



## Barriers to Intercultural Communication Implications for English Teaching at Tertiary Level in Vietnam

Nguyen Thi Mai Huong

English lecturer at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade, Vietnam

Received: 20 May 2025

Accepted: 29 May 2025

Published: 05 June 2025

**\*Corresponding Author:** *Nguyen Thi Mai Huong, English lecturer at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade, Vietnam*

**Abstract:** *The increasing globalization has connected people from different corners of the world. While English has been deployed as the language for international communication, it cannot ensure smooth transaction as people from various countries embed their culture with the way they express themselves and the way they understand their interlocutors' messages. This paper analyzes some major cultural barriers, namely anxiety, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice, assuming similarity instead of difference, language, non-verbal misinterpretation, that have been mentioned in various literature with an aim to reconfirm the importance of corporation of those cultural factors with English language teaching, especially in the context of Vietnam – a country which has been proactive in integrating with the globalization. The teaching of culture in English courses in some major tertiary institutions are also reviewed. Under the light of the discussion and the current teaching situation in Vietnam, suggestions toward approaches to teach different cultural obstruction blocks have been put forward.*

**Keywords:** *intercultural communication, cultural barriers, English teaching*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

With multiple preferential policies, a lucrative market and an abundant labor force, Vietnam has become a promising destination for foreign investors since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Businesspeople from different countries have come to Vietnam to look for opportunities to do business. The country's picturesque landscape as well as its exotic cuisine culture have also attracted millions of others to visit it every year. Besides, hundreds of thousand of Vietnamese travel abroad for holiday, business, medical treatment and educational purposes every year. Consequently, the need to use English for intercultural communication has never been greater. Nevertheless, cross – country boundary interlocutions are immensely demanding as it involves communicators from various unfamiliar cultural backgrounds around the world. To achieve their communicative goals, relevant parties need to be aware of the cultural differences which may lead to misunderstanding or even conflicts.

Clearly, to send and get the messages across - culturally effectively, one needs to have both linguistic and cultural competence. This fact has dictated a crucial task for English instructors and educators to incorporate culture in their teaching program. Many researchers (Nguyen, 2008; Mitrulescu, 2001, and others) even consider culture the fifth skill which should be taught in parallel with other four language competencies, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Being aware of its critical roles, a considerable number of researches have been devoted to find ways to overcome them. A number of researchers focus on dissecting components of cultures (e.g Hofstede's, as cited in Panocová 2020; Byram, 1997; Bennett, 2009) whereas others (for example, Gudykunst, 1993; Jandt, 2017; Neuliep, 2018) explore barriers which prevent people from communicating cross – culturally successfully. Although different scholars have distinct approaches to this challenging problem, their insights illustrate that cultures are so broad and complicated that they need to be dealt with sensitively, systematically and scientifically. Consequently, various cultural issues need to be addressed during the instruction to get English learners ready for intercultural encounter situations.

Because of the diverse nature of culture as mentioned above, this paper only focuses on reviewing and analyzing barriers to intercultural communication. Basing on the theory frameworks, suggestions will be made to improve intercultural teaching in Vietnamese tertiary contexts.

## **2. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION TEACHING IN VIETNAM**

Although culture has been recognized as an indispensable element for effective international communication, Nguyen (2008) admits that it sometimes “fades into the background in the language classes in Vietnam” because it seems that the emphasis is still laid on the promotion of 4 linguistic skills, i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Several other studies (Bui, 2019; Chau & Truong, 2019; Ho & Ton, 2020) also point out a number of reasons that make teachers hesitate to integrate intercultural communicative competence (ICC) with their English language teaching such as: teachers’ insufficient training, a lack of inclusion in the syllabus, teachers’ inexperience, etc.

In a number of universities such as Huit, Huflis, DLA, etc. English majors only have British and American culture courses. However, they only serve to expand the students’ knowledge about education, history, sport, politics, transportation, etc. of these two countries. According to Lessard-Clouston (1997, as cited in Nguyen, 2008) a development of the “receptive aspect of cultural competence is not sufficient”. Understandably, it is hard to enhance students’ cultural skill if they do not have opportunities to experience it. Therefore, class practice is essential. Knowledge aspects of culture, which cannot be drilled, should be taught explicitly to raise their awareness of obstacles they may encounter in cross – cultural interactions. Some educational institutions like SGU, HCMUE, etc. have provided their English – majored students an intercultural communication course. Nonetheless, it is carried out in a short period of time which is not enough to cultivate the learners’ expertise of the abstract part of culture. Especially, explicit barriers to intercultural communication are only incorporated in among many other contents of this short course.

## **3. CULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

It is generally agreed that culture is a complicated concept which results in multiple definitions proposed by scholars.

Clifford Geertz (1973, as cited in (Liu, S., Volc’ic’, Z & Gallois, C 2015) puts forward the notion of culture as a web which have been spun by people. Describing the role of culture, he thinks it is like the fabric of meanings which serves as the base for human beings to explain their experience and guide their action. By saying that, he clearly points out the fact that culture is built and shared by a group of people. It influences what they do and the way they interpret their experience. Another fact can also be inferred is that different communities of people have different approaches to decipher the same experience. Using one’s norm to evaluate others’ likely leads to conflicts.

As culture is broad concept, researchers prefer to depict it as a body which is made up of different elements. While Hofstede (1994) thinks it consists four factors: symbols, rituals, values, and heroes, Dodd (1998, as cited in Liu, S., Volc’ic’, Z & Gallois, C, 2015) attributes a lot more details to it: history, identity, beliefs, values, roles, rules, rituals, customs, communication patterns, and artistic expressions economic, health, educational, religious, family, and political systems. Matsumoto (1996), as cited in Oatey, H.S & Franklin, P, 2009, offers a simpler model of culture which comprises attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors of a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next. Sharing the same view with these scholars about the different aspects of culture which are learned and interpreted in the same way by a significant group of people, Oatey, H.S and Franklin, P (2009) point out clearly that this shared knowledge shapes a community’s conduct. The components of culture in Jackson (2014)’s view include: worldview, religion, history, values, social organizations, language. In the same vein, Liu, S., Volc’ic’, Z & Gallois, C (2015) also believe that culture is reflected in the following factors: “knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, traditions, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, worldviews, material objects, and geographic territory”. All these features create a distinctive way of life for each community of people.

All the scholars’ different descriptions of culture illustrate clearly the complicated nature of it. Furthermore, they all refer culture as intangible aspects of social life which affects people’s behavior. That is, what lies in people’s perception, belief, values, etc. What can be seen such as: clothes, religious practices, attitude, etc. are often a reflection of it. That’s why culture is often metaphorically compared with an iceberg. We can only see the tip of it while a much larger part is hidden in the water. It is obvious that to communicate efficiently in intercultural contexts, one needs to have a cautious and sensitive approach to avoid misunderstanding and above all, to achieve the communicative intention. It also means that the learning and teaching of culture need to address not only the visible parts but the invisible ones as well.

Although Byram (1997) and several other researchers make a distinction between intercultural or cross-cultural communication. For the purpose of this paper, they will be used interchangeably.

According to Damen (1987, as cited in Nguyen, 2008) intercultural communication is “an act of communication undertaken by individuals identified with groups exhibiting intergroup variation in shared social and cultural patterns. These shared patterns, individually expressed, are the major variables in the purpose, the manner, the mode, and the means by which the communicative process is affected”. Oatey, H.S and Franklin, P (2009) state that intercultural communication takes place when communication differences are big and large enough to create ways of understandings and expectations about how to exchange them efficiently. Although expressing their opinions in different ways, both of these two researchers agree that intercultural communication is the interaction between people who do not share the same cultural backgrounds. It is their different cultural experiences that pose a big potential of misinterpretation. Deardorff (2006), as cited in Jackson (2014), asserts that interculturally competent communicators must possess intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to exchange their messages effectively and appropriately.

While linguistic and intercultural skills can be practiced and mastered, the bigger part of cultures which underlies people’s perception, belief and values is invisible. Therefore, it is difficult to recognize and becomes the barriers for successful intercultural communication. As a result, language learners need to be taught this aspect explicitly to raise their awareness. It also helps them have appropriate attitudes when encountering unfamiliar cultural contexts.

#### 4. SOME FACTORS AFFECTING THE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

According to Barna (as cited in Jandt, 2017) stumbling blocks to intercultural communication comprise of anxiety, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice, assuming similarity instead of difference, language, non – verbal misinterpretation.

##### 4.1. Anxiety

Many researchers believe that anxiety is the most common barrier to intercultural communication. Jandt (2017) describes it as the feeling we experience when we are anxious for not knowing what we are expected to do. Consequently, we only focus on it instead of fully concentrating on the conversation.

Neuliep (2018) provides a more detailed description for this term when he says that anxiety is a feeling of uncertainty, fear, and distrust among interactants who do not share the same cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.

Both definitions proposed by these scholars emphasize the emotional pressure we undergo when we conduct cross – cultural communication. Naturally, when we interact with culturally different people, we are uncertain about what is considered appropriate by their norms, their belief and their practice. We may ponder over what to say or to do. We may feel unconfident or even anxious especially if there is a negative misinterpretation. These kinds of thought shift our attention away from making an intercultural transaction, leads to our reluctance to give feedbacks. In worse cases, these unfavorable senses may cause the communication breakdown.

Neuliep (2018) states that certain communication situations may produce more anxiety. For example, novel or unfamiliar encounters normally make us more anxious as we are not sure what we are expected to do or to say. However, it is unavoidable in international communication. Arguing that anxiety may results in separatism instead of unity, Neuliep (2018) insists that only intercultural communication can help decrease this risk. Besides, it can facilitate mutual understanding, which can bring culturally diverse people together. Obviously, to become a competent intercultural communicator, one needs to be able to manage anxiety and be sensitive to any differences.

##### 4.2. Ethnocentrism

According to Bizumic (2014) the term “Ethnocentrism” was first introduced by Sumner in 1906 in his book, *Folkways*. He used this word to describe the perception of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and therefore become the standards for judging all others. Sharing his view, Jandt (2017) defines it as an arbitrary way of judging other cultures using the frame of one's own. In other word, an ethnocentric people believe that their culture is superior to the others’. Neuliep (2018) goes further when saying that those, who carry this characteristic trait, often hold favorable attitudes and

behaviors toward the in-groups at the expense of the out-group. In spite of its benefits in promoting “ingroup conformity, cooperation, loyalty, and effectiveness”, Daniel Levinson (as cited in Neuliep, 2018) asserts that what lies in the root of ethnocentrism is the hard distinction between in-group and out-group which is caused by biased stereotype, negative imagery and hostile attitudes against the latter. It may also be the result of a hierarchical, authoritarian belief of dominance toward out-groups in interaction.

The viewpoints of all the scholars mentioned above clearly confirm the negative nature of ethnocentrism, which certainly impedes the success of intercultural communication. Shijie Guan (as cited in Neuliep, 2018) points out the risk of being put in a “self-centered dialogue” when interlocutors use their cultural frame to judge the others’. Meanwhile Neuliep (2018) sees the danger of prejudice it may cause, which in turn can result in “mistrust, hostility, and even hate”.

However, it has been generally agreed that there is a certain degree of ethnocentrism in all cross – cultural exchanges. Gudykunst (as cited in Neuliep, 2018) attributes it to “one’s cultural orientation” which functions as a filter to process both verbal and nonverbal messages during the communication. For Neuliep (2018) it not only impacts the perception of the messages but their sources as well.

Peng (as cited in Neuliep, 2018) finds out the expression of ethnocentric attitudes in linguistic diversity which is conveyed through the speakers’ expressions, idioms, and word choices. While he and Luken contend that ethnocentric speech creates communicative distance between interlocutors, the latter even puts communicative distance into 3 categories: indifference, avoidance, and disparagement.

Neuliep (2018) recognizes our common tendency to start and keep interacting with those we find attractive. Unfortunately, ethnocentrism often interferes and impacts our perception of the others’ attractiveness if they are culturally different. It is the cultural difference that creates a communicative distance as people likely feel more comfortable interacting with those who share the same background. This can be explained by their mutual understanding, their common perception of values, tradition, custom, etc. among in-group members. For ethnocentrics, the gap with out-group people is much wider because it is governed by their perception of superiority toward the others.

It can be seen that ethnocentrism is a big hurdle in cross-border communication. When one side deems the other as inferior, there can hardly be any respect – the foundation any productive relationship. When the two do not look into the same direction, reaching a mutual agreement or cooperation is almost impossible. In worse cases, it may lead to a conflict or even a war. In fact, it has been blamed for a number of bloodsheds in human history. To avoid the repetition of these sad pages of history and to facilitate international collaboration to counter common threats such as: natural disasters, climate change, terrorism, hunger, etc. ethnocentric attitude must be avoided. An awareness of it should also be raised for everybody because it may hurt both our personal and professional relationship. Obviously, there is no friendship when one side only negatively judge those with cultural differences. At workplace, ethnocentrism prevents the unification and effective cooperation.

Although ethnocentrism has been named as one of the main challenges for successful intercultural communication in various studies, scholars have generally agreed that it is not easy to recognize and control it because it is learnt early and unconsciously. Consequently, everyone is vulnerable to it. In order to minimize its negative effects, the concept of Cultural relativism has been proposed. Its advocates suggest that cultural practices be understood in the light of their own cultural milieu and not judged basing on the norms of a different culture. To put it simply, everything in a culture is consistent to it and makes sense within its frame. We should be open – minded and tolerant to any dissimilarities instead of jumping to any hasty conclusion.

### 4.3. Stereotypes & Prejudice

Stereotypes are very common obstacles in intercultural interaction. Richard Schaefer (as cited in Neuliep, 2018) views them as negative feelings toward a group of people whose attributes are subjectively overstated.

Gudykunst (Neuliep, 2018) defines stereotypes as perception of one group toward the other that affect their members’ judgement on the latter. Stereotypes, in his opinion, may result in positive or negative evaluation of a group of people. Jandt (2017) and Neuliep (2018) also agree with his view over the two characteristics of Stereotypes. However, the former thinks they are influenced personal observation or

belief about one group, while the latter asserts that good or bad perception of members of a group depends on the features members of the other attribute to them.

People often hold stereotypes about sex, race, age, or occupation because these elements carry certain traits. For example, women are physically weaker than men but it does not mean that they are less intelligent. However, they are still considered inferior and more suitable to certain jobs such as house keepers, nurses, etc. Because of this occupational stereotype, women have fewer opportunities for career choices and advancement. It also limits their contribution to society development and becomes a big hurdle for their equal right.

Any types of stereotypes against occupations, sex, age, etc. decrease the efficient utilization of human resources at workplaces. The consequences will be more serious in multicultural social settings because these wrong ideas of a different cultural group of people may lead to prejudice, ethnocentrism and discrimination – major compelling reasons for hatred, social disorders, even wars. Unfortunately, in many cases they emerge because negatives traits of some members are attributed to the whole group. While stereotypes are confirmed as major culprits which distort social perception of others, Neuliep (2018) believes it is due to the subjective nature of human perception, which is influenced by their “need, wish and expectation”. People may even disregard the reality to perceive what they want to perceive. Therefore, it is “not necessarily accurate or honest”.

Being accused of as “a destructive social force” by multiple researchers, stereotypes are unfortunately, quite common. In accounting for this phenomenon, Baker (2022) puts it that we often use prior knowledge to evaluate and interpret a new situation. The mental organization of our experiences influences our perception and behavior toward a group of people. He concludes that most stereotypes are the result of superficial and misguided judgements. These misperceptions can leave detrimental effects on intercultural interaction.

Adler (as cited in Baker, 2022) lists four ways in which stereotypes may hamper successful intercultural communication. First, stereotypes cause people to make judgement that is consistent with their knowledge. Second, they are sources of wrong assumption about culture-specific traits of a group. Third, they bring about an oversimplified, exaggerated, and overgeneralized assessment or unfounded assumptions which create a distorted representation of people who are culturally different. Last, they are resistant to change because they are usually learned early in life and develop with time. Thus, researchers suggest education together with early positive contacts with other cultures may help reduce negative stereotypes.

Stereotypes and prejudice may be used interchangeably in everyday conversation by many people, however they are not the same. Rogers and Steinfatt (as cited in Baker, 2022) describes Prejudice as “an unfounded attitude toward an outgroup based on a comparison with one’s ingroup.” This “unfounded attitude toward an outgroup” is often unfair and negative because it is not based on actual experience. Baker (2022) explains that people naturally find ingroup’s norms familiar and develop favorable feelings toward them. As a result, they tend to use them as the standards to judge members of an outgroup. Prejudice to the entire group arises when misconceptions, suspicion, misinformation, or other irrational feelings are attributed to them collectively. When one holds ill opinions of an individual or a group, a productive relationship can hardly be expected. In worse cases, it may lead to inappropriate behavior or even conflicts.

Undoubtedly, prejudice is a big stumbling block that challenges smooth intercultural communication. To communicate across one’s own culture successfully, any biased pre-perception should be avoided. Judgement should not be made without concrete evidences. Like stereotypes, prejudice is picked – up early and strengthened over time. That’s why, timely education is needed to diminish it.

#### **4.4. Assuming Similarity Instead of Difference**

Another challenge to intercultural exchange is assuming that other cultures are similar rather than different to one’s own. Jandt (2017) states that “without information about a new culture, we may assume no differences exist and behave as we would in our home culture”. People come from different cultural backgrounds have difference beliefs, values, customs, practices, norms, etc. A careless assumption may cause an embarrassment, an offense or a miscommunication.

Geographic locations, distances, histories, weather conditions, races, etc. are among major factors that create cultural diversity. That’s why, interlocutors need to be sensitive in cross – cultural contacts. In

Vietnam, for instance, same - sex people can hold hands or use their two hands to grasp the hand of the other to show their friendliness. However, these acts have perplexed Western diplomats to Vietnam as these are the gestures for homosexual couples in their home countries.

The stories of consequences of assuming similarity instead of difference in multi - cultural interaction seem to be countless. However, the inverse can also be an obstacle. Jandt (2017) warns that assuming difference instead of similarity can make it impossible for one to recognize important features that cultures have in common. He, therefore, advises us to assume nothing.

### 4.5. Language

Language is, unarguably, the most common tool of communication. It is defined as “a set of symbols shared by a community to communicate meaning and experience” (Jandt, 2017). Each language has its own system of sounds, words, and structures.

In an attempt to explain the function of language and its relationship with culture, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (as cited in Jandt, 2017) suggests that language controls thought and cultural norms. However, modern linguists do not totally agree that language can determine our thought and action. They argue that it “only somehow shapes our thinking and behavior”. Thus, “linguistic characteristics and cultural norms influence each other”. One way that language can challenge effective intercultural exchange is translation difficulty. Five possible translation problems have been listed.

The first issue is a lack of vocabulary equivalence which has been a major hindrance in transferring the full meaning from one language to another. Different languages have different number of words. Cultures also determine the full meaning or the shade of meaning which are attributed to individual words. In many cases, certain word equivalences do not exist. Invention of new words does not always work effectively. A typical example is the word “thú cưng” which was created to translate “pet” into Vietnamese. It has taken Vietnamese years to fully understand its meaning because Vietnamese did not used to keep animals as companions like the way Western people do.

Second, a lack of idiomatic equivalence is also a big hurdle in rendering to another language. An idiom is a figurative expression whose meaning is different from the literal meaning of the words in it. They, therefore, cannot be translated word for word. Idioms are used to convey the ideas more vividly and effectively. Without equivalence in the target language, the translation is less colorful, less impressive and cannot impart full meaning of the speakers/writers.

The third difficulty relates to a grammatical-syntactical equivalence. Grammar and syntax govern the rules of using a language. Understandably, they are crucial in acquiring a communicative context. However, these systematic rules of organizing words into utterances are determined by the native speech community. Therefore, they are not necessarily the same. The dissimilarities of these language aspects can be a big barrier in translating the meaning fully and correctly.

Fourth, the experiential equivalence has been an obstacle in getting messages across culturally for as long as the human history. Experiences of people from diverse cultural backgrounds varies. There may be no words to refer to things and events that do not exist in a culture. A common example is the translation of the names of foods. Although explanation is often provided, it is not easy to imagine how it is like. This language problem keeps growing with the development of technology. Translators in underdeveloped and developing countries like Vietnam have been facing numerous challenges in finding the new terms referring to new concepts, objects in medical science, space exploration, military weapons, information technology, etc. Even then, it cannot always fully visualize or express the full meanings in the source language (mainly English).

Fifth, the conceptual equivalence poses problems for intercultural interlocutors when abstract ideas do not exist in the same fashion in the other languages. These phenomena are quite common in certain areas such as inner feelings, religions, customs, politics, belief or legal matters. In these situations, a both language and cultural competence are required to explain the meaning in the most comprehensive manner.

To sum up, it has been generally agreed that language is the most important factor in smooth cross - cultural exchange. The most important language is, undoubtedly, English. Although it only ranks three in term of the number of native speakers (after Mandarin and Spanish), it is spoken as the second language in 55 countries. Besides, it is the mean of communication in all major fields in the world, such

as trade, science, politics, etc. It is said that language and culture are intergoverned. The fact that English is used by diversely cultural people in international transaction makes its effective use more challenging as it is grounded by various cultures of the users. Consequently, culture education must always go hand in hand with English teaching and learning.

### 4.6. Nonverbal Misinterpretations

In order to understand messages across cultural conversation correctly and respond appropriately, both verbal and nonverbal communication competence are needed. According to Neuliep (2018), multicultural conversation primarily involves a nonverbal act between people, during which, verbal and nonverbal messages are exchanged simultaneously. While verbal communication expresses the literal content of a message, the nonverbal cue communicates the way the information will be interpreted. Nonverbal interactions are signal – based and may involve the use of gestures, eye contacts, body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, personal space and artifacts, etc. These signs are used universally to reinforce the meaning of spoken words. Competent intercultural communicators need to be able to decode them correctly to get the full message of the speakers.

The meanings of non – verbal language are also culturally diverse. As a result, cultural contexts are always crucial for correct interpretations of non – spoken messages. In some cultures, certain non – verbal signs such as gestures, body languages, etc. are deployed more frequently to support verbal communication, but they may not be encouraged in others. Neuliep (2018) suggests more attention be paid to non – verbal acts to get the full meaning in highly contextual cultures like those from China, Korea, and Japan. In low-contextual cultures such as those from North-America, Australia, Northern Europe, words are more important in getting the messages across.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the barriers to intercultural communication has further confirmed that language and culture education are inseparable. Languages may be meaningless or misinterpreted out of cultural contexts. The obstacles for using English in international interaction are even greater because it is spoken by people from all corners of the world. They bring with them their own communication styles, their customs, values, belief, etc. To exchange messages across country boundaries effectively, interlocutors need to be aware of these stumbling blocks. Clearly, it takes time to learn about a culture. However, in this dynamic age, one may have to use English to communicate with people from any cultures unexpectedly to meet different needs. Therefore, a sense of cultural differences is crucial as it will help one have a more cautious and sensitive approach when interacting with people from other countries. Additionally, qualities such as respects, understanding, and tolerance are also needed to avoid ethnocentrism, prejudice and stereotype, assuming similarity instead of difference.

Among the 6 obstacles to effective intercultural communication, language is the biggest one and is also the one which takes most time to master. However, it is also the most important hurdle which needs to be crossed as most information is exchanged through verbal communication. Typical problems like mispronunciation, wrong expressions, and incorrect grammar may lead to serious misunderstanding. English is spoken with a variety of accents which may cause difficulties for comprehension. Besides, its usage is also influenced by the habits of using the first language of the users. More importantly, interlocutors often embed their cultures in the way they use English to send and receive their messages across borders. Clearly, the English language must be understood in their cultural settings in order to maintain mutual understanding.

Non – verbal cues are a powerful tool to assist effective transmission of messages. Like verbal language, this signal – based system of interaction is also culturally bound. Furthermore, the messages are not literally expressed through this platform. As a result, it is likely to be misinterpreted in cross – cultural communication. However, this barrier is rarely mentioned as a cultural act which need to be incorporated with English teaching for communicative purposes.

Anxiety is a common element which hinder the success of intercultural exchange. As it is the result of feeling uncertain, fearful or distrustful when interacting with someone who have a completely dissimilar culture, one needs to be prepared to overcome the other five barriers. Linguistic competence together with intercultural knowledge and skill will help one gain confidence and anticipate what to expect in in multicultural communication contexts. Anxiety will be lessened, then.

All the discussion above further emphasizes the fact that intercultural communication skill must be integrated in the teaching of English in Vietnamese education to get the learners interculturally competent. English students should be well equipped with skills and knowledge to overcome all the barriers to the success of cross – border interaction. While diverse cultural contexts need to be created in English communication class so that students can experience and practice necessary skills such as verbal and nonverbal ones, knowledge about the other stumbling blocks need to be addressed explicitly to raise the learners’ awareness. Besides, they should also be provided with chances to make comparisons and contrasts with other cultures to promote their cultural understanding and sensitivity. Qualities such as respects, understanding, tolerance, open - mindedness to other cultural practices should also be raised as they are the key to the reduction of ethnocentrism, stereotype and prejudice.

### 6. CONCLUSION

It has been generally agreed that language and culture are inseparable. That is why the language and culture instruction must be carried out in parallel. For the case of English teaching, it is more complicated as it has been used as the common language for global communication. People from different corners of the world embed their culture with it in cross – border communication. Unarguably, one needs to be interculturally competent in order to communicate cross – culturally efficiently. This fact has required English language educators to change the way they teach cultural competency. Instead of teaching students to communicate in the cultures of major English - speaking countries, English teachers need to teach them to interact in diverse cultures.

A number of recent studies have pointed out various reasons for which the instruction of intercultural communication skill has not been well incorporated in English classrooms in Vietnam. Obviously, all these obstacles must be dealt with so that instructors can provide their learners opportunities to practice using English in culturally diverse contexts, to equip them this essential competency. They should be made aware of the challenges to intercultural communication and should be well – prepared to overcome them. Among the obstruction blocks, non – verbal language should be paid special attention to as it is rarely recommended in literature as an important cultural act which needs to be practiced with verbal communication. Factors like ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice cannot be practiced, thus knowledge about them should be addressed explicitly.

### REFERENCES

- Atay, D., Kurt, G., Camlibel, Z., Ersin, P., & Kaslioglu, Ö (2009). The Role of Intercultural Competence in Foreign Language Teaching. *Inonu University Journal of the Faculty of Education*. December 2009/ Special Issue/ Volume. 10, Issue. 3, pp. 123-135
- Baker. W (2022). *Intercultural and Transcultural Awareness in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press
- Bennett, J.M 2015. *The Sage Encyclopaedia of Intercultural Competence*. London: Sage
- Bennett, J. M (2009). “Cultivating Intercultural Competence,” in the *Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, page 127–34
- Bizumic, B (2014). Who Coined the Concept of Ethnocentrism? A Brief Report. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* [jpspp.psychopen.eu 2195-3325](https://doi.org/10.5964/jpspp.v2i1.264). DOI: 10.5964/jpspp.v2i1.264
- Bùi. T. H. G (2019). Exploring the intercultural communicative competence intergration in foreign teaching and learning. *TNU journal of science and technology* [https://jst.tnu.edu.vn/jst/article/view/1308-DOI: https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.2019.06.330](https://jst.tnu.edu.vn/jst/article/view/1308-DOI:https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.2019.06.330)
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural competence*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M & Zarate, G. (1997). *The sociocultural and intercultural dimension of language learning and teaching*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Byram, M.S & Risager, K. (1999). *Language teachers, politics and cultures*. Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Byram, M (2008). *From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship*. The Cromwell Press Ltd
- Cambié, S and Yang-May Ooi, Y. M (2009) - *International Communications Strategy* - London and Philadelphia
- Chau, T. H. H., & Truong, V. (2019). The Integration of Intercultural Education into Teaching English: What Vietnamese Teachers Do and Say. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(1), 441-456. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.12129a>
- Clausen, L (2006). *Intercultural Organizational Communication: Five Corporate Cases in Japan*. Denmark: Copenhagen Business School Press

- Chen L (2017). Intercultural Communication. Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH and Co KG.
- Deardorff, D. and Arasaratnam-Smith, L. (2017). "Introduction", Intercultural Competence in Higher Education. International Approaches, Assessment and Application. Routledge, New York NY, pp. 1-4
- Francuski, B. D (2011). Image-Identity-Reality. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publication
- Ho, T. P. D & Ton N. N. H. (2020). Factors Influencing Teachers' Integrating Intercultural Communicative Competence into Business English Teaching. Vol. 129, No. 6B, 2020 - Jos.hueuni.edu.vn
- Hồ, S. T. K (2015). English Language Learners' Perspectives and Evaluation of Drama in the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence. ISSN 1859-1531 - TẠP CHÍ KHOA HỌC VÀ CÔNG NGHỆ ĐẠI HỌC ĐÀ NẴNG, SỐ 8(93).2015
- Hui, G. (2017). The learning needs analysis of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in college. US-China Foreign Language, 15(1), 1-6.
- Jackson, J (2014). Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication. Published by Routledge
- Jandt, F. E (2017). An Introduction to Intercultural Communication Identities in a Global Community. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Liu, S., Volčič, Z & Gallois, C (2015). Introducing Intercultural Communication. SAGE Publications Ltd
- Lustig, M.W & Koester, J (2010). Intercultural competence. Pearson Education. Inc
- Mitrulescu, C.M (2023). Using Culture as the Fifth Language Skill to Enhance Military Students' EFL Competence. Land Forces Academy Review - Vol. XXVIII, No. 3(111), 2023 - DOI: 10.2478/raft-2023-0025
- Neuliep, J. W (2018). Intercultural Communication - A Contextual Approach. St. Norbert College. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Nguyen, T. M. H. (2007). Developing EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence: A gap to be filled? Asian EFL journal, 112-139.
- Oatey, H.S & Franklin, P (2009) - Intercultural Interaction - Palgrave Macmillan
- Oksana, B., Nataliya M., Yuliia, Olha, S., & Mariia, V (2019). Developing Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence in Foreign Language Classroom. Advanced Education, Special Issue 11, 2019 DOI: 10.20535/2410-8286.158078
- Samovar, L.A., Porter, R.E., McDaniel, E.R., Roy, C.S (2015) - Communication between cultures - Cengage Learning - ISBN: 978-1-285-44462-8
- Summer, W. (1906). Folkways: a study of the sociological importance of usages, manners, customs, mores, and morals. Boston: Ginn and Co
- Syam, A., F, Basri. M & Sahril (2020). Intercultural Communicative Competence Development of Indonesian Higher Education Students - Asian EFL Journal Research Articles. Vol. 27 Issue No. 2.3 April 2020

### AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



**Nguyen Thi Mai Huong**, English lecturer at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade (HUIT)-Vietnam

**Citation:** Nguyen Thi Mai Huong. "Barriers to Intercultural Communication Implications for English Teaching at Tertiary Level in Vietnam ". *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*. vol. 13, no. 6, pp. 8-16, 2025. Available: DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.1306002>.

**Copyright:** © 2025 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.