedagogical practices in cultivating this competence in the classroom. This qualitative research engaged nine primary ESL teachers selected through purposive sampling technique. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and document analysis, with thematic analysis employed for data interpretation. The findings revealed a positive response from Malaysian primary ESL teachers towards ICC development in the classroom. Results also highlighted diverse materials and pedagogical practices employed by the teachers to foster the competence. Additionally, the teachers affirmed the imperative of enhancing ICC among learners at primary school level. This research contributes valuable insights into the perspectives and practices of primary ESL teachers, shedding light on their pivotal role in fostering learners' ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries.
Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence, ICC, Culture, Teachers' Perceptions, ESL Classroom

Introduction
The integration of culture in language teaching has always been highlighted for the interconnection between language and culture (Kramsch C, 1996; Makhmudov, 2020; Samovar et al., 2017; Sun, 2013). Viewing that language needs to be taught with the integration of culture Himonidi (2023); Kim (2020); Nguyen (2017), a person is unable to fully master the language being learnt without having the cultural knowledge of the target language. In fact, including culture in language teaching can actually develop learners' language skills (Ali et al., 2015; Genc & Bada, 2005; Nguyen, 2017). By developing their cultural knowledge, learners are able to understand the language better by relating the

background knowledge to the vocabulary and grammatical forms of the language (Kitao, 1991).

In relation to this, in response to the increasing demands of our borderless world, the term, intercultural communicative competence, was introduced. Expanding upon the concept of communicative competence, the notion emphasises the imperative of integrating cultural elements into language teaching.

Problem Statement
Aiming to produce intercultural speakers in the interconnected world, many countries have shifted their teaching goals to ICC. In Malaysia, despite the focus of communicative competence in the curriculum, the Ministry of Education has introduced imported textbooks Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015); Ngu & Aziz (2019) to promote ICC implicitly in the ESL classrooms. For instance, one of the imported textbooks, Get Smart Plus 4, includes 21st century competencies especially intercultural awareness to provide learners with a deeper understanding of cultures around the world (Mitchell & Malkogianni, 2019). These information and knowledge about cultures in various countries provide an opportunity for educators to foster learners' ICC.

Despite that, there is a dearth of literature in examining Malaysian teachers' perceptions and the actual development of ICC among learners in the classroom. On contrary to the studies undertaken in other countries to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences to enhance their learners' ICC Banjongjit & Boonmoh (2018); Cheewasukthaworn (2017); Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai (2016), the topic remains under studied in Malaysian context, particularly in primary education setting. In view of the influence of teachers' standpoints on their classroom implementations and the importance of ICC development among the learners, this study aims to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences in fostering the competence in the primary ESL classroom.

Review of Related Literature
Definitions of Intercultural Communicative Competence
Arising from the limitations of communicative competence, Byram introduced the notion of ICC. For its aim to ensure successful communication by producing intercultural speakers, the aforementioned term has gained an attention among educators and it has become the trend of English language education (Hoff, 2020; Zamanian & Saeidi, 2017).

Regardless of the popularity of the notion of ICC in various fields, consensus on its definition is yet to be reached. The differences in perceptions towards "culture" and the embodiment of various concepts have affected how ICC is defined and thus making it difficult to have a precise definition (Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Brunsmeier, 2017; Deardorff, 2006).

Bennett and Bennett (2004) define the competence as "the ability to communicate effectively in cross cultural situation and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts". Similarly, Fantini (2019) defines it as "a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself". Meanwhile, Deardorff (2006) defines ICC in detail, which is

"the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes". Specifically pointed to the field of language education, Byram defines ICC as the 'ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language' (Brunsmeier, 2017; Byram, 1997). He highlights that a foreign language refers to any language other than the first language (Byram, 2020).

Models of Intercultural Communicative Competence
Several ICC models have been introduced by scholars across diverse disciplines. This study specifically examines and reviews two models, namely Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence and Fantini's Dimensions of Intercultural Competence.

Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence
Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence model was introduced for the purpose to develop intercultural speakers who are able to mediate between people of different cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997). In addition to communicative competence, he included intercultural competence in his model, as depicted in Figure 1.
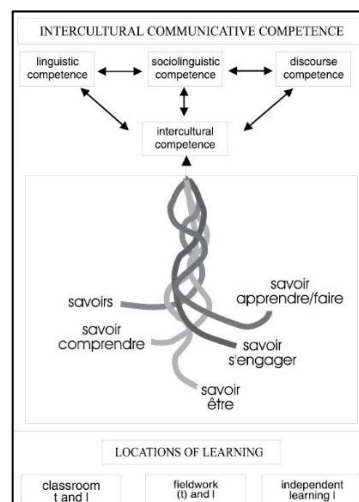

Figure 1: Byram's model of Intercultural Communicative Competence
Source : Byram (1997)

Byram includes the locations where ICC can be acquired, which are in the classroom, fieldwork and independent learning (Byram, 2020). As the name suggests, in the classroom, learners develop ICC with guidance provided by the teacher. In fieldwork, teacher determines the pedagogical structure and educational objectives and learners develop the competence with limited contact with the teacher or other learners. Meanwhile, in independent learning, learners continue to reflect their learning and develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Byram also underscores the significance of intercultural competence within the model. As illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the competence comprises five factors which affect people's ability to communicate interculturally, which are as explained in Figure 2.2.
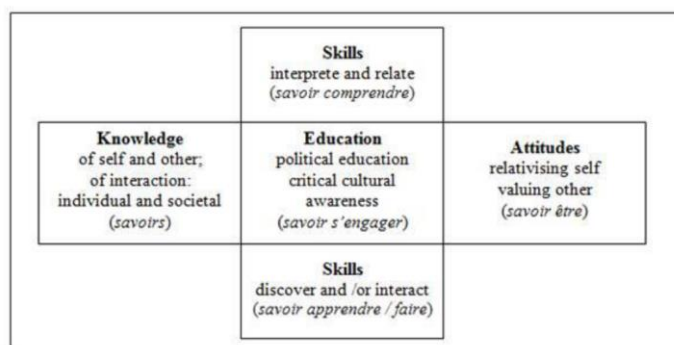
Figure 2: Intercultural Competence Model by Byram
Source : Byram (1997)

i. Knowledge (*savoirs*): Knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.

ii. Attitudes (*savoir être*): Curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own

iii. Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/ faire*): Ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices, and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction

iv. Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre):* Ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own.

v. Critical cultural awareness (*savoir s' engager*): An ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

Byram's model proposes the ability of intercultural speakers to build relationships while speaking in the foreign language. In addition to the ability to communicate effectively, intercultural speakers are considerate of the other interlocutor's opinions and needs, as well as mediate interactions between people from different backgrounds and continue developing communicative skills (López-Rocha, 2016). His model has become the reference of many scholars in their studies (Coperías Aguilar, 2002; Liu, 2021; Tiurikova, 2021). Nonetheless, it is also critiqued for its oversimplified model which does not meet the complex nature of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009; Hoff, 2020; Matsuo, 2012).

Fantini's Dimensions of Intercultural Competence
Fantini defines ICC as 'a complex of abilities that are needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with other speakers who are from a language and cultural background different from one's own' (Fantini, 2008). He explains that there are many interrelated components of intercultural competence, making it 'a complex of abilities', including a cluster of characteristics, three areas, four dimensions, target language proficiency, and developmental levels (Fantini, 2008). Similar to Byram's models, Fantini claims in his work that ICC consists of four dimensions, as depicted in Figure 2.3.

Note:

A+ : Awareness
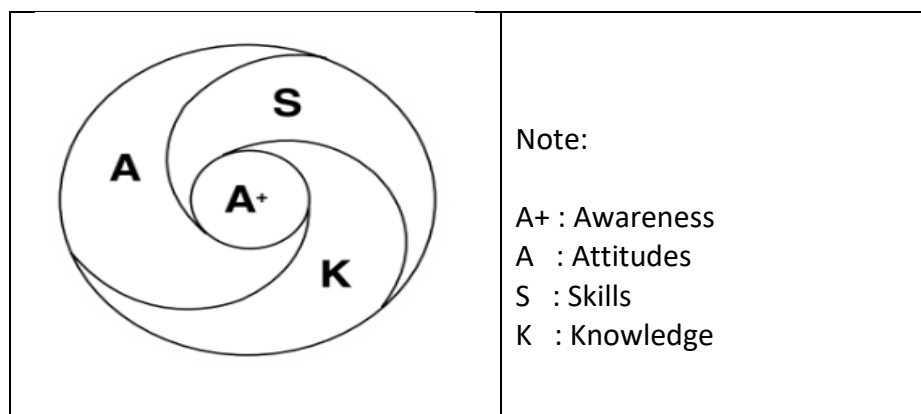A : Attitudes
S : Skills
K : Knowledge

Figure 3: Fantini's Dimensions of Intercultural Competence
Source: Fantini, 2000

Overall, the four dimensions are knowledge, (positive) attitudes (or affect), skills and awareness (Fantini, 2008). It is noticeable that awareness is in the centre and it is critical to intercultural competence development among learners. In order to develop ICC, the elements of Attitudes, Skill, and Knowledge play important roles to enhance intercultural awareness of the learners. Meanwhile, the awareness is important to promote development of the other three skills as well (Fantini, 2008; Thao & Sirinthorn, 2016). He further explains that a person can better develop intercultural competence with the contact and experience with people of other languages and cultures in a positive setting (Thao & Sirinthorn, 2016).

Adapting both models into the current study, this article seeks to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences from the aspects of intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes and intercultural skills and the intercultural components are defined as below:

i. Intercultural Knowledge: General knowledge of learner's own culture and foreign cultures and the understanding of people's world views on cultures.
ii. Intercultural Attitudes: The ability to respect, be curious and open towards other cultures
iii. Intercultural Skills: The ability to observe, interpret, relate, analyse and evaluate own and other cultures.

Teachers' Perceptions on Intercultural Communicative Competence
In exploring ICC from teachers' perspectives, few research has shown that many educators over the world have little knowledge or misunderstandings towards the principles of ICC (Brunsmeier, 2017; Hasanah & Gunawan, 2020; Liao & Li, 2020). For instance, a research conducted on intercultural teaching approaches and practices of Chinese teachers in English education reveals that the participants perceived intercultural competence as skills and only a few made remarks on intercultural knowledge (Liao & Li, 2020). In spite of insufficient knowledge or misconceptions, numerous research shows that educators are generally positive towards the notion and they are actually aware of the importance of ICC (Estaji & Rahimi, 2018; Hoa & Vien, 2019; Özisik et al., 2019; Fitriyah et al., 2019; Zamanian & Saeidi, 2017). In a study conducted by Brunsmeier (2017), Germany teachers believed that it was optimal to promote ICC in primary EFL classrooms, despite facing several challenges.

Developing Leaners' Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Classroom
As ICC has been promoted in several countries, research also has been carried out in exploring teaching strategies in the classrooms. In a research conducted in Thailand, it was discovered that short stories had positive impact on secondary learners' ICC especially in interpreting and identifying dimension (Feeney & Gajaseni, 2020). The learners were also able to develop positive attitudes and openness towards native English speakers and their cultures through the stories. The use of foreign films was also proven to be helpful to develop learners' ICC in a case study conducted by Yue (2019) in China.

Besides that, in a study conducted by Brunsmeier (2017), Germany primary teachers developed learners' ICC by asking learners to relate and interpret the information they had. They also had real time interaction activities such as direct or mediated contacts with people from other cultures. Similar activity was also incorporated in the classrooms in the United States and in Europe where telecollaboration approach was applied to develop intercultural speakers (Liu, 2019). The study shows that this approach had a positive effect on learners' ICC than traditional classrooms. The competence was also taught through virtual exchanges such as computer-assisted language learning in Czech Republic (Hrebacková, 2019). In-class and out-of-class work such as quizzes, online meetings, brainstorming, and information-exchange tasks were some of examples of virtual exchange tasks often conducted in the class. It was found that these tasks allowed learners to have positive impact on their learning, besides enjoying greater degree of satisfaction with the course and subject itself.

Studies of Intercultural Communicative Competence in Malaysian Context
In addition to the emphasis of communicative competence, elements ICC are found to be integrated in the current curriculum where learners need to be equipped with necessary skills, including 21st century skills, in order to keep pace with the rapidly emergent global economy. For instance, learners are able to develop their ICC, particularly the component of attitudes, when they are able to generate questions about learning and are open towards other people's perspectives, values, individual traditions and society (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2022). Besides that, learners can develop their intercultural knowledge when they are able to obtain and explore knowledge effectively in both local and global contexts, besides understanding issues regarding information that they have acquired (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2022). These 21st century skills are integrated in the Content and Learning Standards and thus, by mastering Content and Learning Standards in the English Language curriculum, learners are able to acquire the 21st century skills which allow them to be able to compete in the globalised world (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2022).

In spite of the relevance of ICC to the curriculum, the study of ICC in Malaysian English language classrooms is yet to be fully explored, particularly in primary level. A relevant study carried out by Hadi and Shah (2020) shows that primary ESL teachers were neutral towards the cultural content in the books. This finding is in contrast with another study conducted by Kiss and Rimbar (2021) whereby primary English language teachers in rural Sarawak viewed that the content of the textbooks are inappropriate for the locals as it is worlds apart in the aspect of culture and economy.

Meanwhile, a study by Abdullah and Abdullah (2018) reveals an interesting finding that Malaysian preschool teachers had conflicting attitudes towards multicultural education. The

participants were positive towards trainings received on multicultural education but they had some misconceptions and misunderstandings on the fundamental principles of multicultural education training and practices. Some also viewed that the training is irrelevant to their teaching in the class and this would only create social conflicts.

On the other hand, in secondary schools, one of studies conducted by Abdul Rahim and Jalalian Daghigh (2020) highlights that there is a lack of local cultural content in the textbooks. Despite that, the activities in the imported textbooks were found beneficial to develop learners' ICC as learners' attention were drawn to own cultural context through awareness-raising tasks such as comparing source culture with target culture or other cultures. Another study conducted by James and Aziz (2020) agrees that there is a lack of local culture in the imported textbooks. In spite of the fact that local culture is not focused in the secondary English language classroom, their research shows that learners are generally positive towards culture learning and the inclusion of target culture in the textbooks.

In another study conducted by Manjet et al (2016) to explore secondary school students' intercultural understanding through English Language Intercultural Reading Programme, the findings reveal that literature is important to promote intercultural understanding among students as this would heighten students' intercultural knowledge and bring positive changes in their intercultural behaviour.

The previous studies on ICC elements reveals a literature gap in the field of discipline where ICC in Malaysian primary ESL classroom is understudied. Besides that, as highlighted by Zamanian and Saeidi (2017), teachers' conceptions, convictions and beliefs determine which aspects are practically implemented in their classrooms. Teachers' perspectives would influence learners' development of ICC, hence, making this research to be prominent to be carried out in Malaysian primary ESL classroom from teachers' perspectives.

Research Questions
The present research aims to answer the following questions:
RQ1: How do teachers perceive the importance of ICC in primary ESL classroom?
RQ2: How do teachers develop learners' ICC in the classroom?

Research Methods
Participants
This qualitative study employed involved nine participants who were selected via purposive sampling method. The participants were six female and three male teachers who were in-service teachers at Malaysian public primary schools. Besides being Year 4 English language teachers, all participants had a minimum of five years experiences in teaching the subject. They also had experiences in intercultural communications.

Instruments
Instruments employed in this study included semi-structured interviews and document analysis, which consisted of reflective writing and lesson plans. Prior to data collection, a brief explanation related to the study was given to the participants and their consents were obtained.

In semi-structured interviews, researcher prepared a list of questions which were categorised into two sections. The first section was on participants' demographic information while the second section of the interview was about intercultural communicative competence. The second section consisted of three sub-sections, which asked about different components of ICC. Open-ended questions were asked during the interview and the research might ask additional questions for further inquiry.

Meanwhile, in reflective writings, the participants reflected and recorded their experiences in their journals, as in solicited diaries by Bartlett and Milligan (2021). A total of 11 reflective writings were collected electronically and the data was analysed to answer all research questions. Additionally, 11 lesson plans were gathered to complement the data obtained from reflective writing and interviews. Using different instruments allows the data to be triangulated, so as to reduce biasness and enhance credibility of the research.

Data Collection Procedures
The time period for data collection in this study was two months. The data, particularly reflective writing and lesson plans, were collected fortnightly in the first month. The participants submitted their documents via the Internet. Meanwhile, the interview data was collected in the second month. Considering the geographical locations of the participants, the researcher conducted the interview online via Google Meet. Each interview session was about half an hour. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed for the purpose of data analysis.

Results and Discussion
To answer both research questions, the qualitative data obtained was analysed using ATLAS.ti version 23 software. After transcribing the data, the researcher coded the data deductively and it was analysed to look for emerging themes. The results were then categorised to answer the research questions.

RQ1: Teachers' Perceptions on the importance of Intercultural Communicative Competence Development
Generally, participants acknowledged the imperative need to develop ICC among learners in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms. This was supported by findings unveiled in previous studies (Brunsmeier, 2017; Estaji & Rahimi, 2018), where teachers think that intercultural communicative competence was suitable to be developed in English language classrooms.

In the aspect of intercultural knowledge, the participants felt that learners would be able to broaden their horizons on various cultures and enhance their language proficiency including their vocabulary. This would also promote their intercultural attitudes as they would learn to be tolerant, respect and empathetic to other cultures. This was proven in a study among secondary learners in Thailand where the learners' English proficiency and attitudes were enhanced (Lee et al., 2023). In the following excerpt, a participant explained how intercultural knowledge was beneficial to her learners.

"Because the English language can be a good medium. It's a win-win situation. Pupils can both learn about other cultures and also targeted language to represent

the facts or content that I'm teaching at the moment. And pupils can gain more insights on other cultures and at the same time adding more new vocabulary."

(Interview Transcript- P05)

Meanwhile, developing learners' intercultural attitudes was important to raise learners' awareness to react appropriately during intercultural communication. As highlighted by a participant:

"This is very important. You see, it is crucial for them to have the curiosity […] and openness and respect towards the culture, because, uh, when they know and understand the different countries of people's culture, they will have the […] sense of openness, of like accepting, yeah, their cultures and respect, so that when the foreigners came in or come in, they would be able to know, I can't do this, we should do this, do that, this kind of thing, that kind of thing."

(Interview Transcript- P09)

It was also mentioned by a participant (P02) that developing intercultural attitudes especially curiosity would motivate learners to learn the language. She explained, "they need to be curious first so that they can learn something new." This aligned with Oroujlou and Vahedi's (2011) study, where attitude was essential in raising learners' proficiency and efficiency in learning a language.

Regarding intercultural skills, the participants reported that the mastery of intercultural skills would promote the acquisition of problem-solving and higher order thinking skills. One of the participants (P01) pointed out, "I think these skills are very important to have as the pupil need to […] solve problems. Uhm, and […] they might encounter, uh, in the future."

Additionally, another participant commented, "it is good to develop the skills that you mentioned earlier among the primary school pupils. Yeah, it may […] develop the pupils' openness and respect to other culture." Similarly, P05 explained that developing their skills "can lead them to become good learners and having the thirst to seek more knowledge in the future." These were echoed by other participants, highlighting the need of intercultural skill development to enhance learners' intercultural knowledge and attitudes. Similar finding was obtained in Akatsuka (2019) where higher order thinking skills would enhance learners' attitudes and language proficiency.

Among the intercultural components, findings indicated that some participants highlighted the primary focus on intercultural attitudes as positive attitudes would encourage the development of intercultural knowledge and skills. Their standpoint was echoed by German teachers in Brunsmeier's (2017) study, where they felt that it was the precondition for learners' ICC development. In another study (Fernández-Agüero & Chancay-Cedeño, 2019), Ecuador lecturers also emphasised the enhancement of intercultural attitudes than the other components. Meanwhile, some participants placed the emphasis on intercultural knowledge, explaining that learners had to acquire intercultural knowledge before developing intercultural attitudes and skills. Nonetheless, some participants claimed that these components were equally crucial for the learners as each of them played an important part. This was agreed by Cai and Lv (2019) that these components were intricately connected,

despite their statement regarding the necessity of intercultural knowledge and attitudes as prerequisites for intercultural skills.

Ultimately, all participants unanimously concurred that fostering learners' intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes and intercultural skills would heighten their awareness during engagements in intercultural communication. They observed that learners' language skills were improved, particularly speaking skill. They were also more aware in the choices of words as well, besides having an expansion of their vocabularies. Furthermore, the development of ICC enhanced learners' confidence and attitudes when they dealt with foreigners. These findings were supported by other scholars (Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai, 2016; Rohmani & Andriyanti, 2022; Zhai & Razali, 2020), where the acquisition of ICC was beneficial to learners especially their language skills.

RQ2: Materials and Pedagogical Practices to Foster Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Classroom

In addition to the textbook material, the findings suggested that the participants used extra materials to develop learners' ICC. One of the most frequently used material was visual materials, such as pictures, posters and videos. This aligned with the suggestions Benthien (2021) made, which was to provide additional materials like videos to supplement the lesson. As studied by various scholars Banjongjit & Boonmoh (2018); Benthien (2021); Galante (2015); (Müller-Hartmann & Von Dithfurt (2004); Yue (2019), these materials were proven to be beneficial in developing learners' ICC.

Besides that, the data indicated that the participants obtained various resources and ideas from the Internet. Resources such as worksheets, activities and tasks were accessed via the Internet. As highlighted by Marwa et al (2022), internet contains a wide range of resources to enhance learners' ICC. As pointed out by a participant, the use of online materials is beneficial.

"Of course, I think the Internet is a very good source of getting more sources that are related to the lessons. Any kinds of lesson or any kinds of topics that you want. Videos and audios for listening activities, especially kid's songs, for example. Worksheets made by other creative teachers from other countries can be beneficial to me because to make my own, it will take so much time. The activities that I got from Pinterest especially helps me to be more create and proactive in teaching English and also teaching other cultures. "

(Interview Transcript- P05)

Scholars like Müller-Hartmann and Von Dithfurt (2004) also suggested the use of internet to enhance learners' intercultural knowledge. Subsequently, the activities or tasks were then conducted collaboratively in the classroom where learners complete the tasks in pairs or groups. Some of the tasks and activities were completing I-think maps, slide presentations, and projects including searching for information. These tasks were commonly conducted after the participants showing the videos or other visual materials to the learners. The conduct of project work in the classroom was corroborated with the textbook analysis, wherein it emerged as the predominant activity in fostering the development of ICC. This also aligned with Irimia's (2012) discovery where project works were useful in promoting the

competence. It was worth noting that a participant also conducted flipped classroom where she assigned tasks to the learners, such as search for information, prior to her lesson so that they had a better understanding during the lesson. Her experience to conduct flipped classroom was proven to be effective in enhancing learners' ICC in a study conducted by (Ma and Wu, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings revealed that teachers conducted storytelling in the classroom. The use of stories was effective to develop learners' ICC in various studies, such as the study about short stories conducted by (Feeney and Gajaseni, 2020). Besides a minor development of intercultural attitudes, it was discovered that short stories can improve learners' intercultural skills like comparing and relating skills.

Expanding beyond the stories in the textbook, some participants mentioned that they shared their personal experiences during the lesson to enhance learners' intercultural knowledge and attitudes. For instance, a participant shared, "I use stories uh, with this I say, sharing my experience and relate it to the stuff that we are learning…" Eventually, they carried out follow-up activities to evaluate and improve learners' comprehension. For example, discussion, brainstorming and other comprehension tasks, such as creating new ending for the scenes in the stories. This discovery aligned with the findings unveiled in a few studies Banjongjit & Boonmoh (2018); Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai (2016); Moreau (2021); Müller-Hartmann & Von Dithfurt, (2004) where teachers shared cultural experiences, conducted discussion and brainstorming to develop leaners' intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills. On top of that, the technique of using dialogic and student-centred activities like discussion was found to be the most frequently conducted activity to enhance learners' ICC in Heggernes's (2021) study.

The data also revealed that the participants conducted quizzes and games in the classroom. This finding aligned with the results obtained from a study conducted by Hrebacková (2019) where quizzes and brainstorming were conducted to enhance learners' ICC through virtual exchanges like computer-assisted language learning. Comparably, the use of games is found to support the development of intercultural understanding at primary level in a study conducted by (Benthien, 2021). Additionally, the findings indicated that several participants conducted role plays to enhance learners' intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills. This discovery was similar to the findings uncovered in several studies conducted by various scholars (Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Müller-Hartmann & Von Dithfurt, 2004), proving that role play was beneficial for the development of ICC among learners.

In a nutshell, the participants in this study employed various techniques to enhance learners' ICC. It is worth noting that a participant suggested blended learning in developing learners' intercultural attitudes, in which more than one technique was used. In the researchers' point of view, blended learning is not only suitable to be employed to inculcate learners' intercultural attitudes but all these components. As evidenced in several studies Baron-Earle (2013); Lwanga-Lumu (2020); Madya (2020), blended learning was favourable in developing learners' intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes and intercultural skills.

Conclusion

Based on the qualitative analysis, it can be concluded that the integration of ICC in the classroom was responded positively among primary ESL teachers. Additionally, the findings indicate that teachers employed a wide range of techniques and additional materials in enhancing learners' ICC. Despite encountering various challenges, teachers were of unanimous view that this competence is important to be taught in primary education. By looking into teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices related to ICC, this study does not only add depth to the existing literature but also shed light on the practical application and significance at primary education level. In addition to that, the recognition of the importance of teaching ICC at primary school level indicates a potential paradigm shift towards a more culturally inclusive pedagogy. This research also contributes to bridging the gap of literature by providing valuable insights into the practical aspects of fostering learners' ICC in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms, thereby offering educators and policymakers a foundation for informed decision-making and curriculum development. future research can delve into the exploration of ICC from a different stakeholders' perspective, such as learners' perspectives. Findings from other perspectives can provide a more comprehensive view of the integration in the classroom and can suggest more alternatives for effective pedagogical practices. Alternatively, future studies might investigate the current study from a quantitative approach, which involves a larger population size that can uncover the resemblances of these findings.

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