Developing Intercultural Competence via Social Media Engagement in a Language Learning Framework

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Abstract

Today's EFL students need both advanced language skills and an appreciation of other cultures. Technology for language learning, however, is usually focused on language skills. Cultural understanding is rarely a primary goal. Intercultural competence was the primary goal of this study, using a technically-mediated and culturally-oriented online learning community to cultivate intercultural competence using social collaboration, understanding, reflection, and appreciation. Students in South Africa and Taiwan reacted to videos on cultural topics made by American college students. Qualitative data analysis included the social media discussions of the participants, end-of-study questions, and teacher-participant journals. Six themes in the data are presented, as well as resulting best practices for instructional design and specific author recommendations.

Keywords: *EIL, language learning, computer assisted language learning, cross-cultural, intercultural, social media*

Introduction

The 21st century is marked by a growing population that uses English as a second or a foreign language. In tandem with the globalization of business, industry, and education (Benzie, 2010; Ferguson, Pérez-Llantada, & Plo, 2011), the advent of English as an International Language (EIL) has resulted in a growing need for multicultural understanding and perspectives in order for the speaker to be able to function effectively in the cosmopolitan international society (Dörnyei, 2014). In other words, for today's students to be competent in their future professional communication with customers and colleagues from other countries, they need both advanced language skills and an appreciation of other cultures. Because of these priorities, many people see the need for shifting English education teaching paradigms to adapt to the changing learning environment (Richards & Rogers, 2014).

According to Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), "intercultural competence means being aware that cultures are relative. That is, being aware that there is no one 'normal' way of doing things, but that all behaviors are culturally variable" (p. 23). Intercultural competence is necessary, as a practical matter, to learn a language today (Escudero, 2013) because the differences caused by border, space, and geography have been diminished, and the level of human interaction across cultures is greatly expanding. In this globalized environment, intercultural competence takes on a vital role (Peterson, 2009; Wiebe & Kabata, 2010).

Most academic studies in the literature, however, employ technology not for cultural understanding but rather for language skills, such as vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Those that address culture usually make it a secondary, not primary goal (Chwo, Marek, & Wu, 2014; Stockwell,

2014). This led the authors to conclude that cross-cultural knowledge is often under-represented in the typical EFL curriculum. As a result, intercultural competence has received less scholarly study than language skills.

The instructional design of this study included an online language learning community that was technically-mediated and culturally-oriented, designed to cultivate intercultural competence in language training via a social orientation using the steps of collaboration, understanding, reflection, and appreciation. Twenty-four graduate and undergraduate students from South Africa and Taiwan watched videos about American culture created by college students who were native English speakers in the United States, and performed various interactive learning tasks associated with the topics of the videos.

The academic goals of the study were to enrich intercultural competence through authentic, inspiring, and motivating experiences and materials, using cross-cultural communicative experiences, and creating opportunities to reflect, to compare, to increase openness to, and acceptance of, other cultures. The research goal was to understand the participants' experiences as they developed greater intercultural competence via an instructional design incorporating social technologies.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What were the perceptions of the participants about their interaction with people of other cultures in this study?
2. What were the perceptions of the participants about using the current social media instructional design to increase intercultural understanding?
3. What are best practices for use of the instructional and technology design of this study?

This study is significant because it focused on using social media technology to improve intercultural competence as a primary, not secondary goal of the study, and because it explored how the instructional design, social technology design, experiences, and attitudes of the students, as well as the experiences of the instructor, influenced cultural understanding. As such, it presents a model for English learning and intercultural competence via cross-cultural interaction that is interactive, multicultural, task-based, and technology-oriented. When such factors are employed, students become more motivated, which translates into higher confidence and ability (Wu, Yen & Marek, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, the researchers prefer the term "intercultural" to "cross-cultural" because intercultural carries the connotation of "between people." Similarly, the researchers use "competence" to refer to active intercultural communication ability and "understanding" to refer to the mindset of the interlocutor.

Theoretical Framework

Two notable theoretical frameworks served as the basis for the instructional and research design of this study. They are Liddicoat and Scarino's view of language as social practice, and Hanvey's levels of cultural understanding.

Language as Social Practice

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) saw language learning as requiring complex social interaction. They noted that theories that conceptualize language as communication, but employ a simplistic framework "…have marginalized the learner as a meaning-maker in the very act of communication, often trivializing what is communicated and communicable in the language classroom" (p. 14). They presented five basic principles that they considered to be the foundation of language learning: *active construction, making connections, social interaction, reflection*, and *responsibility*.

Active construction. This principal draws on Constructivist learning theory (Bruning, Schraw & Norby, 2011) in which the teacher provides the students with opportunities to learn and the students engage in interpreting the material and making meaning, as opposed to simply memorizing facts.

Making connections. Students must connect new knowledge with what is already known. In language learning this means understanding one's existing linguistic and cultural frameworks and balancing them against new experiences.

Social interaction. Learning, according to Liddicoat and Scarino, is an interactive process. At the same time, interaction is the purpose and goal of language learning. Learning, they said, requires continual interaction to negotiate meaning among many perspectives and participants. Effective language learning, therefore, is much more complex than simply acquiring vocabulary or applying grammar rules.

Reflection. Learning results from higher-order thinking skills, including both cognitive and emotional responses. Reflective thought, according to Liddicoat and Scarino, encompasses connecting knowledge, thinking in abstract and conceptual ways, and understanding one's own thinking and learning strategies. Liddicoat and Scarino saw reflection as requiring the learner to move beyond one's framework of interpretation and socially constructed concepts in order to seek new perspectives.

Responsibility. The learner has several responsibilities, according to Liddicoat and Scarino, including to communicate with others, to seek intercultural sensitivity and understanding, and to be fair and respectful to other participants in the communication.

While the five points in this framework do not all address intercultural understanding directly, Liddicoat and Scarino noted that they can be thought of as prerequisites for an intercultural perspective. As such, they said, they can serve as elements that should be developed into an intercultural instructional design.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), furthermore concluded that what they called social technology, as opposed to information technology, can be extremely beneficial in developing language learning within an intercultural instruction design orientation. Use of technology-mediated communication has become a high priority for foreign language education (Ware & Kramsch, 2005). Among technologies employed for pedagogical use, social networking technology can foster strong feelings of social connectedness which can become beneficial to language learning situation (Hung & Yuen, 2010). Social media, therefore, presents great opportunities to connect people of diverse cultures to promote understanding, because people are familiar with the interface and features provided by the social media platforms (Wu & Marek, 2016). Indeed, social media platforms, such as Facebook and LINE, have been shown to fulfill the standards, capabilities, and functions that should be desirable in an online platform used for EFL instruction (Marek & Wu, 2012). The framework of Liddicoat and Scarino, therefore, was a primary consideration in creating the lesson plan, instructional materials, and learning tasks in this study.

Levels of Cultural Understanding

In 1976, Hanvey defined four levels of what he called cross-cultural awareness. The authors have edited Hanvey's model slightly (Table 1) and reinterpreted it as levels of intercultural competence.

Table 1: *Levels of Intercultural Competence*

Level	Information	Mode	Interpretation
1	Awareness of superficial or very visible cultural differences; stereotypes	Textbooks, National Geographic, Internet	Unbelievable, bizarre, exotic

2	Awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one's own	Cultural conflict situations	Frustrating, irrational, immoral
3	Understanding of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one's own	Intellectual Analysis, explanations from intercultural friends	Accepted logically
4	Understanding of how another culture feels from the standpoint of the insider	Cultural immersion; living in the culture	Accepted because of subject familiarity

Hanvey found that intercultural understanding is a process that people move through, based on their experiences. He concluded that higher levels of understanding of other cultures are likely to result in more competence in international relationships. More specifically, he indicated that level 3 is required to experience empathy with another culture or group of people, preferably with at least some progress toward level 4. The desire to help participants make progress toward Level 3 was another primary consideration in creating the lesson plan, instructional materials, and learning tasks in this study.

Methodology

This study connected students in South Africa and Taiwan via a private Facebook group, which is considered to be a suitable tool for improving cultural understanding (Marek & Wu, 2012; Toetenel, 2014). The participants watched and reacted to cultural videos created specifically for the study by students at an American higher education institution.

Participants

The participants in this study included nine graduate and 13 undergraduate students at a public university in the Republic of South Africa, as well as 15 undergraduate students from Taiwan, five from a technical university and ten from an academic university. Because English is spoken widely as a second language in South Africa, the Taiwanese participants were carefully chosen to have sufficient English proficiency to enable meaningful interaction. The English level for all Taiwanese participants was above the intermediate level, based on local or international general English proficiency tests. The study was a special learning activity not related to specific classes in either country.

Instructional Design

The study used three videos about American culture made especially for the three-month-long study by college students in the United States. The topics were gift giving, snack food, and diversity. The researchers chose to invite American students to produce the videos in order to provide authentic content created by American peers specifically to trigger intercultural understanding via purposeful social discussions. The American students were in a video production class taught by an American professor.

For each video, the South African and Taiwanese participants in the study performed learning activities via their private Facebook discussion group. The activities included watching, interpreting, and discussing the videos; general intercultural interaction; as well as responding to focused questions from the teacher related to videos, including guided questions and required replies, written in English. The guided questions addressed new concepts learned, personal reflection, and critical thinking comparing and contrasting the three cultures (American, South African, and Taiwanese). In order to guarantee the quality

of interaction conducted only by comment and feedback writing, a minimum requirement of no less than 200 words for each answer was required from all participants.

To supervise the process of online learning and interaction, the principle investigator of the study kept frequent contact with all involved participants and professors. In particular, the principal investigator served as the facilitator of the study. Among other tasks, she monitored the engagement of the participants and quality of their interaction to ensure the proper flow of the study, with interventions made as required to address issues.

Four university professors collaborated in the development of the instructional and research design of the study. Faculty members in the South Africa, Taiwan, and two in the United States worked together to reach consensus about the structure of the study. They first established the English as International Language (EIL) framework. They agreed to the use of the social media platform Facebook in the study, taking into account essential elements in computer-mediated communication, namely interactivity, efficiency, adaptability, and public-private factors into consideration (Spitzberg 2006).

In the next phase of planning, the faculty members in Taiwan and South Africa focused primarily on developing the learning tasks to be used. The two faculty members in the United States collaborated with their students to prepare the three videos to be used in the study. The faculty members had agreed to the themes of the videos, but the American students had to write, record, and edit the videos into their final form. They presented their own viewpoints, but also interviewed faculty and members of the surrounding community to include information with more depth and broader perspectives.

The three topics were chosen for the following reasons:

1. Gifts we give on special occasions. This topic was the springboard for discussion of the kinds of gifts given in different countries as well as the cultural context behind the gifts and those special occasions.
2. Snack foods we eat. Eating usually brings people together, while snack foods appeal broadly to young college students. Talking about snack foods gave participants insight into each other's culture, including discussion of health considerations.
3. Diversity. While the previous topics may be seen as somewhat superficial, the diversity topic was designed as a "capstone" discussion to lead the English learners into varied perspectives on race, age, sex, social classes, religion, place, and political ideology across cultural boundaries, which are particularly important considerations in intercultural competence.

Theoretical Framework

The instructional design of the study employed five core principles for teaching and learning languages from an intercultural perspective, as described by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), *Active Construction*, *Making Connections*, *Social Interaction*, *Reflection*, and *Responsibility*.

Students used *Active Construction* because the participants were not only provided with facts, but were stimulated to make sense of the information they encountered and actively react to it. They encountered multiple cultures during the course of the study, including ideas about American culture, dominant and indigenous culture in South Africa, and dominant and indigenous culture in Taiwan, giving them the opportunity to *Make Connections*. The study was centered on *Social Interaction* that compared and contrasted cultures as a way of negotiating understandings, further defined by Liddicoat and Scarino as a process of *noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting*. The critical thinking for this making of meaning required *Reflection*. The design of the study meant that the participants depended on each other in order to achieve success, meaning that each participant had a *Responsibility* to the others, to make thoughtful comments in a timely manner, and to respect each other's ideas and culture.

Research Design

The researchers employed a qualitative research methodology for data analysis. The small number of participants, chosen to facilitate interaction, meant that quantitative methodology would not be generalizable. In addition, because the research questions addressed experiences, perceptions, affordances, and best practices, qualitative data analysis was judged to provide better opportunities for rich understanding. Table 2 shows the data collection and analysis for each research question.

Analysis of Facebook posts. After viewing the American-made videos in each of the three topic areas (gift giving, snack food, and diversity) the participants discussed three questions, in turn, for each topic. Given the goals of the study, the researchers have delimited analysis of the Facebook posts to the answers to the question about the capstone topic of diversity, because they required the most critical thinking and provided the most opportunity for cultural insights by the participant. In effect, the discussions of gift giving and snack food helped the participants become accustomed to considering cultural similarities and differences, whereas the exploration of diversity was the most powerful topic in addressing the study goals of increasing openness to, and acceptance of, other cultures. Table 3 presents the guided questions used for the Diversity topic.

Table 2: *Data collection and analysis*

Research question	Data Collection & Analysis
1. What were the perceptions of the participants about their interaction with people of other cultures in this study?	Theme analysis of Facebook posts and answers to end-of-study questions.
2. What were the perceptions of the participants about using the current social media instructional design to increase intercultural understanding?	Theme analysis of Facebook posts and answers to end-of-study questions.
3. What are best practices for use of the instructional and technology design of this study?	Synthesis of all findings and academic literature.

Table 3: *Guided questions about diversity*

Question 1: What are some examples among people you know with different backgrounds? Are there areas talked about in the video in which the people you know are ALL the same? If so, what are the categories? What are some of these areas discussed in the video in which you would like to know more people with backgrounds other than your own? Why?
Question 2: Is there anything in your background that sometimes makes YOU feel like you are in a minority? Do people accept the thing that is different about you? How does it make you feel when they do or do not?
Question 3: Is it better for a culture to expect everyone to change and be like the majority? Or is it better for a culture to accept that it is OK for people to be different in these areas? Why?

End-of-study questions. At the conclusion of the three-month study, each participant was asked to answer a series of questions. The question protocol was developed to allow the researchers to understand the experiences of the participants and their frames of reference. Because of the multi-national participants, it was not practical to conduct personal interviews, so they were asked to provide thoughtful

answers to the questions in writing. The researchers also judged that this would allow the participants time for reflection before they answered. Table 4 presents the end-of-study questions.

Table 4: *End-of-study-questions*

1	How important do you think it is to have ability in English in today's world? Please explain.
2	What did you think of the idea of videos and online discussion for learning about the culture of native English speakers? Do you have any ideas for improvements or better ways to do a project like this?
3	In reality, how did it work? Were you satisfied? Why or why not? Give your opinions about the topics included in the two Facebook videos?
4	In this kind of learning, what topics would be most interesting to you? Why?
5	In this kind of learning, how much new vocabulary (words you do not know) is acceptable? Why?
6	In this kind of learning, how many new ideas about other cultures are appropriate – a few, quite a bit, or mostly be new ideas. Why?
7	Did you learn any new words or ideas that helped your intercultural understanding? Please explain.
8	Overall, how interesting was this learning experience and how motivated did you feel to participate? Please explain.
9	Before this learning experience, have you ever used digital learning materials to learn English? This could include audio recordings, video, computer software, and social media, among other tools. Which ones have you used and what were your experiences with them? How did they compare with this the current project?
10	Whether or not you were happy with this learning experience, what advice to you have for teachers who want to use electronic, Internet, or other digital learning materials? What should they do or not do?

Teacher participant-observer journals. The principal investigator, who served as the facilitator of the students' interaction, kept a journal, noting significant occurrences, problems, and successes during the course of the study. This journal also served as a data source for this study.

Findings

Analysis revealed six major themes in the statements of the participants, across the Facebook posts about diversity and their answers to end-of-study questions. The themes were 1) past experience of the participants with digital learning, 2) their perceived value of English ability, 3) participant perception of the benefits of the instructional design, 4) practical considerations for the participants during the study, 5) things learned, and 6) participant suggestion for the future.

Past Experience with Digital Learning

Of the 28 participants in the study, only nine had previous experience with using digital or online platforms for learning. None from the nine South Africans had past digital learning experience.

Nine of the 15 participants from Taiwan had previous experience, having used Facebook, Skype, LINE, Nicenet, or/and Wikispaces for learning. Five participants from Taiwan had used Facebook as a digital learning platform and found it to be particularly effective, in spite of liking all of their past digital learning experiences.

"I did not have similar experience before. However, I feel it very efficient and clear to have a Facebook community, watch videos and discuss and share together our thoughts. Even we are physically separated from other group members, we will be able to share opinions," said one participant from Taiwan. Another Taiwanese participant said, "Before this learning experience, I have used digital learning materials to learn English, such as video and computer software. But I think that our digital learning center is far better than any other digital learning materials that I have used before. Through different people in different countries, people can express their own viewpoints so that every individual will know the distinctive opinions from different countries."

Value of English Ability

All participants said that English ability is important to them. They were aware that English is the first or second language in 70 countries and several participants mentioned the prestige that strong English ability brings to people seeking jobs in international business and media. They said that English opens the door to international society for them.

"South Africans have to acknowledge the presence of the English language to avoid falling into the category of being backwards, and remaining relevant in a contemporary setting," said a South African participant. A participant from Taiwan added, "For me, ability in English is access to the world, the keys that open up paths to greater opportunities."

Benefits of the Instructional Design

The participants liked the instructional design and many saw no need for major changes. They found Facebook to be an effective communication and collaboration tool because they already knew how it functioned, so there was little learning curve. They described their interactions with adjectives like convenient, effective, innovative, and forward thinking.

"Young people are familiar with Facebook so we did not need to learn to use the platform," explained a participant from Taiwan. "It was a great idea, a deviation from having to read about different cultures," added a participant from South Africa. "The advantage of it is that you get to see the person expressing their form of diversity. This helps us become more culturally aware."

It is notable that the participants thought that they learned about their own culture as the result of comparing it to others.

"The online discussion was very interesting in terms of getting to know other cultures and comparing your own culture to another and to see where you show similarities and where you differ," said a South African participant. Another from South Africa said, "I had my doubts about the first topic [gift giving video], but I really found it interesting once I viewed the video." A Taiwanese participant said, "These topics are very internationalized and suitable for people of different nationalities to discuss and share different customs."

Practical Considerations during the Study

The participants found their experiences during the study to be practical and interesting. Problems they cited were largely outside the scope of the instructional design, such as Internet bandwidth, distractions, and school workload.

"I think the concept works, but in reality I found it difficult to do everything via Facebook, due to my Internet connection," said one participant from South Africa. Another from South African explained, "The experience was very interesting and I would have been more active if I was not swamped with all my

university and school work. I would like to apologize once again for my late participation. I would have given my full attention to this innovative experience if I was not working."

Things Learned

Participants in the two countries responded differently when asked about new words or ideas they had learned that helped their intercultural understanding. Participants from South Africa mostly cited facts learned whereas participants from Taiwan more often expressed feelings.

"I really think we shall not be afraid that others cannot accept you," said one participant from Taiwan. "I will have more common topics to talk to them and communicate with them," offered another, and "I learned many new words, and these words I can actually make use of in daily life," concluded a third.

The students said they had learned that countries have their internal issues with cultural diversity problems in cultural communication similar to those they had experienced between South Africa and Taiwan. Learning about other cultures caused them to think more about diversity in their own countries. Their answers to the question about things in their own background that sometimes makes them feel like a minority, and whether people accept the thing that is different about them, resulted in the longest and most thoughtful comments in the Diversity topic. A participant from South Africa reflected at length:

I am known as a "coloured." I speak Afrikaans and because I am from a small community in the Western Cape of South Africa, my Afrikaans differs from that spoken in other provinces. My Afrikaans also differs from that spoken by the so-called "whites", and often that makes me feel inferior, because what I speak might be seen as inappropriate or incorrect Afrikaans. My community might accept the way I speak, but when I move out of my community into a bigger community in another province, I might feel that I have to change or adapt my language or accent in order to be better understood.

Another South African participant had similar thoughts about the multiple official languages, their accompanying cultural factors, and how the participant interacts with each.

South Africa is one of the countries in Africa that is considered to be very diverse. There are mainly four different ethnic groups noted as Black, Colored, Indian, and White. Of these groups, the Black ethnic is considered to be the most diverse. This is because, most, if not 90% of South Africa's eleven official languages are spoken by Black South Africans. This sets us apart also based on the different accents rooted in the different cultural backgrounds and provinces we come from. Even though this may be the case, there are some who show enthusiasm in learning about other cultures and how best to merge them to improve intercultural communication between or amongst peer groups. Personally, I think being able to communicate with other cultures within a particular context has made life relatively easy for me because I have immersed myself in other cultures to learn and to fit in. Diversity can either be a barrier to or a door-way to learning about other people and to relate with other countries on issues of diversity and intercultural communication.

A Taiwanese student also reflected on the multiple cultures in Taiwan.

"Diversity" is an important element because Taiwan is a country of plural cultures. Therefore, there are many ethnic groups in Taiwan, such as aborigines, Hakka, foreign laborers, foreign spouses, and so on. Besides, there are many different cultures, languages and lifestyles between each group especially foreign laborers and foreign spouses because they are from different countries; thus, they may have culture shock.

The study, participants said, had helped them to feel more prepared to communicate with people of other cultural groups. They said they had come to understand that although there were differences, they also saw the similar spirit of cultural traditions such as gift giving.

Suggestions for the Future

Although they were generally satisfied with instructional design, the students made suggestions for future uses of this instructional design. The most common were about ways to improve the level of student

engagement. "There should be time limit because students can be lazy at times," observed a participant from South Africa. The participants looked for even more direct contact, such as video replies or even students making the original videos about their own cultures, as opposed to the third party videos from American students. They repeated the call for captioning if there are issues of EFL proficiency.

"Teachers should be mindful to not concern learners with correctness but rather allow them to enjoy the learning experience through the digital media," recommended a participant from South Africa. "Maybe next time we can invite all community members to shoot videos with them answering questions," suggested a participant from Taiwan. "I think we can recruit more members from more countries," added another from Taiwan.

Teacher-participant journals

The principal investigator, who served as the facilitator of the students' interaction, kept a journal, noting significant occurrences, problems, and successes during the course of the study. This journal also served as a data source for this study.

The journal indicated three major successes in this study. The first was that the video learning materials made by the American college students were highly student-centered. The original plan was that the videos would be "authentic." To accomplish this, the Americans presented both students and non-students, visited representative places, included diverse multicultural viewpoints, and went well beyond simply following basic instructions of their American faculty advisor.

The second success was in the facilitator's interactions with students from three different universities. As a result, the facilitator needed to work with, monitor, and mentor students she knew only from Facebook, and therefore needed to form relationships with them via welcoming messages and individual conversations with them. The process of forming teacher-student relationships was important to the success of the study, particularly for the South African students. Most of them reported being very busy and sometimes required prompting to ensure their timely participation.

The third success of this study, based on the researcher-participant journal entries, was in the overall quality of the dialogue and exchange of interesting ideas among the participants. The comments were thoughtful and intriguing, achieving the aspirations by which the study was designed.

The main problem revealed by the researcher's journal is that she often had to remind participants about assignments, schedules, and deadlines. In the first round of video and response, all participants did well. As the study progressed, participants were more inconsistent, requiring intervention from the facilitator. Even so, some participants sent very late answers to discussion questions.

The journal indicated that the participants were optimistic about the opportunities they were receiving from the study. Regardless of time management issues, proficiency concerns, and other impediments, the participants were positive and felt they were learning.

Discussion

The data indicate that the participants improved their intercultural competence as the result of using social media for cross-cultural communication in this study, and additional language learning was implicit in their experience. As the title of this article indicates, the underlying framework of this study was teaching English, but for the participants, English learning occurred naturally as the result of involvement in multi-national, intercultural communication. Unlike many other studies in which cultural knowledge has been a secondary or even tertiary priority, this study placed intercultural understanding and competence at the forefront, with English proficiency as the "medium of exchange." As such, the study struck an appropriate balance between overt language learning and the more natural way of improving language skills by use.

For example, although the participants were communicating across international boundaries, they made sense of the intercultural discussion questions by scrutinizing cultural sub-groups in their own country, such as indigenous versus dominant culture. This is an example of the participants conforming to the interaction framework of Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) by *noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting*.The videos served as a trigger for noticing and comparing, but students learned organically, from their own reflections and the reflections of their peers.

Often referred to as "authentic learning" (Kocadere & Oagen, 2012), the authors prefer the term "organic learning" because it implies a process that is natural, without being forced or contrived, and without artificial characteristics (Beckett, & Hager, 2000; Moss, 2000; Marek & Wu, 2011). The dynamic of this study was organic, mirroring the real world in which English often mediates communication when interlocutors do not speak the same native language. In such "real world" settings, people improve their vocabulary, grammar, and listening comprehension, but they do not conceptualize themselves to be studying English. Rather they simply see themselves as improving as a result of using the language.

Dörnyei (2005) saw motivation in learning English as a Foreign Language as stemming from the student imagining a future self, functioning effectively in a cosmopolitan international society. In order for this motivating imagery to become reality, the student must become competent at functioning in intercultural settings, not just learning the language in isolation. In addition, students using technology for learning have been shown to be "influenced by their previous experiences with Internet communication and these prior uses affect their communication choices. Teachers also bring their own experiences with and assumptions about online communication, which influence their comfort level in class that incorporate online intercultural interaction" (Ware & Kramsch 2005, p. 191).

Therefore, motivation in an Internet-based learning environment such as was employed in this study stems from the expectations of the students. These expectations include their goals for their own future ability, as well as their evaluation of the capability of the instructional/technology design to enable reaching that goal, based on their own past experience.

In order to engage in cross-cultural communication that will elevate their intercultural competence, students need a certain level of EFL ability. They need sufficient communicative ability to be able to express themselves and to be understood by people from another country who also speak English as a second or foreign language. If an EFL learner is thrown into a communicative environment that is too difficult or demanding, frustration may result, with a corresponding demotivation (Krashen, 1988). Accordingly, the methodology in this study is most suitable for intermediate to advanced English learners.

Learners require English proficiency, but also need the organic experience of actual interaction with people of other cultures who speak the language they are learning. As a result of such interaction, they become progressively more and more willing to embrace and be non-judgmental about cultural differences (Hanvey, 1976; Wu, Marek & Wu, 2009; Wu & Marek, 2014), increasing their intercultural competence. While the authors do not claim that all participants in this study reached Level 3 of Hanvey's model, they clearly made significant progress in their openness to other cultures, adding to their competence when they interact with people from other countries in the future.

Answers to Research Questions

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, the authors present the following specific answers to the research questions.

Question 1: What were the perceptions of the participants about their interaction with people of other cultures in this study?

The participants valued the opportunity provided by this study to interact with people of other cultures, particularly because the interaction was substantive and not superficial. Although cultures are often

compared based on their differences, the participants appreciated learning about the similar spirit of cultural traditions, such as gift giving.

The participants thought that they came to better appreciate cultural groups within their own country, such as the tribal groups in South Africa or the indigenous peoples in Taiwan. This awareness caused the participants to feel more prepared to interact with people of other cultures, to both accept people of other cultures and to be accepted by them.

Question 2: What were the perceptions of the participants about using the current social media instructional design to increase intercultural understanding?

Only one third of the participants in this study had past digital learning experience with which they could compare the current study. Those who did saw the current study as superior to their previous uses, largely because of the intercultural foundation of the study. The participants generally found that using Facebook was effective for communication and collaboration, and that the global reach of the social media platform was a good way to interact with people of other cultures.

Question 3: What are best practices for use of the instructional and technology design of this study?

The findings of this study suggest three "best practices" for use in instructional and technology designs wishing to draw on the methodology of this study, and several specific recommendations.

Extensive Involvement of the Teacher/researcher. The researcher in this study served as facilitator and was in constant contact with participants, both as a group and as individuals. Without such engagement, many participants would have dropped out of the study or procrastinated in posting comments. Although CALL/MALL technology is sometimes portrayed as a labor-saving device for the teacher, active monitoring and engagement should be expected, possibly requiring even more time than instruction not using CALL/MALL.

Importance of Relationships. This study succeeded because of relationships that were formed across multiple dimensions. The facilitator-to-participant relationship was important to keeping the project on track. The relationships among the participants were also vital to the outcomes. Fostering such relationships should be an important part of planning such a technology use.

Need for Authentic Content. The participants in this study were willing to receive large doses of cultural information, but it was the authentic nature of the content, created by American peers, that particularly engaged them. Instructional designers should go beyond focusing on the technology to be used and address learning materials carefully to ensure that they are authentic and engaging to the students.

Beyond these general principles,the authors provide the following specific recommendations, based on the findings of the study and their own synthesis:

- Although the native speaker videos made by American college students were beneficial in this study, they may not be practical for many researchers and teachers. As an alternative, have students produce their own videos and make video replies on the selected cultural topics.

- Use task-based assignments, integrated into the curriculum of a regular class. An assignment that, in effect, says "go and talk to each other" is more likely to result in procrastination or superficial comments than one asking students to address a definite topic or issue, with specific deadlines and grade consequences.
- Manage the flow of information to provide students with appropriate "chunks" of cultural information. In other words, provide them enough new cultural information at any given time to interest and motivate them, but not so much at any one time to overwhelm them.

- Students liked Facebook because they were already familiar with it, but any familiar social media platform could work, as long as it preserves privacy in accordance with relevant national or local laws.
- Cultural content should play different roles at different levels of foreign language instruction. At the beginning and basic levels, snippets of cultural information can intrigue and motivate learners. By the time the learner reaches an intermediate level, cultural information should be more focused to building understanding and acceptance of the target culture with the goal of intercultural competence.

Future Research

The authors believe that intercultural competence should be an important goal of language learning and that once students move behond a basic level of proficiency, intercultural communication can be a motivating factor leading to further improvement in language ability. Future research along these lines could employ larger groups, additional cultural cohort groups, and longer duration interaction. In addition, studies providing best practices for incorporating intercultural competence into the regular curriculum would be a valuable addition to the scholarly literature.

Final Thoughts

The foregoing findings and discussion make clear that there is more than one reason to teach English, and more than one reason to teach culture. Each reason aligns with a type of instrumental or integrative motivation, as defined by Gardner (2001).

Around the world, English is certainly often taught because it is an established requirement for graduation, or because there is a utilitarian goal of passing a certain English proficiency test. This stimulus for teaching aligns with Gardner's instrumental motivation. The higher level *integrative motivation* for teaching is to prepare students for future interaction with speakers of other languages, and not only native speakers because speakers of different native languages often use English as common second/foreign language.

Similarly, culture is often taught for the instrumental goal of understanding English idioms, contrasting with the integrative goal of appreciating other cultures and understanding the cultural differences and similarities. This integrative goal for intercultural competence aligns well with Dörnyei's (2005) idea of the student's future self, functioning effectively in international society.

The authors are convinced that this goal of understanding and competence is reached by advancing through the levels defined by Hanvey (1976) as updated by the current authors, and that higher levels of cultural understanding make students more competent and more likely to experience success in future international relationships. Intercultural competence, therefore, should be part of the curriculum of all intermediate and advanced EFL programs. The authors hope that the methodology, findings, and recommendations of this study will provide a model for future curriculum and instructional design.

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