# Factors Affecting the Intercultural Communicative Competence Development of Cadets At People's Police College 2

Nguyen Thi Hong Tuoi
*People's Police College 2 – Viet Nam*

**Abstract**
The purpose of this study, in theory, is to emphasize the importance of culture in learning a foreign language in general, and learning English for cadets in particular. Furthermore, this research has significant practical consequences that will benefit everyone involved. Teachers can recognize the merits and weaknesses of their own actual teaching based on the findings of the questionnaire as well as the student's interview. Teachers are expected to enhance their teaching skills as a result of this. Students, on the other hand, can obviously utilize the language more successfully if they are completely aware of the critical function of culture and the importance of learning about culture when learning a language. The findings from this study suggest that in general the students had rather good ICC level. Nevertheless, if going into more details about its sub-variables of ICC which include language competence and intercultural competence, it was clear that the students' intercultural competence was considerably far better than their linguistic competence. More specifically, it can be seen from the study that students had high intercultural competence in terms of attitudes, knowledge, skills and awareness. In addition, three main groups of categories namely learner-related factors, teacher-related factors and learning environment-related factors were investigated. Three broad mentioned factors were found highly affected the development of EFL students. Student-related factors, more specifically, were explored to play a prerequisite role in the learners' process of ICC development. Teacher-related factors and learning environment-related factors, similarly, were seen to affect to the ICC development among students positively.
**Keywords:** intercultural communication competence (ICC)

## I.    Introduction

There has been a surge in interest in culture and language learning in general, and esl/efl learning in particular, in recent years. obviously, learners must be familiar with a foreign language's culture in order to properly comprehend and efficiently learn it. it is thought that learners who do not understand the context of a new language would fail to grasp it. culture is seen as one of the stepping stones toward linguistic proficiency. in other words, culture and language acquisition are two sides of the same coin, with one side being more important than the other. Brown (1994) argues, "a language is a component of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intimately connected to the point where one cannot separate the two without losing the relevance of either language or culture" (p.189). indeed, culture and language work together to help people attain their ultimate objective of speaking the target language fluently. this is especially important in the age of globalization, when students have greater opportunity to interact with individuals from many cultures. as a result, it is critical to emphasize the critical function of inseparable culture in language development.

Given the aforementioned tendency, it is evident that intercultural communicative competence plays such a big role in the field of english teaching and learning in this age of globalization and international interactions. rather than focusing on significant issues related to developing learners' communicative competence in english, such as phonology, morphology, vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and the like, language teaching and learning in recent years has placed a greater emphasis on expanding learners' knowledge of intercultural communicative competence (Bachman 1990; Council of Europe 2001; Zofina, 2008). indeed, as can be observed today, most english education curricula place a strong emphasis on multicultural dialogue. Many language scholars (e.g., Bennet 1997; Lazar et al 2007) believe that include intercultural communication in language acquisition is essential since it may lead to entertaining situations or, worse, confusion and misunderstanding, or "fluent fools" where culture knowledge is lacking. when it comes to english learning and teaching in particular, this is completely true. Almost every study written on icc in EFL contains a portion about how essential icc has become in recent years (Byram, 1997).

In the current context of teaching and learning about culture in English in Vietnam, the author's observation and experience is that cultural aspects are less focused on the curriculum, despite the fact that the majority of teachers are aware of the importance of integrating culture into language teaching and learning. Furthermore, while cultural themes are substantially more prevalent in new textbooks for students than in older textbooks, which helps to highlight cultural components to some extent, teaching techniques among instructors remain constant.

Despite the fact that they should have exploited these cultural features methodically, teachers are shown to dive into cultural concerns that occur in classes. Furthermore, teachers have differing perspectives on the frequency and usefulness of incorporating cultural themes into english instruction. merely a few professors are said to be successful in this type of activity, whereas the bulk of teachers are seen only giving lectures.

Other key difficulties that may obstruct students' development of icc in the real-world learning setting at people's police college 2 include a lack of time, mixed-level students, big class sizes, and a truly multicultural atmosphere. Indeed, with a 45-minute time and an average of 35 students per class, as well as factors like different ability levels, the ineffectiveness of learning culture among students is inescapable.

The goal of this paper is to explore the factors that affect the development of intercultural communicative competence of efl students in the context of people's police college 2. therefore, the paper focus on:

- To determine the level of icc of efl students at people's police college 2;
- To find out the factors that affect the icc development of efl students at people's police college 2;

**Definition of intercultural communicative competence**

The term intercultural communicative competency (ICC), which is currently in widespread usage, encompasses a wide range of ideas, making it difficult to come up with a clear and distinct definition. Furthermore, in recent years, this phrase has become widely used in practically every industry, including language learning and teaching, healthcare, human resources management, and corporate communication. As a result, establishing an agreement on what constitutes intercultural communication skills is challenging (Deardorff, 2006a). Because ICC is difficult to describe, it's noteworthy to note that different academics use different terminology to refer to the concept of ICC. For example, Polisca (2011) uses the terms "cultural awareness," "cultural sensitivity," "intercultural awareness," and "intercultural competency" to describe this concept. Other studies have utilized terms like intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communicative competency, intercultural understanding, and cross-cultural communication (e.g. Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997; Fisher et al, 2004; Levy, 2007). In a poll of more than 200 intercultural researchers and professionals, Fantini (2005) discovered that intercultural communicative competency is the most standard, common, and logical term to use to clear up any uncertainty regarding the phrase. The phrase "communicative competency," which has been used in language teaching and learning since the 1970s, is comparable to this one.

**Table 1:** Components of Intercultural Competence (Sercu et al, 2005)

| Knowledge | Skills/behaviour | Attitudes/traits |
|---|---|---|
| • Culture specific and culture general knowledge<br>• Knowledge of self and other<br>• Knowledge of interaction: individual and societal<br>• Insight regarding the ways in which culture affects language and communication<br>*Savoirs* | • Ability to interpret and relate<br>*Savoir-comprendre*<br>• Ability to discover and/or interact<br>• Ability to acquire new knowledge and to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction<br>• Metacognitive strategies to direct own learning<br>*Savoir-apprendre / savoirs-faire* | • Attitude to relativize self and value others<br>• Positive disposition towards learning intercultural competence<br>*Savoir-être*<br>• General disposition characterized by a critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration and one's own<br>*Savoir-s' engager* |

**Table 2:** Intercultural communicative competence and sub-components (Fantini, 2005)
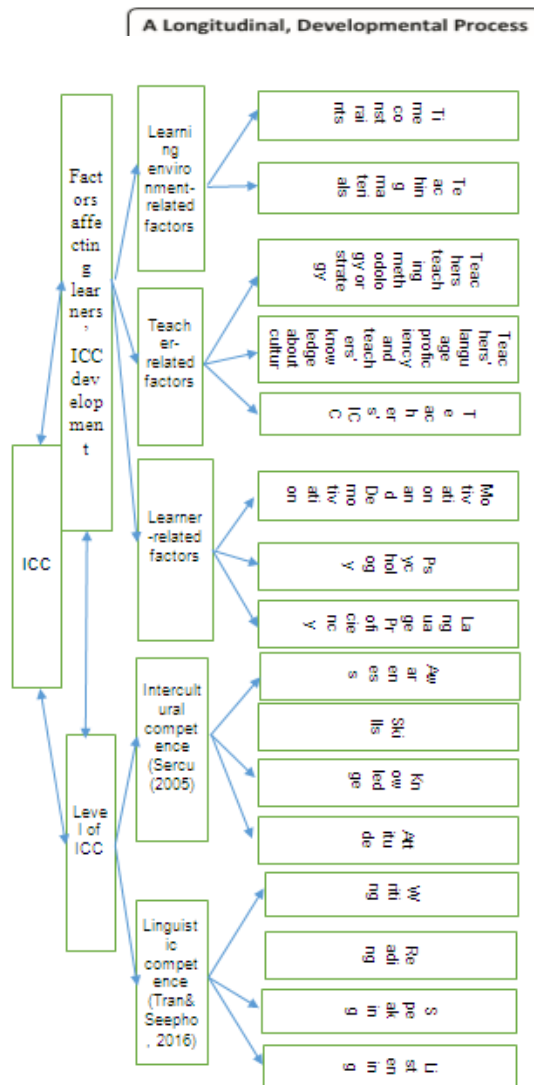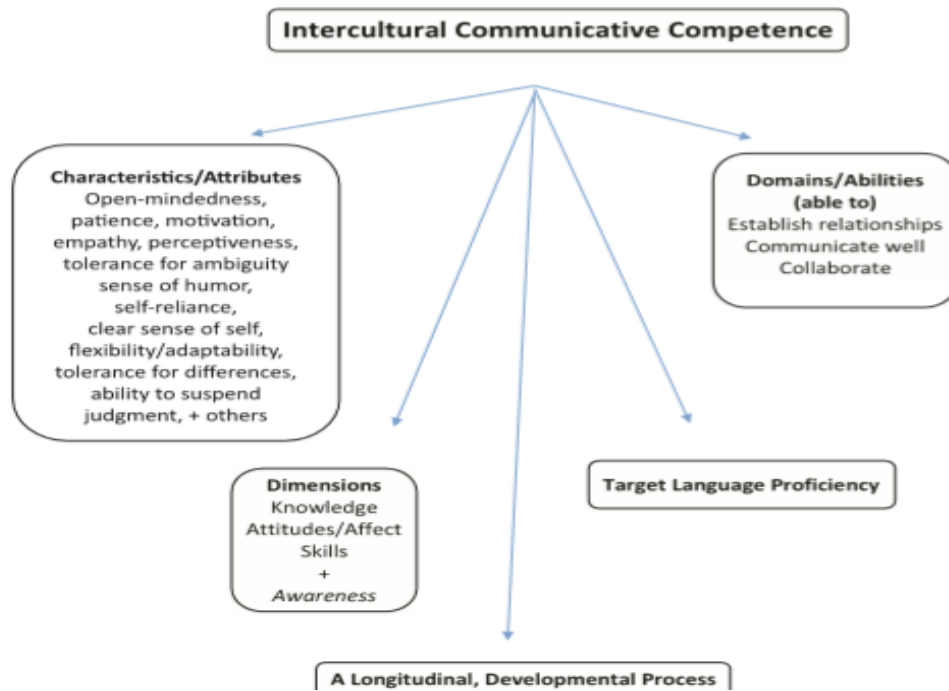


Table 3: The ICC model of People's Police College 2

## II.    Results

As can be seen in Table 4, the results reveal that the total mean scores of students' level of ICC was high (M=3.44; SD=.54). This means that EFL students were remarkable in possessing a high level of ICC.

Table 4. People's Police College 2 EFL students' level of ICC

| No. | Students' level of ICC | N = 35 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | **M** | **SD** |
| 1 | Linguistic competence | **3.32** | **.51** |
| 2 | Intercultural competence | **3.56** | **.58** |
| | **Total** | **3.44** | **.54** |

*Note: M: Mean; S.D: Standard Deviation*

The results in Table 5 below illustrated that students had an average level in terms of linguistic competence when assessed on the four components of linguistic competence namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. More specifically, the overall mean score of cadets' linguistic competence was 3.31. The listening skill had the highest mean score (*M*=3.36; *SD*=.82) while the lowest mean score (*M*=3.22; *SD*=.89) was the speaking skill. The reading skill (*M*=3.37; *SD*=.72) and the writing (*M*=3.27; *SD*=.72) ranked the second and the third mean score of EFL students' linguistic competence respectively. This can be interpreted that the levels of students' linguistic competence were at an average level.

Table 5. Cadets' linguistic competence

| No. | Cadets' linguistic competence | N = 35 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | **M** | **SD** |
| 1 | Listening | 3.36 | .82 |
| 2 | Speaking | 3.22 | .89 |
| 3 | Reading | 3.37 | .72 |
| 4 | Writing | 3.27 | .72 |
| | **Total** | **3.31** | **.61** |

*Note: M: Mean; S.D: Standard Deviation*

Cadets' intercultural competence level is presented in Table 6. From the data in table 6, it is apparent that students' intercultural competence level was relatively high, to some extent, in view of attitude, knowledge, skills and awareness (M=3.52; SD=.38). As this table shows, there was significant difference between the students' linguistic competence. Cadets' attitude is the highest (M=4.16; SD=.54), then cadets' awareness is second high (M=4.11; SD=.58. While the linguistic competence among students stood at the average level, students' intercultural competence was much higher and stood at the high level.

Table 6. Cadets' intercultural competence

| No. | Cadets' intercultural competence | N = 35 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | **M** | **SD** |
| 1 | Attitude | 4.16 | .54 |
| 2 | Knowledge | 3.12 | .55 |
| 3 | Skills | 3.30 | .68 |
| 4 | Awareness | 4.11 | .58 |
| | **Total** | **3.52** | **.38** |

*Note: M: Mean; S.D: Standard Deviation*

With respect to the attitudes towards intercultural competence, it can be clearly seen from the descriptive statistics (Table 7 below) that the majority of cadets, in general, had a significant positive attitude toward cultural learning. The results of the study show that the students were ready and enthusiastic for intercultural integration when they strongly showed their eagerness to interact with foreigners (M=3.91, SD=.85). The willingness to communicate with foreigners were also collected from the questionnaire (M=4.07,

SD=.85). Moreover, students highly agreed that respecting behaviors of foreigners was of importance in learning culture in English (M=4.53, SD=67). This result suggests that students had a very good attitude towards learning about culture, an essential requirement in learning a foreign language. Some students perhaps may not realize the importance of cultural learning, but the more they learn a foreign language, the better awareness they become to include culture in English learning. Thus, the dispersion of the data in this section is various. Students also agreed that three issues namely explaining what foreigners do not understand (M=4.25, SD=.87), asking foreigners to explain what they do not understand (M=3.92, SD=.95) as well as changing their behavior accordingly to the culture of foreigners (M=4.07, SD=.85) were important in the language learning process. This can be explained that the students were well aware of the significance of learning and mastering cultural issues in English classroom. In short, it is apparent from this table that the majority of students had a real enthusiasm for the cultural learning.

Table 7. Cadets' attitudes

| Attitudes | N= 35 | |
|---|---|---|
| | M | SD |
| 1. I like to talk to foreigners. | 3.91 | .85 |
| 2. I am willing to talk to any foreigner when I have the chance. | 4.07 | .85 |
| 3. I respect the behaviors of foreigners. | 4.53 | .67 |
| 4. I have no prejudice against foreigners. | 4.15 | .73 |
| 5. I am willing to explain what foreigners don't understand when they talk to me. | 4.25 | .87 |
| 6. I am willing to ask foreigners to explain what I do not understand when I speak to them. | 3.92 | .95 |
| 7. I am willing to change my behavior accordingly to the culture of foreigners when talking to them. | 4.06 | .77 |

*Note: M: Mean; S.D: Standard Deviation*

In a similar vein, qualitative reports from the interview were also considered to obtain in-depth information relating to student's attitude about cultural learning. The overall response to these questions in terms of attitude was very positive. The majority of those who responded to item 1,2 were found to express a strong desire for communicating with foreigners. Furthermore, a common view amongst interviewees was that students highly respect the behaviors of foreigners (item 3) and they have no prejudice against foreigners (item 4). The full details of this positive attitude were shared as followings:

"I really love English. I want to practice my English with everyone especially with the foreigners. Therefore, I take the advantage of talking to foreigners whenever I have a chance".

"I think that communicating English with foreigners helps me not only to improve my cultural knowledge of many countries, but also enhance my English proficiency".

"I always respect the behaviors of foreigners and I don't have any prejudice against foreigners."

"I prefer practicing English with foreigners. I have no difficulty interacting with them as I am willing to explain what foreigners don't understand when they talk to me and vice versa.".

In view of students' knowledge, Table 8 presents the results obtained from the preliminary analysis of students' knowledge. Based on the results below, it can be seen that students' knowledge varies widely among the measured thirteen items. More specifically, the results revealed that many students had much knowledge about ways of greeting (M=4.09; SD=1.02) as well as daily activities (M=3.64; SD=1.21) of two or more countries in the world. With regard to knowledge about festival (M=3.56; SD=.95), foods (M=3.71; SD=8.34) and drinks (M=3.51; SD=9.48), the participants were found optimistic to express their high understanding in these aspects. Furthermore, the participants' knowledge of leisure activities was collected very extensive (M=3.43; SD=8.91). In terms of understanding about famous landscapes of two or more countries, the participants, in the same vein, showed their clear understanding in this field (M=3.19; SD=8.94). As for knowledge about national sports of various nations, the mean score increased more (M=3.46; SD=9.24). However, it was worrisome when students admitted that they lacked the fundamental knowledge about body language (M=2.69; SD=.89), physical space (M=2.61; SD=1.02) and typical weather (M=2.46; SD=1.09). Students also showed their loss of confidence on typical interests (M=2.56; SD=.88) and conventions of communication (item 13: M=2.62, SD=1.10). According to the above statistical results, it can be seen that the standard deviation of the data, more specifically, the dispersion of a data set around the mean, is high. This can

be explained that such issue as ways of greeting, daily activities, physical space, typical weather, conventions of communication may be familiar to one person but not to others. Those who self-explore these issues through movies, books or study materials will surely master these issues well. On the contrary, those who pay less attention to these issues obviously get less knowledge.

Table 8 Students' knowledge

| Knowledge | N = 35 | |
|---|---|---|
| | M | SD |
| 1. ways of greeting | 4.09 | 1.02 |
| 2. daily activities. | 3.64 | 1.21 |
| 3. festivals | 3.56 | .95 |
| 4. foods | 3.71 | .83 |
| 5. drinks | 3.51 | .95 |
| 6. leisure activities | 3.43 | .89 |
| 7. famous landscapes | 3.19 | .89 |
| 8. national sports | 3.46 | .92 |
| 9. body language | 2.69 | .89 |
| 10. physical space | 2.61 | 1.02 |
| 11. typical weather | 2.46 | 1.09 |
| 12. typical interests | 2.56 | .88 |
| 13. conventions of communication | 2.62 | 1.10 |

*Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation*

In accordance with the above results, some of those interviewed shared similar opinions in terms of knowledge about cultural issues. Examples of this point are:

"I am confident in my knowledge about ways of greeting, daily activities, festivals or foods and drinks. However, I know little about such issues as body language, physical space or conventions of communication."

"I like to learn about other cultures, especially about body language and physical space because I don't know much about them."

" …. "ways of greeting" should not be included into the text books as I think most of us clearly know about it…"

Table 9. Students' skills

| Skills | N = 35 | |
|---|---|---|
| | M | SD |
| 1. understand the document (e.g. in the media, in political speech or historical writing) or event from different cultural views. | 3.06 | .73 |
| 2. identify the causes leading to misunderstandings under the different cultural perspectives. | 3.04 | .76 |
| 3. explain the reasons for the misunderstanding under different cultural perspectives. | 2.92 | .78 |
| 4. ask foreigners to explain what I do not understand when reading books and newspapers in English. | 3.41 | .83 |
| 5. use English to describe its culture for foreigner. | 3.30 | .92 |
| 6. learn new things from foreigners when communicating with them. | 3.64 | .87 |
| 7. ask foreigners to explain what I do not understand when I communicate with them. | 3.55 | .83 |
| 8. explain if foreigners do not understand what I am telling them. | 3.57 | .83 |

*Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation*

Turning now to the total mean scores of students' skills. Overall, it can be seen that the students had the basic skills in terms of understanding the document (e.g. in the media, in political speech or historical writing) or event from different cultural views (item of 1: M=3.06, SD=.73) and identifying the causes leading to misunderstandings under the different cultural perspectives (item of 2: M=3.04, SD=.76). Students also showed their remarkable ability on learning new things from foreigners when communicating with them (item 6: M=3.64, SD=.87). Furthermore, the students showed that they possessed the communication skill to "ask foreigners to explain what I [They] do not understand when reading books and newspapers in English" (item 4: M=3.41, SD=.83), "use English to describe its culture for foreigner." (item 5: M= 3.30, SD=.92), "ask foreigners to explain what [they] do not understand when [they] communicate with [foreigners] (item S3.7:

M=3.55, SD=.83) and "explain if foreigners do not understand what [they] [are] telling [foreigners] (item 8: M=3.57, SD=.83). However, it was seen from the results that the students lacked the skill of explaining the reasons for the misunderstanding under different cultural perspectives as the mean score of this item was the lowest from the result (item 3: M= 2.92, SD=.78).

Table 10. Students' awareness

| Awareness | N = 35 | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | M | SD |
| 1. people from different countries or cultures may interpret the same document (e.g. in the media, in political speech or historical writing or event) differently. | 4.16 | .93 |
| 2. people from different countries or cultures have different norms and taboos. | 4.27 | .87 |
| 3. people from different countries or cultures have different ways of expressing themselves. | 4.10 | .80 |
| 4. people from different countries or cultures have different conventions of communication. | 4.04 | .83 |
| 5. interacting with people from different countries or cultures helps me understand my culture better. | 4.14 | .90 |
| 6. understanding people from different countries or culture helps me interact with them better. | 3.90 | .74 |

*Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation*

The table shows the results of students' awareness towards cultural learning. Overall, the results obtained from this table were very positive. The students were found to agree with the view point "people from different countries or cultures may interpret the same document (e.g. in the media, in political speech or historical writing or event) differently" (item 1: M=4.16, SD=.93). More remarkably, the students strongly agreed well that "people from different countries or cultures have different norms and taboos." (item 2: M= 4.27, SD=.83) and "people from different countries or cultures have different ways of expressing themselves" (item 3: M= 4.10, SD=.80). Furthermore, students expressed that they entirely approved "people from different countries or cultures have different conventions of communication" (item 4: M= 4.04, SD=.83) and "interacting with people from different countries or cultures helps [them] understand [their] culture better" (item 5: M= 4.14, SD=.90). Students also revealed their agreement on the perspective that the better they understood people from different countries, the better interaction with them they would achieve.

Aligning with the descriptive statistics, qualitative data, in the same view, received positive answers from the students. All students being interviewed agreed on the points that people from different countries or cultures may not only interpret the same document differently but also have different norms and taboos, ways of expressing themselves, conventions of communication. They also shared that:

"I am aware that interacting with people from different countries or cultures helps me many things such as understand my culture better, interact with foreigner better, broaden my cultural knowledge about many countries in the world."

"I am aware that learning culture makes me love our own country more. And I also love English more."

**Factors affecting cadets' ICC development**

Table 11. Factors affecting EFL students' ICC development

| No. | Factors affecting EFL students' ICC development | N = 35 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | M | SD |
| 1 | **Learner-related factors** | 3.73 | .52 |
| 2 | **Teacher-related factors** | 3.26 | .65 |
| 3 | **Learning environment-related factors** | 2.94 | .59 |
| | **Total** | 3.59 | .38 |

*Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation*

In terms of factors affecting cadets' ICC development, three broad separate categories namely learner-related factors, teacher-related factors, learning environment-related factors were measured. Table 11 demonstrates a discrepancy and downward trend from learner-related factors (M = 3.73, SD = .52), teacher-related factors (M=3.26, SD=.65), and learning environment-related factors (M = 2.94, SD = .59). In can be interpreted from the results above that while learner-related factors had a significant impact on students' ICC

level, teacher-related factors and learning environment factors did not yet seem to be having any effect on their ICC development process.

### III. Conclusions

Question 1: To what extent is the level of ICC of EFL students at People's Police College 2?

To have the best results for this research question, the researcher divided the level of learners' ICC into two parts namely *language competence* and *intercultural communicative competence*. The findings from this study suggest that in general the students had rather good ICC level. Nevertheless, if going into more details about its sub-variables of ICC which include language competence and intercultural competence, it was clear that the students' intercultural competence was considerably far better than their linguistic competence. More specifically, it can be seen from the study that students had high intercultural competence in terms of attitudes, knowledge, skills and awareness. Furthermore, the students were found to be open and eager to explore and experience other cultures. The "strongly agree" responses from respondents at some extent highly proved themselves to be positive in terms of attitude and awareness towards culture learning.

Question 2: What are the factors that affect the ICC development of EFL students at People's Police College 2?

In this paper, three main groups of categories namely learner-related factors, teacher-related factors and learning environment EIL-related factors were investigated. Three broad mentioned factors were found highly affected the development of EFL students. Student-related factors, more specifically, were explored to play a prerequisite role in the learners' process of ICC development. Teacher-related factors and learning environment-related factors, similarly, were seen to affect to the ICC development among students positively.

### References

[1]. Bennett, J. M., & Bennett, M. J. (2004). Developing intercultural sensitivity: An integrative approach to global and domestic diversity. In D. Landis, J. Bennett & M. Bennett (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training, 3*,147–165. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

[2]. Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (4th Ed.). London: Longman. Pearson Education limited.

[3]. Byram, M. & Flemming, M. (Eds.) 1998. *Language learning from an Intercultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[4]. Fantini, A. E. (2015). *Exploring intercultural communicative competence: A multinational perspective*. Federation EIL-CERCLL, Brattleboro, VT and Tucson, AZ.

[5]. Fantini, A.E., & Garrett-Rucks, P. (2016). 1 Introduction: Expanding our Educational Goals: Exploring Intercultural Competence.

[6]. Sercu, L. (2005). Teaching foreign languages in an intercultural world. In M. Byram & A. Phipps (Eds.), *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence*. Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.

[7]. Sercu, L. (2005a). The foreign language and intercultural competence teacher. In L. Sercu, E. Bandura, O. Castro, L. Davcheva, C. Laskaridou, U. Lundgren, M. del Carmen Mendez García, & P. Ryan, *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence: An international investigation. Languages for intercultural communication and education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.