CHAPTER 5

An experimental study to gain further insights into the effects of intercultural communication training with critical incident open-ended tasks on students' awareness of intercultural communication

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Abstract

Due to the internationalization and globalization of businesses in Vietnam, the new generation students need to develop skills in intercultural communication. The current study aims to develop English non-majors' awareness of intercultural communication through intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks. One group of 234 students received ten weeks of instruction of intercultural communication with critical incident task and another group of 88 students received regular English classes. Data were collected from the students' answers on pre- and post-test and on papers from ten critical incident tasks. The results showed a significant and strong effect of the intervention of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident tasks on students' awareness of intercultural communication, with the strongest effect for the groups of low and middle scoring students. Within the intervention group, students' scores on awareness of intercultural communication over ten critical incident tasks fluctuated as these covered different themes and situations. Implications for educational practice refer to further teaching of intercultural communication with critical incident open-ended tasks.

5.1 Introduction

In higher education, graduates need new competences and skills to work knowledgeably and comfortably in a global society. Students who want to work in large enterprises or in an international setting should acquire skills such as intercultural competence and soft skills (Cai, Gu & Wong, 2017; Sercu, 2004). Yet higher education does not seem to provide enough opportunities for students to develop these competencies, with Vietnam not being an exception (Tran, 2012). The number of foreign companies, subsidiaries and joint-ventures has been increasing throughout Vietnam with many foreign employers and managers, particularly Western higher managers who work and interact extensively with the Vietnamese employees. According to a recent survey study (Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam, 2017), about 50% of the new graduates do not meet the expectations of the international employers with respect to language competence and communication skills. Recently, various universities in Vietnam switched to a more communication-focused curriculum. Yet most studies are still struggling how to implement a communication-focused curriculum with more attention for intercultural competences. The current research aims to provide insights into the development of future graduates' intercultural competence by incorporating intercultural communication into the English classrooms.

5.2 Theoretical background

5.2.1 Critical incident tasks

Cross-cultural training is necessary for preparing people who have to work in another culture (Bhawuk, 2001; Landis & Bhagat, 1996;). Foreign language classrooms are important venues for this because building language skills should be related to cultivating intercultural knowledge and skills (Snow, 2015). Educators might use different types of approaches to provide intercultural competence training. A review of the cross-cultural training literature indicates that critical incident technique is still one of the most researched and accepted methods for intercultural competence training (Bhawuk, 2001). Based on Flanagan's study (1954), critical incident technique was defined as: "a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (p.1). Generally, critical incidents are means for enhancing awareness and understanding of human attitudes, expectations, behaviors and interactions. The purpose of this technique is to engage participants in the roles they are already performing or preparing for (in the workplace, in educational settings, and in society at large) (Norquest College, 2015). Critical incidents in intercultural communication training are descriptions of situations in which a misunderstanding, problem or conflict arises as a result of the cultural differences of the interacting parties. Cultural differences that people bring to the situation are implicitly manifested in the incident and are meant to be discovered by the trainee participants (Bhawuk, 2001; Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Tolbert & Mclean, 1995).

Characteristics of an effective critical incident task

According to Flanagan (1954), two pivotal characteristics of critical incidents are completeness and clarity, which are worked out in the description of incidents as follows. A critical incident should include: (1) interpersonal attitudes that reflect a contrast between the home culture and the target culture, (2) the customs or norms of the target culture, (3) the contrasting values of the two cultures and (4) the various social situations that participants may be confronted with at work or other social settings. In short, the critical incidents themselves can focus on behaviors, ideas, perceptions and attitudes of members of both cultures and on the crucial differences in those factors between interlocutors from the two cultures so that they can help leaners use their own cultural framework and the framework of other cultures for the interpretation of behaviors in the same way as do members of the other culture (Bhawuk, 2001)

Snow (2015) distinguished two types of critical incident exercises: *cultural assimilators* (close-ended tasks) and *encounter exercises* (open-ended tasks) and Snow argued that the open-ended task brings more advantages to the learners compared to the close-ended one. *Cultural assimilators* are real-life situations that depict a cultural misunderstanding or clash between people from two different cultures. Following the scenario, it has multiple choice exercises, including a list of possible explanations for the situation and an answer key that discusses the merits of each possible explanation (Richard, Leah, Brigitte, Joseph & Ou, 2016; Snow, 2015). *Encounter exercises* are also real-life scenarios but they require learners to generate possible explanations of the situation. The open-ended format requires more of students' engagement in the discussion to work out the answers than the close-ended ones do, and might therefore better suited to be incorporated in English as Foreign Language classes (Snow, 2015). Open ended tasks also provide good speaking and expository writing practice.

Snow (2015) argued that the advantages of the open-ended tasks outweigh the one of close-ended tasks and emphasized the interplay between intercultural competence and repeated use of these encounter exercises. Critical incident open-ended tasks that are repeatedly used offer learners reasonably realistic practice thinking through the process of interpreting incidents. Snow contended that the use of these task could lead to: (1) awareness of problematic situations and the habit of switching to more conscious thinking modes, (2) consideration of multiple interpretations of a situation, (3) awareness of factors which may negatively impact the interpretation process and (4) awareness of the benefit of the doubt choice and how the choice of an interpretation affects subsequent interactions with the interlocutors from the target culture.

Common themes of critical incident tasks in workplace context

In the present study, we aimed to educate undergraduates who might work with Western employers after their graduation. Thus, in the scenarios of the critical incident tasks, we targeted at the workplace context as our training goals. According to Brislin (1986) and Bhawuk (2001), workplace context scenarios between the individualistic and collectivistic culture (Western versus Vietnamese culture) can be centralized around the themes described in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Themes of critical incident tasks in workplace context between individualistic and collectivistic culture

Concepts	Behavioral settings	Individualistic culture	Collectivistic culture
Concept of self	1. Missing a deadline	Negative consequence	Acceptable
	2. Failure to follow schedule	Negative consequence	Acceptable
	3. Valued skills	Technical	Interpersonal
	4. Being direct and forthright	Preferred	Avoided
	5. Hiring a friend's relative	Not acceptable	Acceptable
	6. Hierarchy	Less distinctive	Distinctive
Prioritization of goals	1. Work versus pleasure	Sacrifice work	Sacrifice pleasure
	2. Individual gain versus group responsibility	Individual gain	Group responsibility
	3. Reward allocation	Equity rule	Equality rule
	4. Social loafing	Likely in groups	Less likely in groups
	5. Selection and promotion	Merit-based	Favors in group
Motivation for behavior	1. Work place behaviors	Less normative	Formal norms
	2. Interacting with superiors	Less normative	Formal norms
	3. Work orientation	Task focused	More social
	4. Decision making	Many styles	Procedure oriented
	5. Problem solving	Resulted oriented	Procedure oriented
Orientation to relationships	1. Laying off employees	Rational	Relational
	2. Providing service	Charge fee	Earn credit (unequal exchange)
	3. Relationship versus task	Task focused	Relationship focused
	4. Work relationship	Short term	Long term

Usefulness of critical incident tasks

Critical incident tasks might be beneficial to intercultural competence training. Cross cultural training may be more effective and time-efficient if it focuses on the process of learning about and adjusting to cultural differences rather than transmitting culture-specific information about a given destination (Tolbert & Mclean, 1995). Within this goal, critical incident tasks could bring the learners to a higher cognitive and affective level. Empirical studies proved that the critical incident technique has significant impact on trainees' ability to retain and generalize cultural information and to formulate isomorphic attributions. Formulating isomorphic attributions means that participants' attributions are believed to be similar to the cultural characteristics of their interacting counterparts (Albert, 1986; Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000). Many authors claim that critical incident technique could underpin the

acquisition of intercultural understandings, knowledge and competence (Collins & Pieterse, 2007; McAllister, Whiteford, Hill, Thomas & Fitzgerald, 2006; Snow, 2015). Critical incidents are open to multiple interpretations and thus provide opportunities for the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills via professional reasoning processes (McAllister, Whiteford, Hill, Thomas & Fitzgerald, 2006). More importantly, Cushner (1989) and Collins & Pieterse (2007) emphasized that participating in critical incident analysis might boost students' awareness of cultural experiences so that future incidents are acknowledged, attended to and even analyzed. In this way, a commitment to enhanced awareness and honesty in future behavior may occur.

5.2.2 The present study

In the current study, we decided to implement the intercultural communication instruction with the open-ended critical incident tasks to examine English non-majors' awareness of intercultural communication. The following research questions guided our research:

1. *What are the effects of intercultural communication instruction by means of critical incident open-ended tasks on English non-majors' awareness of intercultural communication?*
2. *Is this effect different for students who differ in their ability in awareness of intercultural communication?*
3. *Do the English non-majors develop their awareness of intercultural communication over time?*
4. *Do students who differ in their ability in awareness of intercultural communication score differently on the different critical incident tasks?*

5.3 Method

This study partly utilized the same data as Chapter 4. In Chapter 4, we used the students' pretest and posttest papers for analysis. In this study, we used students' papers on pretest and posttest and also on 10 critical incident open-ended tasks for all the analyses.

5.3.1 Design

A pretest-posttest control group design was used to examine the effects of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident tasks on students' awareness of intercultural communication. Both the intervention group and the control group were instructed with the same instructional course designed for English non-majors with their majors in the technical domain. The course textbook was adapted from the English course book named "Outcomes Intermediate: Real English for the Real World, 1st Edition" by Dellar and Walkley (2011). The intervention was the implementation of intercultural communication instruction with 10 critical incident tasks (ten workplace scenarios) (Appendix 3) added to the course instruction. Students in the experimental condition and control condition completed the pre- and post-test (see for an overview of the research design in Table 5.2).

Table 5.2

Research Design

Group	Pre-test	Intervention	Post-test
EC (n=234)	O_1 (W1)	IC & CI	O_2 (W11)
CC (n=88)	O_1 (W1)	R	O_2 (W11)

Note: EC = Experimental condition; CC = Control condition; IC & CI = Intercultural Communication Instruction with Critical Incident Tasks; R = Regular course teaching; W1 = Week 1; W11 = Week 11 (the students had 10 weeks for the course); O = measurement of learners' intercultural awareness; O_1 = Pretest; O_2 = Posttest

5.3.2 Participants

Participants were 322 second-year English non-majors in 6 classes of Technical Engineering (131 females). The participants were of the same age of 19 years old. The students' classes were randomly divided into one experimental (4 groups with 234 students) or one control (2 groups with 88 students) condition. All students were required to take an entrance university examination and an English placement test in their first year. Moreover, they followed two courses of General English for English non-majors in their first year and they all passed the final tests of those courses. All the participants were from the Mekong Delta regions in Vietnam.

5.3.3 Procedures

The course took place in 10 weeks with 2 meetings of 4 hours each week. For the experimental condition, students received intercultural communication instruction with one critical incident task of 1 and a half hour in one meeting per week. The other meeting of 2 and a half hour was used for regular education or textbook instruction and students' practice of four English skills for TOEIC test. In the control condition (CC), the students received the regular course instruction with the textbook and practice of four English skills for TOEIC test of 4 hours each week. In order to have similar student efforts in both condition, the students in the control group received more English-skill assignments than their peers of the experimental group. In Table 5.3, we summarize the setup of the procedures of the treatment condition.

Table 5.3

Course Activities for the Treatment Condition

	Procedures
IC (Intercultural Communication Instruction) & CIT lessons	Initiating activity + introduction of the critical incident task (*) + discussion of the critical incident task in pairs + performing the critical incident task individually + wrap-up
Regular lessons	Regular textbook tasks + students' practice of 4 English skills for TOEIC test

Note: (*): Only in the first 3 weeks, this part is added

Of the four experimental groups, two were instructed by one instructor, who is one of the authors and has been engaging in teaching English as a foreign language for 7 years. The other two groups were instructed by another instructor, who is also an English teacher and has had experiences in teaching English as a foreign language for 10 years. The two student groups in the control condition were instructed by two other teachers, one teacher for each group. These two instructors are also English teachers. The first one has been involved in instructing English as a foreign language for 15 years and the other for 8 years.

Treatment condition

Students in the experimental condition were given a critical incident task treatment. In the first three weeks, lessons were built up with five parts: 1) an initiating activity, 2) introduction of the critical incident task, 3) discussion of the critical incident task in pairs, 4) performing the critical incident task individually and 5) wrap-up.

1) In the initiating activity, cultural differences between Western and Eastern culture in the workplace were introduced through supplementary cultural materials. The purpose of this initiating activity was to help the learners grasp the major cultural points that would emerge in the critical incident task afterwards.
2) Then, the critical incident task was introduced and explained. In the first three lessons, a model or instructions of the task was provided so that the students could master the aims and significant points in performing the task.
3) Next, the students discussed the incidents in pairs. In all tasks, the students were asked to summarize the scenario of the incidents and work out the problematic issues of those incidents in the perspective of effective intercultural communication.
4) In the following step, the students were requested to perform their answer individually on an answer sheet since we aimed to gain the students' final product in their own perception which means that we expected to see how they extracted the information they obtained from their peer discussion and demonstrated this knowledge in their own perspective.
5) Finally, there was a wrap-up phase in which teachers summarized and asked questions about what the learners had just studied. In this phase, the instructor also explained the answer and gave feedback to the students for the task they have just done.

In the last seven weeks, lessons had only four parts leaving out the introduction of the task as students were accustomed to the task.

The themes presented in Table 5.1 capture critical work for intercultural interactions at the workplace between the individualistic and collectivistic culture which can be used as a guide to develop critical incidents. As we had an exploration study of the workplace context in foreign subsidiaries in Vietnam in 2015, we developed critical incident tasks based on the findings of this study and on the above themes. 12 critical incident tasks (including the pretest and posttest) from several Intercultural Booklets (see Appendix 3 for the specifications of 12 tasks) designed as training guides for Intercultural Education Program were utilized for the intervention program. One task (task 8) was written by the researcher on the basis of a real story in a foreign subsidiary in Vietnam. These tasks shared three aspects:

1) Themes are congruent with the cultural issues coming about from earlier research.
2) These incidents were purposely designed for undergraduate students taking their first course in intercultural communication and based on information from professional training of the multicultural corporations in an effort to improve their workers' relations, equalize

opportunities and enhance workplace experiences for their increasingly multicultural labor force (James, 2015; Norquest College, 2015).

3) These incidents demonstrate an in-depth look into two contrasting cultural ideologies, Eastern and Western culture with cultural dimensions such as time perception, face-concern, direct and indirect communication, family orientation, participation in work decision-making and power distance (Tran, Admiraal & Saab, 2017).

Control condition

Students only received the regular course instruction with the textbook of four hours each week. In addition, the students in the control group received more English-skill assignments than the experimental group.

5.3.4 Data collection

Students' awareness of intercultural communication has been measured by their completion of the 12 critical incident tasks, including a pre-test and post-test. The pretest and posttest were structured in the same format as the ten critical incident tasks of the intervention. Participants completed the pretest at the beginning of the course and the posttest one week after the final critical incident task of the experimental condition.

Data were gathered via students' answer sheets. The answer sheet includes an instruction for the students to do the task, the critical incident which is a problematic workplace scenario in the form of texts or conversations among characters and a table with 4 questions. The students were asked to read the scenario in 5 minutes and then discuss the scenario and work out the solutions to the problem in pairs in 20 minutes. Afterwards, they wrote down their answers to the 4 questions in the table individually. The 4 questions were formulated in line with 3 indicators: (1) *students' understanding of the scenario (scenario understanding)*; (2) *students' understanding of the miscommunicated points in the scenario (miscommunication understanding)*; (3) *students' awareness of effective communication in Western or Eastern culture (awareness communication Western or Eastern).* These four questions were constructed in an ascending level of difficulty in which the students uncovered the issue (questions 1 and 2) and showed awareness of intercultural communication (questions 3 and 4).

The students' answers were rated with a rubric, based on the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Value Rubric for grading (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2013), the model of Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) and Deardorff's intercultural framework (Deardorff, 2006). Students' answers in each task were rated in 10 point grading scale with 5 levels, with level 1 = 0.5 point and level 5 = 2.5 points (Appendix 4). For each of the four questions, 2.5 points could be earned. The students' answers were graded by the first instructor of the experimental group, one of the authors of this article. In order to ensure the reliability of the grading procedure, the two instructors of the experimental groups rated the posttest of one experimental group (N=56 of 234 students) with a satisfactory correlation (r = 0.692).

5.3.5 Data analysis

Students were grouped in classes and instructors. Six groups of students participated with four groups of students in the experimental conditions and two groups in the control condition. The four groups of students of the experimental condition were instructed by two teachers, each of them teaching two

groups. To check whether the variance of the pre-test and post-test scores that can be attributed to the group level variance component models with two levels (group and student) were analyzed for the pre-test and posttest scores, both the total score and the scores on the three indicators. In all analyses, variance at the group level did not differ significantly from 0 showing low proportions of variance explained at the group level. Therefore, we performed analyses at the student level only.

To examine a potential instructor effect, we also tested differences in change of pre-test scores to post-test scores between the two teachers within each condition with repeated measures analyses of variance. In both the experimental condition and control condition, we did not find any difference between the teachers in change of the pre-test scores to the post-test scores: experimental condition ($F(1,166)= 0.780$;$p= 0.379$) and control condition: ($F(1,66)= 1.488$;$p= 0.227$). We had similar results for the change in each indicator.

In order to examine the effects of the critical incident tasks (research question 1), we performed multivariate analysis of covariance at the student level with condition (intercultural communication instruction with critical incident task or regular education) as factor, the post-test scores on the three indicators of awareness of intercultural communication as dependent variables and the pre-test scores as covariates. Subsequently, we performed paired-samples t-test for each indicator between pre-test and post-test scores within each condition.

In order to answer research question 2, we first examined how many ability groups could be distinguished based on the pre-test scores. We repeated the multivariate analysis of co-variance described above for 2, 3 and 4 binned groups. The analysis for three binned groups were selected to answer research question 2 as the clustering into three groups provided significant findings in contrast to clustering into either two or four ability groups.

In order to answer research question 3, we plotted the original scores of the 10 tasks, both for the total scores and for the three indicators.

In order to answer research question 4, we performed multivariate analysis of variance within the experimental condition with ability group (low, medium and high) as factor and the sum scores for all 10 tasks. Then for the tasks in which the three ability groups differ, we performed multivariate analyses of variance within the experimental condition with ability group (low, medium and high) as factor and the scores for each task on the three indicators of awareness of intercultural communication as dependent variables

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Effect on awareness of intercultural communication

In Table 5.4, we present the descriptive statistics for both conditions. We found a multivariate effect for condition (Wilks' $\lambda = .452$; $df = 3,228$; $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .548$), which showed a significant difference between both conditions on the posttest scores on students' awareness of intercultural communication. Students from the experimental condition generally showed significant higher scores on the posttest on awareness of intercultural communication than the students from the control condition, after controlling for the pre-test scores (see Figure 5.1).

The test of between-subjects effects with three indicators as dependent variables showed a significant difference of three indicators in the posttest's results between the experimental and control condition, after controlling for the pre-test scores. The largest difference was found in *awareness communication Western or Eastern* (indicator 3) ($F(1, 234) = 141.324$; $p = <.001$; $\eta2 = 0.503$). A smaller but still significant effect was found in *scenario understanding* (indicator 1) ($F(1,234)$; p .001;

η^2 =0.217) and *miscommunication understanding* (indicator 2) (F(1,234)= 53.774; p < .001; η^2 = 0.356).

Next, we performed paired samples t-test between the pre-test and post-test scores for each condition. For the experimental condition, all differences between pre- and post-scores were significantly different with higher scores on the post-test with p ≤0.001 (indicator 1: t(167)= -4.026; indicator 2: t(167)= -9.665; indicator 3: t(167)= -10.329; total pre-test: t(167)= -11.590). For the control condition, all differences between pre- and post-test scores were significantly different with lower scores on the post-test (indicator 1: t(67)= 4.366; p≤0.001; indicator 2: t(67)= 2.558; p=0.013; indicator 3: t(67)= 4.658; p≤0.001; total pre-test: t(67)= 6.022; p≤0.001).

Table 5.4

Means and Standard deviation of Pre-test and Posttest with three indicators

Indicators	**Experimental**				**Control**			
	Pre-test		**Posttest**		**Pre-test**		**Posttest**	
	Mean (SD)	**N**	**Mean (SD)**	**N**	**Mean (SD)**	**N**	**Mean (SD)**	**N**
Scenario understanding (Indicator 1)	1.638 (0.522)	185	1.826 (0.417)	167	1.607 (0.411)	84	1.272 (0.629)	68
Miscommunication understanding (Indicator 2)	1.168 (0.619)	184	1.695 (0.517)	167	1.119 (0.5)	84	0.897 (0.419)	68
Awareness communication Western or Eastern (Indicator 3)	2.505 (1.08)	185	3.509 (0.842)	167	2.446 (0.832)	84	1.772 (0.637)	68
Total	5.327 (1.671)	168	7.018 (1.339)	168	5.162 (1.288)	68	3.941 (1.256)	68

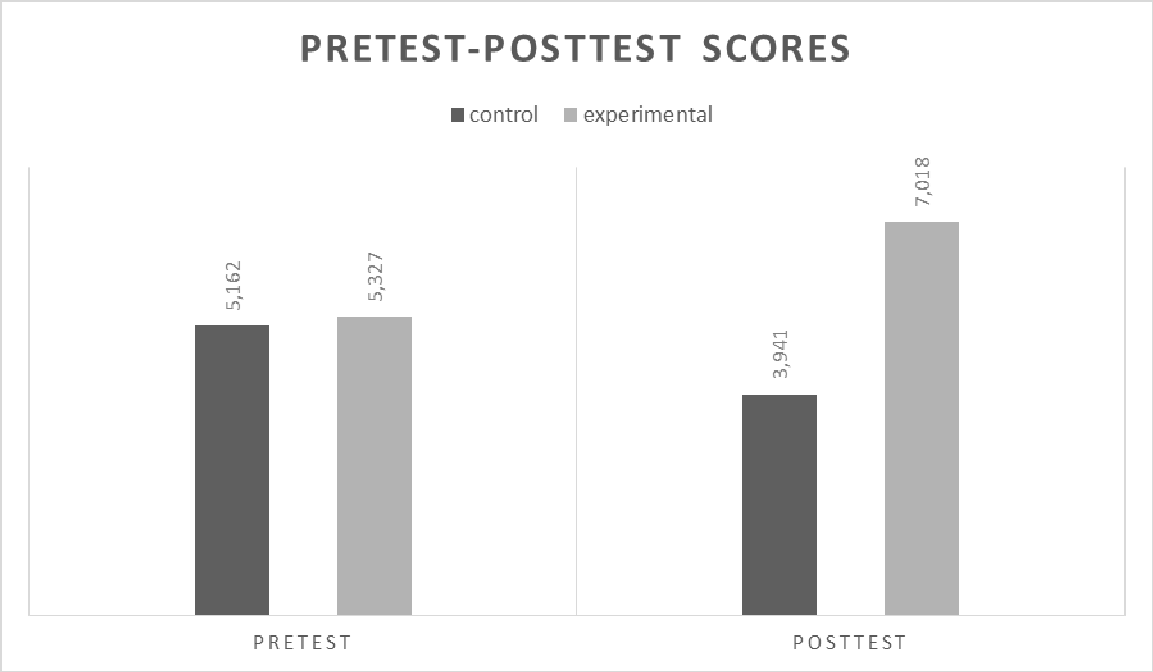

Figure 5.1 *The effects of critical incident open-ended tasks on students' awareness of intercultural communication*

Since the largest difference between the experimental and control group was found in indicator 3 (*awareness communication Western or Eastern*), we selected two students to illustrate what a low or a high score on this indicator looks like. In Table 5.5, the performance is shown of these two students on task 3.

Table 5.5

Qualitative Analysis of Students' Paper between the Low and High Scorer for Indicator 3 from Task 3

	Student with a low score	**Student with a high Score**
Answer to question number 3 (How would you think George should behave considering Bo's cultural background?)	George *should sympathize* with Bo.	In Bo's culture, *people do not often speak out when they do not agree nor they have an idea*; they think that "a wise head makes a close mouth". They *also feel shame to express ideas between the crowds*. So George *should change Bo's mind slowly by advices and encourages*, not to accept his suggestion.
Answer to question number 4 (How would you think Bo should behave considering George's cultural background?)	Bo *needs to learn much more* and *more comments* in meeting.	In George's culture, *people just speak out when they have something to say*. This habit helps their community going better and having a clear direction to develop. In this situation, *Bo should change his habit and gets on well to the new community* if he wants his career getting better.

From Table 5.5, it is obvious that the student with the high score could highlight the contrast between Western and Eastern culture and offered an acceptable suggestion for both characters. In contrast, the student with the low score could not emphasize the cultural differences and made a very general statement about the solution to the problem. It is worth noting that the student with the high score did not get the highest score because of grammatical mistakes and unintentionally did mistake answering question number 3. The correct answer was that "George should accept Bo's suggestion that Bo can ask for recommendations from the people who run the meetings for solutions of the problem". The student probably intended to answer in that way but wrote down the answer in an opposite meaning. For the answer to question number 4, the student with the high score also did not get the maximal score because of grammatical mistakes and the solution to the problem is not clear enough; more elaborations about habit change should have been made.

5.4.2 Effect on awareness of intercultural communication for students with low, moderate and high awareness

Because the students' scores on ten critical incident open-ended tasks fluctuated a lot, we decided to perform this analysis in order to examine accurately the students' development of intercultural communication awareness throughout the course. The result from the analysis of co-variance with pre-test as covariate for 2, 3 and 4 binned groups indicated that the 3 binned groups, low, middle and high scores on the pre-test, explained the largest proportion variance in the post-test scores (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6

Analysis of co-variance with pre-test as covariate for 2, 3 and 4 binned groups

Groups	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Square
2 groups (low and high)	2.736	1	2.736	1.694	.194	.007
3 groups (low, middle and high)	13.374	2	6.687	4.104	.018	.035
4 groups (low, middlelow, middlehigh and high)	2.672	3	.891	.544	.653	.007

From Table 5.6, we see an interaction effect of intervention by groups that differed in awareness showing that – in addition to the main effect of the intervention on students' awareness of intercultural communication- the effect of the intervention differed between the three student groups. From the mean scores shown in Table 5.7, we may conclude that the intervention of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks explained more variance in the post-test scores for the low and middle scoring group, compared to the high scoring group.

Finally, the results from the multivariate analysis of covariance with intervention and awareness groups as independent variables indicated a significant interaction effect in all indicators: *scenario understanding* (indicator 1), ($F(2,232) = 5.787$; $p = 0.004$; $\eta 2 = 0.049$), *miscommunication*

understanding (indicator 2), (F(2,232) = 3.546; p = 0.03; η2 = 0.031) and *awareness communication Western or Eastern* (indicator 3), (F(2,232) = 3.374; p = 0.036; η2 = 0.029) (see Table 5.7).

5.4.3 Students' development of awareness of intercultural communication over 10 tasks

In Figure 5.2, we have plotted the mean scores on the 10 tasks for the three groups of students that differ in their level of awareness of intercultural communication at the pre-test. Figure 5.2 clearly shows a large fluctuation in scores between the 10 tasks.

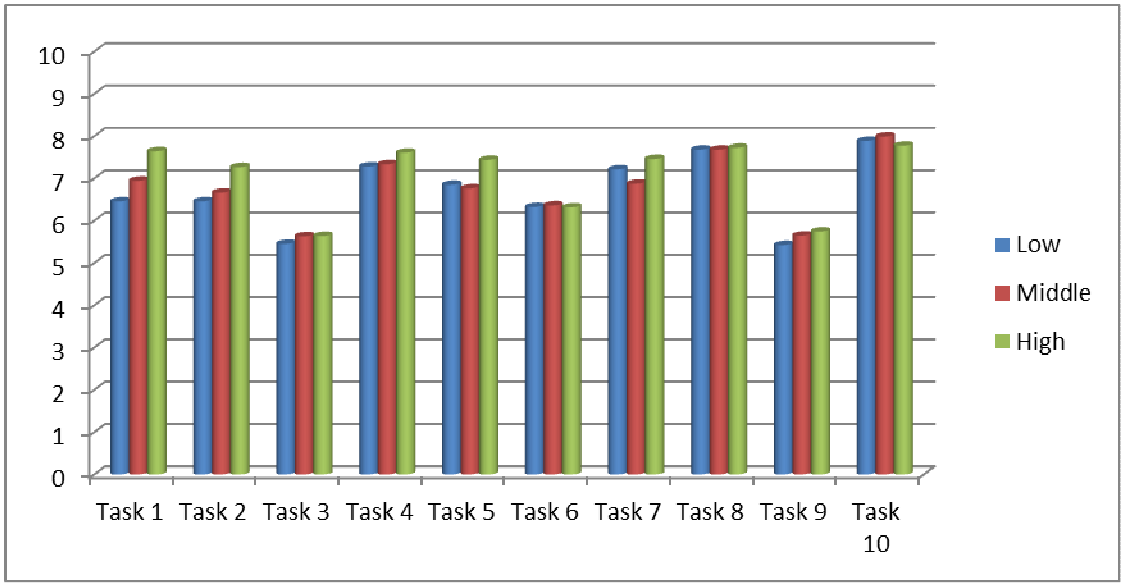

Figure 5.2 *Mean scores of the three student groups on the 10 tasks*

5.4.4 Differences between the three student groups in awareness of intercultural communication in each task

From the multivariate analysis of variance with the three student groups as independent variables and the scores for awareness of intercultural communication on the 10 tasks, we found a significant difference for ability group ((Wilks' λ = .744; df = 20,222; p= 0.025; η^2 = .138). The test of between-subjects effects with 10 task scores as dependent variables showed significant differences between ability groups for task 1 (F(2, 123) = 10.296; p < 0.001; η^2 = 0.146) and task 2 (F(2, 123) = 4.075; p =0.019; η^2 = 0.064). For the other tasks, no significant differences were found between the three ability groups (see Table 5.8). Scheffé posthoc test showed that for task 1, the high scoring group differed significantly from the low and middle scoring group (high versus low: p < 0.001; high versus middle: p = 0.012) and for task 2, the high scoring group differed significantly from the low scoring group (p = 0.029).

From the multivariate analysis test for 3 binned groups with three indicators for task 1 and task 2, the results showed that, for task 1, we found significant effect for indicator 2 (F(2, 163) = 7.830; p= 0.001; η^2 = 0.089) and indicator 3 (F(2, 163) = 7.658; p= 0.001; η^2 = 0.087), with significant differences between the low and middle scoring group with the high scoring group for indicator 2, p=0.001 and p=0.009, respectively) and between the low and high scoring group for indicator 3 (p= 0.001).

Table 5.7

Total scores and scores on the three indicators of the pre- and post-test for students with low, moderate and high awareness scores on the pre-test

Indicators/Groups		Experimental						Control					
		Low		Middle		High		Low		Middle		High	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Pre-test	Scenario understanding	1.304	0.563	1.675	0.306	1.992	0.377	1.477	0.430	1.625	0.265	1.938	0.359
	Miscommunication understanding	0.667	0.546	1.272	0.423	1.664	0.367	0.818	0.390	1.375	0.368	1.563	0.403
	Awareness communication Western or Eastern	1.536	1.051	2.803	0.400	3.364	0.547	1.941	0.725	2.895	0.329	3.250	0.447
	Total	3.514	1.236	5.737	0.251	7.025	0.604	4.144	0.939	5.896	0.207	6.750	0.316
Posttest	Scenario understanding	1.750	0.417	1.865	0.385	1.880	0.446	1.014	0.548	1.361	0.659	1.750	0.470
	Miscommunication understanding	1.641	0.573	1.750	0.437	1.690	0.514	0.900	0.398	0.722	0.427	1.071	0.385
	Awareness communication Western or Eastern	3.320	0.956	3.711	0.723	3.540	0.768	1.857	0.636	1.500	0.568	1.857	0.662
	Total	6.711	1.487	7.340	1.099	7.069	1.307	3.833	1.195	3.583	1.251	4.679	1.202

Total	Low		Middle		High	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	5.675	1.959	6.387	1.996	6.554	1.615

For task 2, we found a significant effect for indicator 1 2 ($F(2, 159) = 4.220$; $p= 0.016$; $\eta^2 = 0.051$) with the high scoring group showing significant higher scores than the low ability group ($P= 0.019$).

Table 5.8

Means and standard deviation of the differences among 3 groups of students: low, middle and high in each task

Task and	Low		Middle		High	
Group	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Task 1	6.457	1.475	6.944	1.223	7.644	1.077
Task 2	6.458	1.822	6.663	1.640	7.269	1.805
Task 3	5.452	2.017	5.632	1.678	5.639	1.711
Task 4	7.283	1.187	7.337	1.219	7.608	1.193
Task 5	6.849	1.512	6.764	1.589	7.440	1.427
Task 6	6.323	1.464	6.361	1.343	6.315	1.588
Task 7	7.215	1.476	6.875	1.608	7.462	1.392
Task 8	7.680	1.268	7.680	1.232	7.724	1.342
Task 9	5.423	1.873	5.648	1.465	5.745	1.663
Task 10	7.887	1.424	7.991	1.073	7.774	1.489

From the multivariate analysis test for 3 binned groups with three indicators for each task, the results showed that, for task 1, we found significant effect for indicator 2, between the low and middle with the high scoring group; for indicator 3, between the low and high scoring group. For task 2, significant effect was found for indicator 1 between the low and high scoring group. Finally, for task 5, significant effect was found for indicator 1 between the low and high scoring group.

5.5 Discussion

This study aims to examine the effects of intercultural communication instruction with ten critical incident tasks on the English non-majors' development of awareness of intercultural communication. The results indicated that students instructed with intercultural course by means of critical incident open-ended task showed a strong positive development of their awareness of intercultural communication compared to the students in the control condition. We found significant differences of answers on critical incident open-ended tasks on students' awareness of intercultural communication between the experimental and control group on the three indicators: (1) *understanding of the scenario*, (2) *understanding of the miscommunicated points in the scenario*, (3) *awareness of effective communication in Western or Eastern culture*. The largest effects were found in indicator 3. Accordingly, we conclude that teaching intercultural communication by means of critical incident open-ended tasks with student pair work generally enhances students' awareness of intercultural communication.

We also explored the effect of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks on students' awareness of intercultural communication in three awareness groups: students with low, middle and high scores on the pre-test. We found a significant interaction effect between intervention and awareness groups for all the indicators indicating that the intervention explained most variance in students' awareness of intercultural communication at the post-test for students with low and moderate initial awareness.

Additionally, we also observed the students' development of awareness of intercultural communication over time in ten tasks within the experimental condition showing large fluctuation in scores on the different tasks. Finally, we tested differences between the three awareness groups within the experimental condition on the 10 tasks showing significant differences on only some indicators of three out of the ten tasks. The latter means that the effect of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident task is rather stable across initial levels of awareness, although a bit stronger for students with low and moderate levels initial awareness of intercultural communication.

From the general effect of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended task on students' awareness of intercultural communication (research question 1), we see slightly different effects for the three indicators with curiosity and discovery which is indicated in indicator 1 (*scenario understanding*), observation, analysis, evaluation and interpretation, which is indicated in indicator 2 (*miscommunication understanding*), and awareness of effective and appropriate communication, which is indicated in indicator 3 (*awareness communication Western or Eastern culture*). The strongest effect was found for indicator 3, which could be understood as the most crucial indicator of awareness of intercultural communication. Students in the experimental condition generally used the knowledge they gained from their training to explain and give suggestions to cross-cultural misunderstanding. The findings highlight that intercultural communication instruction with critical incident technique is a desirable tool for cross-cultural training in EFL classes, particularly introducing important cultural concepts that direct further cross-cultural training. Specifically, the findings we found have three similarities with previous studies. First, this study confirms the development process in which the students in the experimental condition move from ethnocentrism to broad ranging cultural competence. In other words, the students could formulate a higher ethnocentric view which proceeds towards a greater level of cultural awareness and acceptance (Aoki, 1992; Cushner, 1989; Herfst, Oudenhoven & Timmerman, 2008; McAllister, Whiteford, Hill, Thomas, & Fitzgerald, 2006). Second, the students from the experimental conditions might exhibit increased knowledge about factors that mediate cross-cultural interaction and adjustment. They do acquire new elements to assist them for the explanation of interactions and communications (Cushner, 1989; Tolbert & Mclean, 1995). Finally, intercultural communication instruction by means of critical incidents tasks help to build up students' sophisticated intercultural thinking. Students tend to better memorize events in a scripted sequence as they were put into the experience. This experience probably outperforms a list of do's and don'ts that is often presented in informational presentations (Cushner, 1989; Herfst, Oudenhoven & Timmerman, 2008; McAllister, Whiteford, Hill, Thomas, & Fitzgerald, 2006).

We also examined the effects of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks on students' awareness of intercultural communication among three groups of students who differed in their initial level of awareness. In general, we found a strong effect on scores of students with low and moderate initial awareness and smaller effect on scores of students with high initial awareness. Probably, students with low and moderate initial awareness need intercultural communication training with critical incident open-ended tasks in order to develop their awareness of intercultural communication more than students with high initial awareness who only reached a slightly higher level of awareness of intercultural communication. From Figure 5.2 and Table 5.8, it is quite clear that the students with high initial level of awareness do not grow any more after task 2. One explanation could be that students with initial high scores might got bored of doing the same task every week. A second explanation could be that these students might need another learning activity, maybe in combination with a critical incident task. A third explanation could be that students with initial high scores cannot grow anymore because they already have reached the maximum scores. But

that is not the case in this study: even initial high scoring students could have reached a higher level as they generally did now.

5.6 Limitation

The first limitation is that the students in the experimental condition received both intercultural communication instruction and communication skills in their speaking lessons of regular education. Because of this, the results might be affected by two conditions: intercultural communication skills and general communication skills. In further research, we suggest that students' development in rgular education should also be taken into account.

In the current study, we look for the students' development of awareness of intercultural communication throughout ten tasks through the students' answers on papers. The participants in this study could not completely show their awareness of intercultural communication since they were restricted by the language and writing ability although they could choose to perform the tasks in Vietnamese (see Table 5.5 and the explanation below the table). Accordingly, we recommend that in future studies, an integration of speaking and writing assessment should be made in order to assist the students to thoroughly express their ideas.

In the current study, intercultural communication was instructed by means of critical incident open-ended tasks to promote English non-majors' awareness of intercultural communication. The study is a quasi-experimental study with two conditions: experimental and control. The experimental group received teaching intercultural communication with critical incident tasks and the control group received regular education in which the students were instructed with normal course for English non-majors. Although teaching of communication skills was included in the control condition, it cannot be concluded that the development of the students in the experimental group of their intercultural awareness is affected by relatively more attention to intercultural communication (as addition to communication skills in general), the critical incident tasks as a teaching method, or both of them. Although giving lectures to compare two or more cultures that should be appear in the critical incident tasks is a compulsory step in the intervention (Shibata, 1998), this is still a limitation of this study. In further studies, a better design in which the experimental group receive both intercultural lectures and critical incident open-ended tasks and the control group receive only intercultural lectures should be made. Only in this case, more accurate interpretations of the effects of critical incident open-ended could be obtained.

Finally, from the plot analysis of the students' development over 10 tasks, no growth in between the tasks was observed. However, the students in the experimental condition performed high scores on the posttest. This finding might be the effect of testing to the test. The students in the treatment condition did the same task every week and they knew exactly how to do it perfectly. In another observation, the different themes of the tasks, the different levels of difficulty of the tasks probably in combination with the sequence of these tasks, might explain the large fluctuation in scores of students in the experimental condition. However, we still decided to choose those variety of combinations because we thought of the quality of the course. In order to have a favorable educational program, integration of diferent themes and various levels of difficulties should be conducted to arouse students' interests. This might be an interesting topic for future research. In order to examine the influence of different tasks, we should use a research design which combines sequence and themes.

5.7 Implications

We can conclude that intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks is an effective method to promote learners' awareness of intercultural communication. Additionally, the intervention seems to work better for students with a low or moderate initial level of awareness than for the other students. These findings lead us to the following implications. First, teaching cultural general knowledge might not be sufficient for the learners' preparation to emerge in an intercultural context (Tolbert & Mclean, 1995). The learners need communication-oriented skills to succeed in the intercultural settings and the critical incident approach might offer them with those necessary skills. Second, as after the third task, students' awareness of intercultural communication does not increase much, it might be that a program with 3 tasks is sufficient for the students' practice. Another option would be that teachers alternate or combine other methods with the critical incident tasks so that the students, especially the high scoring students do not get bored. Finally, although the current study aims to develop future graduates' awareness of intercultural communication, we believe that intercultural communication instruction with critical incident technique is also useful for training of expatriate managers or workers. In an intercultural context like the economic situation in Vietnam, awareness of intercultural communication from both parties is needed.

5.8 Concluding remarks

Intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks is a promising method to assist educators to support the development of their students' awareness of intercultural communication. Critical incident open-ended tasks help students to develop their critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills if these tasks are appropriately implemented. In this way, these tasks support the combination of language and intercultural competence training, which as some other claims (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001; Sercu, 2004) cannot be separated.