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CHAPTER 6

General conclusions and discussion

6.1 The context of the study

This study was conducted in the South of Vietnam. All the data that were analyzed in the exploration studies (Chapter 2 and 3) were collected from companies in Ho Chi Minh city and Can Tho city (the capital city of the Mekong Delta). The data for the experimental study (Chapter 4 and 5) were collected at Can Tho University of Technology. The selection of the companies for the exploration studies in this project was carefully planned but in a way that the data collected would be accurate, appropriate and upright. All the companies were randomly chosen through a website called the Global Trade in Customer Language website (http://eu.ecizi.com). The author followed the following procedure: first, she collected the randomly chosen companies' information; then she sent emails, phoned or visited the companies in person to ask for their permission to carry out her research at those companies. Accordingly, all the participants in these exploration studies formed a group of various people with different nationalities (for the Western employers) and different regional origins (for the Vietnamese employees and employers), which ensured the internal validity of the studies.

The results from the exploration studies showed significant differences between the Vietnamese and the Western participants, even though there was a great variety within the groups: the Western group consisted of people with different nationalities and the Vietnamese group consisted of people from different regions. Nonetheless, when interpreting the results of this study, one should keep in mind that not all Western countries nor all Vietnamese regions are completely similar. In the following parts, the characteristics of those two groups will be described more in order to provide a clear frame work for interpreting the findings of the studies.

6.2 Main findings and conclusions

This dissertation is divided into two parts: the exploratory studies (chapter 2 and 3) and the experimental studies (chapter 4 and 5). The exploratory studies investigated cultural differences related to work-related values and communication between Western and Vietnamese professionals in foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures in the South of Vietnam. The results have shown significant differences in work-related attitudes and in intercultural communication problems and concerns between Vietnamese employees and Western higher managers. These findings will be summarized in part 6.2.1. Based on these findings, the intervention of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident technique has been examined in language classes in higher education to better prepare students to work in an international context. These findings are elaborated in part 6.2.3.

6.2.1 Findings from the studies on the intercultural workplace context

In Chapter 2, examination of the differences in work-related attitudes between Vietnamese employees and Western employers/higher managers was conducted. This study is based on research question 1: *To what extent do Vietnamese employees and Western employers/managers differ with respect to their work-related values?* Six work-related values were extracted from the international research on cultural distance in the workplace: 1) *sense of time* (this value was split into two other sub-values: *being on time in a direct way* (e.g. asking for an extension of a deadline) and *being on time with a*

condition (e.g. asking for a deadline extension if I have good reasons)*,* thanks to Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis)*,* 2) *participation in higher managers' decision-making,* 3) *open relationship with employers,* 4) *face-concern,* 5) *accountability* and 6) *autocratic versus work-performance orientation.* These work-related attitudes were selected from empirical and theoretical studies reflecting differences between Western and Vietnamese culture.

The questionnaire findings showed that Western employers exhibited higher mean scores than Vietnamese employees in all work-related values. Significant differences were also found between Vietnamese employers and Vietnamese employees, with higher scores for Vietnamese employers, except for *being on time with a condition*. Additionally, three significant differences were found between Western and Vietnamese employers, with higher scores for Western employers: *being on time in a direct way*, *being on time with a condition* and *face-concern*. The researcher did not find any significant differences between the Vietnamese employees working in foreign and Vietnamese companies. The differences between Western employers and Vietnamese employees were more significant than the differences between Vietnamese employers and Vietnamese employees. Therefore, the differences between Western employers and Vietnamese employees seem to be caused partly by cultural aspects and partly by status differences between employers and employees. In conclusion, the largest differences between Western employers, on the one hand, and Vietnamese employers and employees were found in *sense of time* and *face-concern*, which indicates that these are two significant differences between Western and Vietnamese professionals. The findings provide insight into what future graduates who are going to work with Western professionals should work on most. The findings also signify the importance of culture instruction along with language instruction in higher education.

In Chapter 3, examination of intercultural communication issues between Western employers/managers and Vietnamese employees in Western subsidiaries and joint-ventures in Ho Chi Minh city in Vietnam was conducted. This study tried to answer the following questions: 1) *What are the perceptions of Vietnamese employees towards communication in the workplace in foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures in Vietnam?* 2) *What are the perceptions of Western employers/managers towards communication in the workplace in foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures in Vietnam?* The study specifically delved into the impact of cultural distance on daily-work communication of professionals from Western and Vietnamese culture and aimed to validate the findings from the questionnaire data in study one.

From the interviews, it seems that both perspectives (employers and employees) on communication between the Western managers and the Vietnamese employees seem to complement each other, in which the differences are due to both cultural and status differences. There were many concerns and problematic issues from the Western managers' viewpoints centralizing around (1) *lack of communication* and (2) *lack of autonomy in getting work done* and *motivation in professional development*. The Western managers complained that while working with Vietnamese employees, they encounter several issues that they do not face when collaborating with their home-country partners. Nevertheless, from the Vietnamese employees' side, there were not many concerns brought about and the negative points were not frequently mentioned. They clearly stated that they have good and satisfying relationships with their higher managers.

6.2.2   Elaborations on the differences between Vietnamese and Western professionals

Taking into account the statistical components of the three different groups: Western employers, Vietnamese employees and Vietnamese employers, it could be concluded that there are more differences between the Western employer group and the Vietnamese employee group than between

the Vietnamese employer group and the Vietnamese employee group (please see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2). *Firstly*, in regards to personality characteristics or individual differences, the Vietnamese groups (employees and employers) consisted of more females than males whereas in the Western employer group, there are only 3 females out of 32 employers/managers. Gender differentiations at workplaces have been long discussed by their inequalities in several aspects (Padavic & Reskin, 2002; Peterson, 2004). Peterson (2004) found out that although men and women value the same aspects of work, they have different indications for those values. While men fall for pay, money, status, power, results and achievement, women put greater value on friends and relationships, recognition and respect and virtues such as integrity and honesty. Besides, Padavic & Reskin (2002) noted that the differences of gender at workplace are usually seen in two facets (1) the sexual division of labor and (2) the undervaluation of women's work and overvaluation of men's work. These researchers eventually contended that both men and women might be susceptible to value conflict, less productivity and health problems if they are working in an environment dominated by their opposite-sex counterparts. Accordingly, value conflicts easily occur when there is domination of one sex in workplace environment and the situation in these companies could be more severe when there are three big differentiations between the Western employers/managers and Vietnamese employees: status difference, gender difference and cultural difference. Secondly, with reference to work experience, both groups, Vietnamese employees and Western employers/managers have short time in experience working with their counterparts (please see Table 2.1, Chapter 2). In this case, more time is needed for both sides to penetrate into the others' world to interact effectively because acculturation process takes time and the participants need to go through many stages before reaching their final goals (Anderson, 1994).

Relating to cultural differences, the author aims to make distinction between the Vietnamese people and other Eastern or Asian groups although there are also a lot of similarities between them which greatly differentiates them from Western people. For a long time, the Vietnamese value system is constructed on four main grounds (coming from the basics of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism like other Eastern countries): (1) allegiance to the family in which the benefits of the family and the community come before individual desires, (2) yearning for a good name in which a good name or keeping good face is more significant than material possession and a Vietnamese individual often avoid words or actions that could harm his/her dignity and honor, (3) love of learning in which education is accentuated, and (4) respect for other people in which harmony is a crucial nature to be preserved (Hays, 2014; Hue Private Cars, 2016). In addition, in regards to "time concepts", the Vietnamese have no impression for the word "rush" and accordingly, time is not as valuable to the Vietnamese as it is to the people from the United States (Hays, 2014). However, the current Vietnamese value system is slightly modified compared to previous years because of the influence of Socialism and Westernism. Now, there are five main ideologies affecting the system including: traditional values, Confucianism and Taoism, Buddhism, Westernism and Socialism. Particularly, the impact of Western values in recent years is captured in the sense of promoting individual awareness not only for his/her personal development but also for supporting the development of the society (Nguyen, 2016). Another significant impact of Western values on the Vietnamese people is the change in position of women. In the past, women were definitely assigned the role of housewives and mothers at home. Nowadays, thanks to this influence, many Vietnamese women are well-educated and engaged in many types of careers, leaving their kitchen corners and become professional workers (Nguyen, 2016).

The Vietnamese economy is recently greatly affected by the globalization and internationalization all over the world; nevertheless, the values system is still dominated by the

traditional and Confucian system and the Vietnamese people's characteristics are frankly distinctive from Western individuals in many ways (Luong, 2009; Weng, 2015). Moreover, taking into account the Western groups in this project, one crucial feature is that they are from different Western countries comprising of the United States of America, New Zealand and European countries such as England, Ireland, Belgium, France, The Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden. Although these employers/managers are from divergent Western nations which are all developed countries, they come to Vietnam to work with Vietnamese people and might face similar challenges during their expatriate assigments. *First*, they have to work at a higher level than what they do in their domestic environment because they have to interact with people from a different culture with a different language (Nikolaeva, 2010). *Second*, due to the pressure to achieve productivity from the parent companies, those expatriate managers put pressure not only on themselves but also on their counterpart employees. They might set high expectations for their cross-cultural employees and endeavor to Westernize their Vietnamese workers; however, they often fail in reaching this goal and are quite distressed afterwards (Kamoche, 2001). *Finally*, there is one undeniable fact that Western people are direct and they always have problems with Vietnamese people's indirectness, which is really annoying to Westerners when working with Vietnamese people (Nguyen, 2016; Pham, 2014; Puffer, 2004). Puffer (2004) contended that indirectness is specifically frustrating for project managers driven by a time-is-money orientation. Like many other Asians,when working with the Vietnamese, building trust is the first step that expatriates should take for later success. When Vietnamese people trust their partners, they will be more open (Reeder, 1987; Sergeant & Frenkel, 1998). Pushing too fast risks everything when doing business with Vietnamese nationals (Puffer, 2004).

The author describes the characteristics of the two groups of participants in this project in order to highlight their dissimilarities which might lead to the conflicting opinions they stated in Chapter 2 and 3. The author did not explain in details the "West" characteristics of the Western group because they are composed from many nationalities; however, they are still a group of Western people with great differentiated characteristics from the group of Vietnamese people. This could be the explanation for the consequences of cultural distance between two cultures, which were presented in the result sections in Chapter 2 and 3 (please see 2.5 in Chapter 2 and 3.4 in Chapter 3).

6.2.3   Findings from the experimental studies of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks

Chapter 4 and 5 in this dissertation aimed to explore the effects of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident task on English non-majored undergraduates' intercultural competence. The research questions guided these studies were: 1) *What are the effects of intercultural communication instruction with 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 different critical incident tasks?* In the scenarios of the critical incident tasks, workplace context between the individualistic and collectivistic culture (Western versus Vietnamese culture) was targeted as the study's training goals and also the crucial means to impart cross-cultural knowledge as well as the skills to the students.

A pretest-posttest control group design was used to examine the effects of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended 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 intervention was the implementation of intercultural communication instruction with ten critical incident open-ended tasks (ten workplace scenarios) added to the course instruction. Students in the experimental condition and control condition completed the pre- and post-test. Students' awareness of intercultural communication was measured by their completion of the 12 critical incident tasks, including a pre-test and post-test.

Students instructed with intercultural communication course with critical incident open-ended task showed a strong positive development of their awareness of intercultural communication compared to the students in the control condition. Significant differences of answers on critical incident open-ended tasks on students' awareness of intercultural communication between the experimental and control group were found 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, the combination of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks and student pair work generally enhances students' awareness of intercultural communication. I 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. A significant interaction effect was found 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, I 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, differences between the three awareness groups within the experimental condition on the ten tasks were tested and the findings showed 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. Therefore, I concluded that intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks is an effective method to promote learners' awareness of intercultural communication and that the intervention seems to work better for students with a low or moderate initial level of awareness than for the other students.

6.3 Discussion of the main findings

The discussion focuses on two main themes: the differences in cultural values and the usefulness and meaningfulness of intercultural communication instruction with CIT to enhance students' awareness of cultural values in higher education language classes. Discussion of the results from differences in cultural values will be presented in part 6.3.1 and discussion of the results about intercultural communication instruction with CIT will be presented in part 6.3.2.

6.3.1 Discussion of the findings from the exploration studies

The first two studies aimed to formulate satisfactory solutions for the professionals working in intercultural fields to achieve a mutual understanding with their cross-cultural partners in order to accomplish their goals in their professional environment. Via the examination of employers and

employees' perceptions and needs, measures can be worked out to facilitate intercultural training at tertiary level.

The exploration studies led to several implications for communication enhancement through leveraging the cultural differences between Western employers and Vietnamese employees. *Sense of time* and *face-concern* are the two largest differences in work-related attitudes between Western and Vietnamese professionals coming about from these exploration studies.

The findings of differences about *time perception* are predictable and align with previous research concerning the divergent perspectives about *time use* between Western and Eastern culture (Arman & Adair, 2012; Ashwill & Thai, 2005; Kathryn & Dinh, 2006). The opposite view in measuring *time* might have consequences for work productivity because when people value *time* differently, they might work in a different manner to achieve their goals (Arman & Adair, 2012; Kathryn & Dinh, 2006). The problematic issue about *time* could be solved when people from the two cultures read their counterparts' way of thinking about how to use time (Kathryn & Dinh, 2006). For instance, since the concept of time is quite stretched in Vietnam, a collectivistic culture, (Leonard, Billing, Bhagat & Lammel, 2010; Smith & Pham, 1996), the Westerners must understand that the Vietnamese employees take time to do their work because they desire to do it in a rigorous and effective way. In contrast, the Westerners desire to accomplish their work in a short and concise time (Leonard, Billing, Bhagat & Lammel, 2010). Thus, it would be better if the Westerners searched for the reasons for the Vietnamese' tardiness and the Vietnamese are explicit about the time they finish their task. Both sides should moderate their time management in order to accomplish a deal satisfying the company's needs.

The findings from the first two studies are persistent with literature about facework between Western and Eastern culture in which in Vietnamese culture, the harmony of individual behavior with the judgement and acceptance of other people is more appreciated than the accommodation of individual desires (Nguyen, 2016; Pham, 2014), whereas the definition of face in Western culture is manifested in the individual's want to be approved of, and the individual's want to be free from imposition. In other words, the desire to be loved, supported, and admired, and the desire to have full freedom in doing what one wants, have become the key explanations in Western politeness behavior (Merkin, 2006; Pham, 2014). The first two studies provided an in-depth look into the distinctive belief in the concept of *face* between Western and Vietnamese culture. The underlying meaning of miscommunication between workers from two cultures mostly originates from how the face-savings works for them. The Vietnamese tend to avoid tense emotions over relationships by keeping silent or even lying in order to stay in a safe zone in face-threatening situations because they incline to think that that is a way to save face for them as well as the people they are interacting with (Nguyen, 2016; Pham, 2014). Nevertheless, to the Westerners' mindset, directness in conversations is appreciated (Mak, Chen, Lam, Yiu, 2009; Pham, 2014; Sanchez-Burks, Lee, Choi, Nisbett, Zhao & Koo, 2003). They would prefer to discuss things in an explicit and straightforward manner so that things can be quickly and easily worked out. Because of these divergent beliefs, clashes might occur in every single contact and hamper the smooth of daily working procedure.

In short, the findings from the exploration studies showed how cultural distance affects communication at the workplace between people from different cultures. However, in addition to the impact of cultural dissimilarities, the gap in employer/manager and employee expectation should also be taken into account. The Western employers come to Vietnam with the ideal idea to rearrange a new world for their subsidiaries by bringing their country's ideology into a new and incomparable context. On the other hand, the local employees are quite overwhelmed when the new style of the Western

employers is speedily experimented. Thus, sometimes, in their haste to accomplish things, the employers' adaptation may fail and they cannot reach their goals.

6.3.2 Discussion of the findings from the experimental studies of intercultural communication instruction with CIT

The findings from the exploration studies made it clear that cross-cultural training is needed to train the students in higher education. An experimental study with intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks was set up to find out effects of the training of intercultural skills in higher education.

Different from previous studies utilizing critical incident technique with close-ended tasks (Bochner & Coulon, 1997; Collins & Pierterse, 2007; Cushner, 1989), the experimental studies in this dissertation have used the open-ended approach in order to maximize the students' communicative and critical thinking competence. The open-ended approach requires more of students' engagement in the discussion to work out the answers than the close-ended ones do. Open-ended tasks also provide good speaking and expository writing practice and might therefore better suited to be incorporated in English as Foreign Language classes (Snow, 2015).

Findings from study 3 and 4 proved the positive effects of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks on enhancing students' intercultural communication skills. Consistent with former studies using critical incident task training (Aoki, 1992; Bochner & Coulon, 1997; Collins & Pierterse, 2007; Cushner, 1989), the results confirmed that students become more aware of the cultural differences and might be able to use the knowledge they gained to manipulate and deal with problems and conflicts in an intercultural context afterwards.

The examination of 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 is also a distinctive feature of the studies in this dissertation compared to former research. Previous studies (Aoki, 1992; Bochner & Coulon, 1997; Collins & Pierterse, 2007; Cushner, 1989) did not examine the students' development of awareness of intercultural communication differentiating between students with various levels of awareness of intercultural communication. The findings have verified that 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.

6.4 Reflections and suggestions for future research

In this section, reflections on some methodological issues will be presented so that the conclusions of the studies could be more cautiously interpreted. Besides, recommendations for further research are also made on the basis of these reflections.

First, the exploration studies were conducted in order to offer some guidance for the design of cross-cultural training curriculum in higher education. However, there is a missing link between the companies and the higher education institutions in this research. The findings of the research could be further substantiated if the trained students are going to work in those companies. The training could assist those students to have a good preparation for their future interactions with Western workers. Additionally, the findings should be applied to design a training programs for the employees who are working in those foreign companies because these findings are these employees and employers'

reflections on their work experiences and they should be explicitly informed to the whole organizations as lessons to be taken into account. In further studies, it is recommended that the gap between the companies and the higher education institutions should be filled by their collaboration in many cross-cultural training programs.

Second, in the exploration studies, the limitation is the lack of a Western employee sample working in the same companies as the Vietnamese employees. As the Western employers both represent people from different cultures and hold the position of management, the results might be affected by two conditions: cultural and position difference. Consequently, it is difficult to determine how much differences were due to cultural distance or position distance, although, in this study, I tested differences for both pairs of participants (Western higher managers versus Vietnamese employees and Vietnamese higher managers versus Vietnamese employees). However, in the future, when there are more Westerners working as employees in Vietnam, this research can be validated by comparing employees from these two cultures in the same companies.

Third, the gender issue in which nearly almost the managers are males whereas most of the employees are females should also be taken into account. At the moment, gender and power issue are difficult to separate as there are not many female employers. In order to work this out, I suggest that further research may choose the foreign companies with a more balanced number of male and female employees and employers so that more valid data can be obtained.

Next, in the second exploration study, there was not much negative information obtained from the Vietnamese employees. Imprinted by the culture, specifically power distance, the Vietnamese professionals are usually reluctant to offer straight and downside information about their managers (Jacqui & Tran, 2009; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Pham, 2014). They probably did not straightly express their grievances and they seemed to provide quite good and neutral information. Many Western managers as well emphasized that Vietnamese people do not show bad things out; they generally come to the managers with good news and when they face downsides, they just keep the information as secrets and solve the problems by themselves. Therefore, in order to catch the real image of their intercultural communication with their Western superiors, I used many probing questions. Further research may also use observational tools to gain more behavioral examples from their workplaces.

Fifth, two instructors of the experimental groups found out that the students were a little bored when they did the same critical incident task with the same format every week. That might also be the reason why the students with high scores from the beginning did not reach the highest level of development. Some students were really motivated until the end of the course but some others lost their interests when they did the same task every week. Therefore, I suggest that in addition to critical incident tasks, role play or other forms of cross-cultural training can be incorporated in order to help students gain real performance experience from the skills they obtain from the critical incident tasks. In other words, these critical incident tasks should be alternated with other teaching formats.

In addition, 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.

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.

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, in the experimental studies, I looked 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 write in Vietnamese. Accordingly, in future studies, an integration of speaking and writing assessment should be made in order to assist the students to thoroughly express their ideas.

6.5   Practical implications

This dissertation has revealed significant differences which might cause clashes in daily work situations between Western and Vietnamese professionals. Additionally, the measures to fix the problematic issues have also been disclosed, which are valuable to the scholarship of intercultural communication in professional context. The findings from the implementation of intercultural communication instruction with critical incident open-ended tasks are also useful for further studies using the same method or designing intercultural lessons. Following are some implications from the results of the studies in this dissertation.

6.5.1   Implications for intercultural workplace context

In the exploration studies, two largest dissimilarities between Western and Vietnamese professionals coming about are *sense of time* and *face-concern*, which might become the main grounds for conflicts and misunderstandings happening. Several lessons can be taken into consideration.

First, in Vietnamese culture, face loss is considered a vulnerable situation, which might cause an emotional barrier between Western employers and Vietnamese employees. The findings from the

exploration studies suggested that Vietnamese employees are usually behind the deadlines but might tell a lie to their higher managers that they finish or when they have problems, they also hide the problems and try to fix the problem by themselves. The underlying reason for the Vietnamese's actions of concealment also emerges from their face-saving belief. They feel embarrassed to show their bad things out. Accordingly, it is suggested that Western higher managers could use both direct and indirect facework strategies simultaneously in order "to lessen the blow of the direct communication that needs to be used to get points across" (Merkin, 2006, p. 155). This means that in order to coax the employees' appreciation, the Western employers might play the role of both a quietly powerful but considerate managers. Then, the Vietnamese subordinates might feel more at ease to reduce the distance, talk openly and voice their opinions to the superiors. On the other hand, in order to help the Western higher managers catch the implicit meanings of the Vietnamese's behaviors, the Vietnamese professionals should at least offer the reason for their actions. Findings from the questionnaire data suggest that when a condition or a reason is added, differences between Western employers and Vietnamese employees are less.

Second, the interviews in the second study gained insights into how the Western managers successfully communicate with their Vietnamese employees by building trust. Most of the higher managers confirmed that problems can be worked out when their employees trust them. When trust is established, the cultural and power distance is reduced and employees are more open to share and contribute. Scheduling face to face meetings and informal social events is a way to build trust and solve the problems since the employees have chances to communicate to their managers through informal, clear and explicit conversations. Building trust might also be a way to help the Vietnamese employees reduce their embarrassment when they have something to share with their managers.

Third, both the Vietnamese employees and the Western higher managers agree that professional meetings (once a month or every two or three months) are effective for strengthening both professional and communication skills. These meetings can be acknowledged as a strategy of Human Resource Management to impart professional knowledge and experiences and fortify the relationship between superiors and subordinates.

Finally, the findings suggest that pre-departure adaptation is a good preparation for expatriates' later adjustment and on-site training is significant for both the foreigners and host country nationals (Peltokorpi, 2010). It is important that the companies together with the universities play active roles in supplying those communicative cross-cultural training so that culture-based misunderstandings and negative stereotypes can be diminished.

6.5.2   Implications for higher education

The exploration studies provides a clearer vision of how communication between the Western higher managers and Vietnamese employees is going on in the foreign companies so that a relevant intercultural lesson is formulated to train the undergraduates in higher education institutions. Since most of the information obtained from the companies are several contextual problematic working situations, I am strongly inclined to a training program of intercultural communication instruction using critical incident tasks, which are several communication situations or cultural clash events - situations where unexpected behavior occurs in which the participants (or one participant) consider as problematic and confusing. These critical incidents could help learners look for appropriate ways to deal with real-life scenarios afterwards.

Intercultural communication instruction with critical incident with open-ended tasks is promising for providing cross-cultural teaching as part of ELT classrooms. Teaching cultural general

knowledge might not be enough for the learners' preparation to emerge in an intercultural context (Tolbert & Mclean, 1995). The learners need essential skills to succeed in their professional environment and the integration of teaching cultural general knowledge with critical incident approach might bring them up with those necessary skills in order to gain control of the international workplace settings. Besides, although the main goal of the current studies is to enhance future graduates' intercultural awareness, this intervention might also be useful for future expatriate managers training and employee coaching at the workplace.

Concerning the ways to provide the tasks, it is recommended that firstly, CIT might be effective when a series of tasks are applied, which means that practice of the tasks should happen regularly. Secondly, CIT might be effective when it is combined with other ways of teaching. In the intervention, the instructors did perform the initiating task in which the major cultural points that would emerge in the critical incident tasks were presented through texts, pictures or video clips. As after the third task, students' awareness of intercultural communication did not increase much, it might be that a program with three 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. Thirdly, in order to optimize the training, I conceived that pair work or group work could be a good option for ELT classrooms. Learners collaborated and argued a lot to figure out what was happening in the scenario and for the explications and resolutions to the problems, which might be very beneficial for enhancing their language skills as well.

6.6 Final conclusion

In closing, cultural differences might bring several issues to the workplace if there is no preparation for the consequences. Cultural distance has been recognized not only by its disadvantages but also its benefits. In fact, multinational organizations have been proved to enjoy many benefits when entering the world market if people understand the ways to manipulate those precious assets (Hasan, Mehmet & Demet, 2014). This research project is conducted to serve the needs of the global-oriented development in the Mekong Delta and Ho Chi Minh city in Vietnam, specifically at Can Tho University of Technology. With the excessive penetration of foreign trade and culture into Vietnam, the residents should upgrade themselves to keep pace with this internationalization. Therefore, an inquiry into workplace culture and operation of foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures in the area is propitious for intercultural communication training of EFL students in the region. With the information collected in the studies in this dissertation, contribution to the intercultural communication research body can be made by creating a manual for composing intercultural communication curricular not only for higher education training but also for employee and employer coaching.

6.7 Final reflections

In the context of teaching English in Vietnam in general and in the Mekong Delta in particular, most English program curriculum for non-major students do not include intercultural communication skills enhancement inserted into the main English programs. Specifically, in the context of Can Tho University of Technology, all the English courses do not touch intercultural communication skills because of the following reasons. First, focusing on the language skills already consumes a lot of teachers' and students' time and they cannot find any space to instruct and practise other relevant soft skills. Second, most of the textbooks which have been selected and adapted by the teaching staff of the

university within the past two decades stress the instruction on language and general communication skills; there are no chapters or teacher instructions about comparison of cultures in these textbooks. Third, instructing intercultural communication skills is quite a new domain to the teachers at Can Tho University of Technology. Finally, the university director board did not make any efforts yet in supporting teachers both mentally and finanically to conduct well-made English programs with the insertion of intercultural communication skills.

The author of this dissertation, who had been teaching at Can Tho University Technology for 7 years before doing her Ph.D in the Netherlands, instructed several English courses for non-major students in Technical domains, Law, Business and Economics. Students of these courses were also adults who come to the University Language Center to learn General English to serve the needs of their current jobs or going abroad for permanent living. Among these leaners, most of them got satisfying results and they were quite happy with the courses they took. However, the reason for conducting this research project is also based on the evaluations of a large subset of participants, who noted that the original course was not sufficient for communicating effectively in English with people from other cultures. They stated that they needed more training of the language skills and more knowledge and training of the cultures of people they are working with or might be working with in the future. From those evaluations, the author herself reckoned that not only the English-majors have a demand to learn about the cultures and intercultural communication skills of the target language but the English non-majors are also in greater demand of those skills and knowledge. For this reason, the author decided to write the proposal for this research project and looked for funding to implement the project.

During the lines of thoughts when writing the proposal, the author decided to do exploration studies at foreign companies because there was a lack of knowledge about the communication between different cultures in international organizations in Vietnam. The author wanted to get more insight in this matter in order to develop and implement the first English program inserted with intercultural communication skills enhancement at her university. For this reason, she conducted the first two exploration studies and attempted to use as much as possible the knowledge she gained from the results of the exploration studies to apply to the later experimental studies. A second step in developing the course should be to enhance the collaboration between the univerisities and the companies to improve the learning process of the participants. The trained students in the experimental studies should be sent to those companies for a short internship in order to interact with the foreign employers/managers for hands-on experiences. With that experience, the results of the experimental studies could be justified, modified and adapted. However, at this moment, in the context of Vietnam, the missing link between the enterprises and higher education institutions is quite significant (Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam, 2015). In addition, this mission is also out of the author's authority since she has just successfully convinced the university director board to implement a small course of intercultural communication training for English non-majors and asking permission from the companies for students' internship is too far of expectation in the current stage due to the limitation of financial and liability resources.

However, the author is still ambitious in carrying out further projects, firstly to disseminate what she has done in the present project to other colleagues not only in her university but also in the Mekong Delta and the South of Vietnam, secondly to look for agreements and finance to assist students with better environments for their English and intercultural communication skills practice.

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