WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STUDENTS' WRITTEN REFLECTIONS IN AN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THEORETICAL COURSE?

Vu Thi Hoang Mai*

Faculty of Linguistics & Culture of English Speaking Countries,
VNU University of Languages and International Studies, Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam

Abstract: The implementation of intercultural communication (IC) courses has been excitedly scrutinized particularly in multicultural education and training environments. However, little has been talked about such courses as a compulsory theoretical subject at tertiary institutions, especially where communicating across cultures is not a mandatory daily practice. Inspired by the researched merits of reflective thinking, this paper investigates what a lecturer of such a course can learn from her students' assigned written reflections. The analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, of the reflections of eight classes of third year students at a language education university in Hanoi throughout an IC theoretical course has revealed informative implications with respect to: (1) the students' interest and critical thinking in particular issues and/or frameworks in IC; (2) the students' self-regulation in studying such a theoretical subject; (3) the students' reflection levels and their conceptualization of the knowledge and their own learning. This analysis also attempts to discover the effectiveness of reflective writing in an IC theoretical course at the investigated institution, thereby proposing some recommendations to the reflection pedagogy currently employed at the university.

Keywords: reflective thinking, reflective writing, self-regulated learning, intercultural communication, theoretical course

1. Introduction

The advent of leading-edge technology has been promoting and optimizing communication across cultures to the point that intercultural communication (or IC) has become an inevitable and more-exciting-than-ever human daily activity. This globalized phenomenon calls for such significant attention that intercultural communication competence (or ICC) has become a must in almost every walk of life. As a result, the discussions of IC have become not only a key concern in international formal education curricula and in-service training program but also taken place in both theoretical formats and practical communicative skill building programs. The IC theoretical courses, whose alternative names might be Issues in international communication, Cultural interactions in an independent world or the like, for instance, is present in prestigious universities worldwide for both undergraduates and postgraduates, such as University of Washington[1] in the US, the

* Corresponding author.
 Email address: hoangmai2308@gmail.com
 https://doi.org/10.25073/2525-2445/vnufs.4650

[1]
 www.jsis.washington.edu/programs/undergraduate/international-studies/#major

University of Auckland[2] in New Zealand, Nottingham Trent University[3] in the UK, the University of Hong Kong[4], and National University of Singapore[5] to name a few. In terms of theoretical texts on cultural and intercultural communication concepts, numerous well-known scholars, for example Baldwin et al. (2014), Lustig and Koester (2010), Jackson (2014), Zhu (2014), have published their works to either "present simple explanations of things for the student new to cultural issues" (Baldwin et al., 2014, p. xii) or elucidate the way intercultural communication takes place daily, how appropriateness and effectiveness are obtained in such interactions, the importance of as well as research approaches to studying language and culture altogether (Zhu, 2014, p. i), and even look at intercultural communication from an interdisciplinary approach like Nguyen P. M. (2017). More practical are such compilations like Apadaile and Schill's (2008) "Critical incidents for intercultural communication: An interactive tool for developing awareness, knowledge, and skills" which serves as "a ready-to-use curricular and training guide that will allow" educators and service provider "to introduce the concepts of cultural competence in their learning settings" (p. 3), or "52 activities for improving cross-cultural communication" by Stringer and Cassiday (2009) for adult learners in "corporate or educational environments throughout the world" (p. xii).

The omnipresence of IC discussions results in a rich research body in terms of the tools and techniques of communication (e.g., Bazgan & Norel, 2013; Dalib, Harun & Yusoff, 2014; Gray, Connolly, & Brown, 2019; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Koester & Lustig, 2015; Lieberman & Gamst, 2015; Peng & Wu, 2016, 2019; Valeev & Kondrat'eva, 2015; Zhang & Zhou, 2019), and the degree of necessity of ICC (e.g., Dănescu, 2015; Ihtiyar & Ahmad, 2014). In the meantime, very little literature can be found on the conduct of IC as an official theoretical subject at tertiary institutions, especially in such contexts where IC is virtually not a mandatory daily practice in every domain as Vietnam.

The IC theoretical course launched at the surveyed university caters for the third and fourth year students whose English language proficiency is at level B2 or C1 in the CEFR. This course is intended to promote students' thinking and reasoning capacity via introducing basic concepts and processes of cross-cultural and intercultural communication. It offers various opportunities for students to acquire an informed understanding and hence an appreciation of the dynamics of culture, the diversity of values and perceptions of peoples from different cultures and even from the same culture that give meaning to people's lives and drive their actions and behaviours. This understanding will help them to reflect on personal values and practices, and to draw implications for their intercultural communication and intercultural understanding and appreciation of the cultural similarities and differences. Besides, the course is also designed to introduce a critical perspective of intercultural communication, from which, students engage as responsible citizens in critical dialogues that help understand not

---

[2] www.auckland.ac.nz/en/study/study-options/find-a-study-option/transnational-cultures-and-creative-practice/undergraduate.html

[3] www.ntu.ac.uk/course/arts-and-humanities/ug/ba-hons-communication-and-society-and-global-studies

[4] www.english.hku.hk/course/ENGL7105#Course_Contents_and_Topics

[5] https://fass.nus.edu.sg/cnm/undergraduate-minor-cultural-studies/

only themselves better but also the needs of others, of the community and the world at large. As individuals, students are hoped to be empowered with more knowledge of cultures to make their own personal choice. The course includes both lectures and in-class tutorials, employing discussion of readings, students' presentations, films and documentary, and case analysis. In terms of assessments, this course requires the students to submit three written reflections on their favorite or pondering topics or/and concepts, a group project, and a final essay assignment which respectively account for 10%, 30% and 60% of their grades. To avoid the students' overloaded work towards the semester end, their reflections were collected in weeks five, nine and thirteen of the semester.

As a lecturer of IC courses at my university and a used-to-be overseas student with intercultural communication experiences, I believe that IC, by nature, is a process in which interlocutors unceasingly learn from self and others' intercultural experiences, both success and failure, to come into terms with ethno-culturally different people's ideologies, thereby being able to empower themselves as global communicators as well as sustain peace and harmony. Accordingly, ICC in my opinion should be considered as dynamic and iterative rather than accomplished and closed; therefore, I maintain that it is much more significant to look at the formative process of receiving, considering, analyzing and internalizing ideas, concepts and practices provided by courses of IC rather than the results of the learners' summative tests. Encouraged by this belief, this paper chooses to investigate the written reflections of the attendants of an IC course at the examined university to uncover these students' responses to and during the course.

2. Study Objectives

The current paper aims to uncover the pedagogical implications that a lecturer of an IC theoretical course can derive from her students' written reflections. Specifically, it intends to answer the following questions:

a. What theoretical topics in the IC course are most interested to the participants?

b. How do the participants conceptualize the lectured concepts?

c. Is the current use of the written reflections as effective as expected?

The results of the study are hoped to provide me as a researcher with insights into these students' learning process during the course, and at the same time to assist me as a teacher to better understand my students, thereby making appropriate adjustments to my teaching practice. Moreover, the answers to the research question are also hoped to generate some useful recommendations as to the use of reflective writing in such theoretical courses as well as for further studies on relevant topics.

3. Theoretical Backgrounds: Reflective Thinking and Writing

Learner reflection has also rendered a rich body of research as to the tendency of learner reflective thinking tendency (e.g., Şahin & Óvez, 2012) as well as various effects of using reflections to assess and enhance learning outcomes (e.g., Burner, 2014; Romova & Andrew, 2011; YuekMing & Manaf, 2014), learners' motivation and autonomy (e.g., Alexiou & Paraskeva, 2010; Burdina, 2013; Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015), learners' critical thinking (e.g., Cargas, Williams & Rosenberg, 2017; Carter, Creedy & Sidebotham, 2017; Tuncer & Ozeren, 2012), and faculty professional development (e.g., Allan & Driscoll, 2014; Donohoe, 2015) to name a few.

According to Dewey (1991), as cited in Şahin and Óvez (2012, p. 569), reflection refers to an active and thoughtful process of analyzing any belief or knowledge that helps people conclude or make decisions. Likewise, Boud and Walker (1985) also emphasize the significance of reflection as an effective ability that assists people to "recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over, and evaluate it" (as cited in YuekMing & Manaf, 2014, p. 974). So important and effective is the ability to reflect that it is deemed to be able to record learners' conceptualizations of unseen understandings and experiences. Moreover, through the process of reflecting, learners' assumptions of prior knowledge are contextualized and critically reasoned in the light of the new knowledge. YuekMing and Manaf (2014) therefore believe that those learners required to reflect on the knowledge "are more likely to remember it and use that knowledge later" (p. 974). LaBoskey (1993) goes on to contend that reflection also leads to changes in one's belief, attitude, value and emotion.

Maclean (1987, as cited in Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1997) maintains that reflection can either happen naturally in daily practice or be built through discussions, journals, reading and self-assessment exercises. Among these tools, journal writing has been extensively employed thanks to its capacity to "promote growth, help reconcile the personal with the professional self, and document the writer's growth, development and transformation" (Henderson, Napan & Monteiro, 2004, p. 358). It is also believed that reflective writing helps further improve learning outcome assessment and faculty professional development (Allan & Driscoll, 2014) as well as learners' thinking, communication skills while assisting them to immerse themselves into the discipline's community (Yuekming & Manaf, 2014).

Using reflective writing, learners can dig deep into their knowledge either deliberatively or dialectically. Deliberative reflection refers to how learners' knowledge of an issue can guide their practice; whereas, dialectical reflection is more idiosyncratic as the student's experience is transformed and reconstructed based on their personal knowledge of the topic (Valli, 1993). In both forms of reflection lies the theories of the focused issue as the learner has to read about or listen to the relevant scholarship, which makes their reflective writing activity an integrated one. Knoch and Sitajalabhorn (2013) define integrated writing tasks as those that go through six steps, including: (1) original text analysis, (2) ideas selection, (3) ideas synthesis, (4) paraphrasing, (5) ideas organizing, and (6) application of cohesion, coherence and source acknowledgement.

Such reflective compositions are deemed to be able to evaluate learners' outcomes and critical thinking (Yuekming & Manaf, 2014) as well as autonomous learning (Burner, 2014). In order to analyze these writing pieces, Valli (1003) suggested two main approaches, namely, the *sociological approach* and the *psychological approach* (Henderson, Napan & Monteiro, 2004, p. 359). While the former considers the proof of learners' internalization of knowledge the most important evidence of reflectivity, the latter emphasizes the learner's writing style. In another fashion, LaBoskey (1993) proposes that those written reflections can be examined as to either the focus or the level of reflection.

Researchers such as Van (1977), Mezirow (1997), Henderson, Napan, and Monteiro (2004), Jacobs and Murray (2010) have come up with various models of reflective thinking levels, ranging respectively from a three-level model to a six-level one. Although segmented into different numbers of levels with diverse labels, these frameworks all share three basic

stages of reflective thinking, namely, unexamined technical reception of knowledge, reflection in practice and critical reflection on action. However, this current study specifically employs the five-level model of reflection by Henderson, Napan, and Monteiro (2004), which consists of *reporting, responding, relating, reasoning,* and *reconstructing*. This model, which is most attached to the practice of reflective writing, can help explore how deep the student has worked with an issue.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants and Data Collection

The data used in this study comprised the written reflections provided by the third-year students from eight classes of the examined university. At the beginning of the course, the students had been provided with common guiding questions for the three reflections which were submitted in weeks 5, 9 and 13. The rubrics asked the students to discuss the issues of their own interest or concern, as to their evaluation of the novelty of the theories, their effects on the students' perspectives, and the potential application of the theories into their daily as well as intercultural communication. Since one of the goals of the course is to arm the learners with research skills in theoretical disciplines, scientific fidelity is emphasized in the requirements of the reflections. As a result, the reflections require appropriate acknowledgement of sources and APA citations. These writings were then returned to the students in weeks 6, 10 and 14 with grading results and the lecturer's feedback in terms of the development of reflective writing and skills, ideas organization, critical thinking and source acknowledgement.

The researcher had asked the students for ethical approval of using their writings for this study. After being collected, the students' papers were then classified based on the sequence of submission and reflected issues. Since there were papers that were identified to commit plagiarism or be hastily composed minutes before the submission deadlines and thus were discarded, there were 291 papers qualified for analysis.

4.2. Data Analysis

4.2.1. Analysis Frameworks

Inspired by the reviewed literature on reflective writing, these dialectical reflections were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively using mainly a mixed framework of Zimmerman's *self-regulation in learning* (2000, p. 14), *integrated writing strategies* (Knoch & Sitajalabhorn, 2013) and the *five-level model of reflection* (Henderson, Napan & Monteiro, 2004).

Self-regulated learning, including three phases of forethought, performance and self-reflection, refers to learners' own planned and repeatedly adjusted thinking, motivations and behaviors to achieve their learning goals (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 14). The forethought phase is characterized with motivation, self-efficacy, goal setting and learning plans. In the performance phase, learners need to control their attention, keep records of learning notes, tests and texts, and closely monitor their tasks. The final phase of self-reflection is marked with learners' comparing performance with a goal and evaluating their results. However, this current paper only focuses on the participants' written reflections per se rather than the whole process of writing. Therefore, the participants' forethought and self-evaluation phase in their self-regulation was not included in this study.

Knoch and Sitajalabhorn's (2013) definition of integrated writing task can help discover whether the students understand

thoroughly what genre to write, what materials to read or consult before writing, what organizational structure to use in their reflections, how to transform the language used in the source text, and how to acknowledge the original ideas inside of text

or afterwards. These indicators might be used as snippets of evidence of self-regulation. The analysis of the students' self-regulated learning was based on the following adapted framework of Knoch and Sitajalabhorn's (2013).

Table 1

Integrated Writing Strategies for Written Reflection

(Adapted from Knoch & Sitajalabhorn's definition of integrated writing tasks, 2013)

	Integrated Writing Strategies	Evidence
1	**Mining the source text for ideas**	The student identifies in the requisite readings or extensive sources the location and origin of the reflected theories/ideas/concepts. She/he provides a brief review of the relevant literature.
2	**Selecting ideas**	The student cites or gives comments on other people's ideas, compares and contrasts between chosen ideas. The selected ideas indicate a sequence of reasoning and unite in a single relevant topic.
3	**Synthesizing ideas from one or more source texts**	The student makes connections between ideas, critically analyzes the literature and its relevance to reality. She/he can identify the significance of the theories/concepts and reach satisfactory conclusions.
4	**Transforming the language used in the input**	The student provides a sufficient summary of the reading contents and/or appropriately paraphrases others' ideas.
5	**Organizing ideas**	The student logically arranges sequences of information and ideas, showing clear progression throughout the reflection. She/he presents a clear central topic within a paragraph or evident cohesion in her/his writing.
6	**Using stylistic conventions such as connecting ideas and acknowledging sources**	Punctuation, cohesive and coherent devices are used properly. APA style is utilized accurately to acknowledge the sources.

Besides, the model of reflection level by Henderson, Napan, and Monteiro (2004) can examine how deep a student works with an issue as well as how his/her "continual self-awareness of the situation and the learning" develops throughout three reflections. The students' critical thinking capacity could also be investigated regarding the ability to report and logically analyze the relevant experience, make connections with other situations, evaluate how it fits with the theories, how practical the theories deem to be, and then synthesize all ideas to modify or refine future communication (Henderson, Napan & Monteiro, 2004). Following this model, each reflection was given 1 more point for each level reached.

Table 2

Five Levels of Reflection

(Adapted from Henderson, Napan & Monteiro's model of reflection level, 2004)

Level of Reflection	Evidence	Grade
Level 1 – Reporting	The student describes, reports or retells with minimum transformation and no added observations or insights.	1/5
Level 2 – Responding	The student uses source data in some way, but with little transformation or conceptualization.	2/5
Level 3 – Relating	The student identifies aspects of the data which have personal meaning or which connect with their prior or current experience. The student gives a superficial explanation of the reason why something has happened or identifies something that they need or plan to do, or change.	3/5
Level 4 – Reasoning	The student integrates the data into an appropriate relationship involving a high level of transformation and conceptualization and seeks deep understanding of why something has happened, exploring the relationship of theory and practice in some depth.	4/5
Level 5 - Reconstructing	The student displays a high level of abstract thinking to generalize and / or apply learning. The student draws original conclusions from their reflections, generalizes from their experience, extracts general principles, formulates a personal theory, or takes a position on an issue. The student extracts and internalizes the personal significance of their learning and/or plans their own further learning on the basis of their reflections.	5/5

4.2.2. Analysis tools

Regarding the quantitative data, the analysis followed simple calculation and ranking procedures of reflections which had the same topic or discussed similar issues. All the investigated writings started with the participants' statements of their favourite or concerned issues, which allowed me to categorize and rank their learning interests.

As to the qualitative data, the content and thematic analyses of the students' reflections were employed in this study to obtain more understanding with respect to the students' responses to the lessons and any other learning issues during the course. The surveyed reflections were encoded following the incorporated frameworks mentioned above.

5. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of 291 written reflections of the attendants of the aforementioned IC theoretical course revealed interesting information regarding the participants' learning interests, their self-regulated learning, as well as their reflection level and conceptualization of the learned issues.

5.1. Participants' Learning Interests

The results showed that six out of ten main lectures of theories were chosen for reflection with the ranking of favorite issues as follow:

Table 3

Participants' Interested Issues/Concepts

Ranking	Interested issues/concepts	Number of reflections
1	Actions, ethics and research	89
2	Identity (social identity, ideology, politics of identity)	53
3	Global media & intercultural communication (representations, social dramas)	45
4	Cultural patterns (cultural values)	38
5	Cultural biases (stereotypes, discrimination)	32
6	Cultural taxonomies (Hall's high & low context cultures)	21
7	Other issues & group presentations	13
	Total	*291*

The lecture of *Action, ethics and research* with *ethics* being the central concept was reflected by the most students, many of whom shared that it is eye-opening because before the lesson, they "*thought morality and ethics were the same because they are similarly translated in English-Vietnamese dictionaries*" (e.g., student 3). The elaboration on *ethics* in interpersonal and intercultural communication was perceived as useful and influential because it provided information that went beyond or even against what the students had learnt before. These participants acknowledged that the way they looked at good deeds or charity had been challenged in the session and it "*will never be the same anymore*" (e.g., student 85). Some admitted that their own "*traditional moral values may be inappropriate*" (e.g., student 17) in various communication encounters across cultures.

Identity, Cultural patterns, Cultural biases and *Cultural taxonomies* came second, fourth, fifth and sixth respectively in the list of the most favorite lectures because most of the writers found themselves " *in concept-related stories*" (e.g., student 59). In their reflections, many of the students clarified their understanding of *identity, ideology, cultural values, stereotypes* and *discrimination* through examples of their own communicative experiences (e.g., students 1, 2, 24, 38, 47, 78, 92) or relationships with friends and/or families (e.g., students 4, 9, 66, 97). 43 participants also shared similar positive responses to the lecturer's narratives of her own identity development, discrimination experiences or her own analysis of cultural values through cultural artefacts. According to these students, although the facts and stories exemplified in their course books were interesting and informative, the lecturer's narratives accompanied with step-by-step analysis and association with the theoretical concepts were "*more authentic*" (e.g., student 15, 29), "*insightful*" (e.g., students 23, 40) and made the lessons "*more fun*" (e.g., students 1, 11, 15, 26, 83, 96) as well as "*approachable*" (e.g., students 3, 22, 34, 50).

Global media and intercultural communication was the third most appealing lesson for providing the students with information they "*had never known or cared about*" (e.g., student 66). Although exposed to various genres of media, few students were aware of or had motivation to explore media-culture related issues, such as the agenda-setting function of media, the effects of global media on intercultural communication like framing social

acceptability and understanding about difference, free expression and representational absence (e.g., student 74, 83, 89). Armed with the maxims of Grice's (1975) cooperative principles in a previous lesson, the students believed that the theories provided in the lesson of global media and intercultural communication could help them "*filter the information transmitted better*" and "*join the conversations with more caution and deliberation*" (e.g., students 23, 48).

It could be concluded that the theoretical IC lessons which appealed to the students most were those that could either challenge the students' existing perspectives and values, vividly reflect their daily practices, or provide them with insightful analyses on frequently neglected issues. Additionally, the students showed more interest in the lessons in which the theories are elaborated on by the lecturer's own experiences with witticisms. In the face of an eclectic syllabus of IC which entitles the responsible lecturers to decide what contents to lecture like that in my faculty, these results could very well function as a reference for a most welcomed agenda by prospective learners of the subject.

5.2. Participants' Self-Regulated Learning

Based on the integrated writing strategies for written reflections adapted from Knoch and Sitajalabhorn's definition of integrated writing tasks (2013), the analysis of the data revealed that the participants were not highly self-regulated in studying this theoretical subject.

A modest number of the papers (accounting for 34.5%) showed signs of mining different texts in order to get ideas for their reflections. The most used included the course books (provided by the lecturer at the semester beginning), folklores, blogs about cultures, and memoirs or autobiographies on cultures. These reference sources, regretfully, were only cursorily

mentioned in the reflections instead of being analyzed or evaluated. Notably, lecture notes and examples from the course books or the lecturer were selected for the compositions of all participants, only one fifth of whom brought up examples or experiences of their own. Moreover, there were very few signs of systematic selection of ideas to show a sequence of reasoning, comparison or contrast. Regarding ideas synthesis, only two students made connection between ideas, critically analyzing the literature and its relevance to reality. They could identify the significance of the theories/concepts and reach satisfactory and idiosyncratic conclusions. For example, after reflecting on the lesson of cultural biases, student 23 concluded that "*stereotyping [was] not bad itself. It [was] the way how people use stereotypes to judge others that lead to negative effects. Thus each person should wisely take advantage of them to be well-prepared in the dynamic community*." Or when commenting on the question of "Who am I?" in the lecture of identity and analyzing the correlation between identity, power and fame, student 40 remarked that it "*[was] not just as simple as it used to be. It [was] beyond the meaning of a name […] Identity could also be a double edged sword: it can give one power or take away his life*." Last but not least, although the reflections were composed following the basic format of English essays and ideas are paraphrased, there was no appropriate acknowledgement of the source texts. Importantly, despite receiving the lecturer's feedback on a previous reflection, there was hardly any change to these listed writing issues throughout the three submissions.

These results indicated that the participants' level of self-regulation was quite low as they either did not have the skills to well control their attention, effectively keep learning records, closely monitor their tasks, or they were not motivated to do so. This did not go in line

with previous studies of similar domain (e.g., Henderson, Napan & Monteiro, 2004; Alexiou & Paraskeva, 2010) in which the participants were documented to be more engaged and enthusiastic about their learning and the students' writing were recognized as "a scaffolding approach of understanding and engagement" (Alexiou & Paraskeva, 2010). This discrepancy may lie in the fact that the participants in the previous studies had to continuously compose weekly e-writings throughout a 12-week course and received immediate

feedback as well as lecturers' close monitoring for their subsequent writings thanks to online asynchronous communication.

5.3. Participants' Level of Reflection

The analyzed data depicts a complicated picture of the participants' level of reflection, their progress in reflective thinking, their conceptualization and reconceptualization of the theories as well as their learning.

Figure 1

Reflection Levels Through Reflective Writings
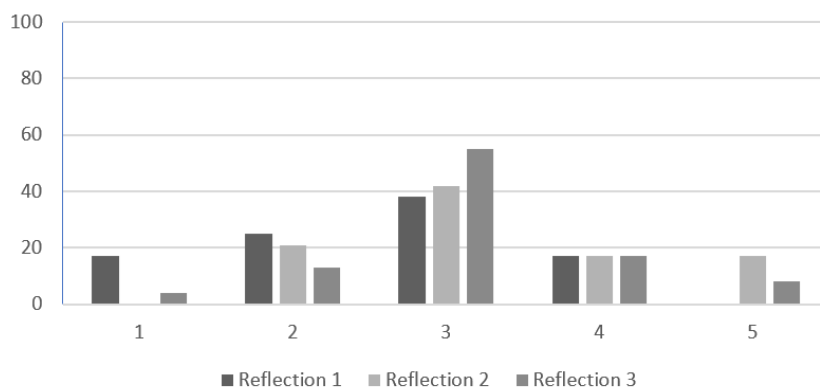
It is obvious from Figure 1 that throughout three submissions, almost half of the participants achieved level 3 of reflection at which they identified theoretical aspects that related with their prior or current experience and gave superficial explanations why something worked the way it did. At this level, another pattern was found among this group of participants that they all agreed with the lecturer's explanations of the theories and took her examples as standard exemplifications in their reflections, thereby glorifying the theories without any critical analysis or challenge. Specifically, many of these unconditional proponents of the lectured theories made "promises" to "*change [their] perspectives/approach*" (e.g., students 4, 8, 27, 33, 59, 61, 77, 90) or acknowledged the effects of the lessons on their thinking in that they "*completely changed [their] point of view*" (e.g., student

14, 18, 21, 56, 79, 85), "*made [them] think about [their] behaviors again*" (e.g., students 7, 19, 54, 75, 96) or "*made [them] realize [they] were wrong*" (e.g., student 91). Student 82 even confirmed that after learning about ethics in intercultural communication, she could "*have a full awareness of the situation and the right behavior*" and "*be able to deal with intercultural issues.*" Apparently, this group of participants conceptualized intercultural competence as approachable only via learning such a theoretical course and the lectured theories as the key to correct right from wrong.

The above chart also presents an improvement in reflective thinking of 47.8% of the participants who managed to raise their reflection levels in subsequent submissions, mostly from level 1 to 3. This

result implies a fact that a great number of participants did not know how to write a learning reflection until they got feedback from their instructor. Meanwhile, a modest number of 8 cases were able to improve their levels from 3 or 4 to 5 by showing effort in extensive analyses of multiple materials as well as in depth exploration of the relationship between theories and realities. For example, when reflecting on the concept of ideology and her family relationship, student 66 admitted that the theory helped her understand that her belief and aggressive communication with her mother "*unconsciously*" resulted from her upbringing witnessing her parents' frequent quarrels. This group of students not only criticized the practicality and applicability of the theories and presented their own positions, but also drew original conclusions from their reflections. For instance, student 40 expressed his interest in the lesson of cultural patterns and cultural conceptualisations because it helped him not only "*get to know about the rough definitions but also about the way to know and understand a thing.*" For the participants similar to student 40, what mattered is the development of their metacognition, their ability to justify how things work culturally rather than knowing what cultures to study, thereby "*evaluating everything in multiple aspects, raising related questions to it rather than trusting the information or not*" (e.g., student 23).

Significantly, 21.7% of the participants maintained their performances at level 3, another 21.7% fluctuated between level 3 and 4, and 8.8% gained lower levels of reflection in the subsequent papers (from level 3 to 1). The population whose reflection level did not change might not have writing motivation in the first place. The others, however, seemingly indicated a loss of interest in reflecting their learning toward the end of the course. This could be explained by a multitude of reasons which,

although not the focus of this study and hence not supported by the current data, may align with previous research of similar concerns (e.g., Rushton & Duggan, 2013; Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad & Ghanbari, 2013; Vassilaki, 2017). Firstly, it is the fact that at my university, reflection writing is not practiced as frequently as "the still dominant, prestigious genre of the academic essay" (Vassilaki, 2017) in students' official learning products. As a result, the participants are not familiar with the narrative nature of reflective writing, thus reproducing "experts' views rather than their own thoughts" or just finishing the assignment as it is compulsory (Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad & Ghanbari, 2013). Moreover, lack of thorough understanding of the topic can also demotivate the students because without analytical reading of the assigned texts and proactive engagement in class activities, the students cannot obtain good preparation necessary for writing (Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad & Ghanbari, 2013). The data of this paper actually documents cursory understanding and even inaccurate explanations of the theories of the participants whose reflection levels fluctuated between 2 and 3 or decreased over time. For example, student 30 chose to reflect on cultural biases against LGBT community, yet she herself concluded that she had to protect her LGBT friends, which in turn implicitly denoted her subconscious stereotype of LGBT people as weak and vulnerable. Many other participants also wrongly repeated the definitions of the components of cultural patterns or the outward expressions of cultural intolerance. Last but not least, 17 students got demotivated after getting low scores for their initial or previous reflections (Rushton & Duggan, 2013). In fact, the reasons for the participants' loss of writing motivation in this study need more investigation to be confirmed.

6. Conclusion

This mixed method study reports the use of 97 junior students' written reflections as formative assessment in an intercultural communication theoretical course at University of Languages and International Studies in Hanoi. It is discovered that the participants are most interested in learning about ethics, identity, media, cultural patterns, cultural biases and cultural taxonomies and their roles in intercultural communication. However, the research also reveals a low level of self-regulation in writing reflections as compulsory assignments due to the evidence of unsatisfactory control of attention, learning record keeping and task monitoring. In terms of reflective thinking, on average the participants achieve level 3 according to the five-level model proposed by Henderson, Napan and Monteiro (2004). At this level the students mainly relate aspects of the theories with personal meaning or prior and current experience, and give superficial, sometimes inaccurate, explanations to socio-cultural phenomena. Glorification of the theories or pseudo changes of beliefs or behaviors are also popular among this group of these students. Although a small number of students acknowledge the importance of and express their interest in the development of their reflective capacity thanks to such reflection procedures, it is also suggested in this study that the current reflective writing procedure is not as effective as expected in promoting the students' critical thinking, professional transformation and metacognitive growth, which only happens to a modest number of the participants.

Despite the existing limitations such as uninvestigated student pre-writing activities and student responses to the lecturer's feedback after each submission, this study still well assists the teacher researcher to understand the participants' learning interests, their level of learning autonomy, reflective capacity and knowledge conceptualization. It is advisable that the pedagogy of written reflections in the current course should be altered in terms of closer writing mentoring, increasing frequency of submissions, more various feedback modes and speeding feedback immediacy. Moreover, further research is needed to work out ways of motivating students to learn theoretical subjects and enhance their self-regulation in such courses.

References

Abednia, A., Hovassapian, A., Teimournezhad, S., & Ghanbari, N. (2013). Reflective journal writing: Exploring in-service EFL teachers' perceptions. *System, 41*(3), 503-514. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.05.003

Alexiou, A., & Paraskeva, F. (2010). Enhancing self-regulated learning skills through the implementation of an e-portfolio tool. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2*(2), 3048-3054. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.463

Allan, E. G., & Driscoll, D. L. (2014). The three-fold benefit of reflective writing: Improving program assessment, student learning, and faculty professional development. *Assessing Writing, 21*, 37-55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2014.03.001

Andrusyszyn, M., & Davie L. (1997), Facilitating reflection through interactive journal writing in an online graduate course: A qualitative study. *Journal of Distance Education, 12*(1/2), 103-126. http://cade.athabascau.ca/vol12.1/andrusyszyndavie.html

Bazgan, M., & Norel, M. (2013). Explicit and implicit assessment of intercultural competence. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 76*, 95-99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.04.080

Burdina, S. (2013). Motivating students to study a theoretical course through reflective writing. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 93*, 2180-2185. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.184

Burner, T. (2014). The potential formative benefits of portfolio assessment in second and foreign language writing contexts: A review of the

literature. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 43*, 139-149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2014.03.002

Cargas, S., Williams, S., & Rosenberg, M. (2017). An approach to teaching critical thinking across disciplines using performance tasks with a common rubric. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 26*, 24-37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2017.05.005

Carter, A. G., Creedy, D. K., & Sidebotham, M. (2017). Critical thinking evaluation in reflective writing: Development and testing of Carter Assessment of Critical Thinking in Midwifery (Reflection). *Midwifery, 54*, 73-80. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2017.08.003

Dalib, S., Harun, M., & Yusoff, N. (2014). Reconceptualizing intercultural competence: A phenomenological investigation of students' intercultural experiences. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 155*, 130-135. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.268

Dănescu, E. (2015). Intercultural education from the perspective of training didactic competences. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 180*, 537-542. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.02.156

Donohoe, A. (2015). Reflective writing: Articulating an alternative pedagogy. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 186*, 800-804. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.091

Gray, J. S., Connolly, J. P., & Brown, M. A. (2019). Measuring intercultural knowledge and competence in college essays: Does a performance-based rubric have construct validity? *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 62*, 142-148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2019.05.007

Hargreaves, E. (2013). Inquiring into children's experiences of teacher feedback: Reconceptualising assessment for learning. *Oxford Review of Education, 39*(2), 229-246. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2013.787922

Henderson, K., Napan, K., & Monteiro, S. (2004). Encouraging reflective learning: An online challenge. In R. Atkinson, C. McBeath, D. Jonas-Dwyer & Philips (Eds.), *Beyond the comfort zone: Proceedings of the 21st ASCILITE Conference* (pp. 357-364). ASCILITE. http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/perth04/procs/henderson.html

Holmes, P., & O'Neill, G. (2012). Developing and evaluating intercultural competence: Ethnographies of intercultural encounters. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 36*(5), 707-718. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2012.04.010

Ihtiyar, A., & Ahmad, F. S. (2014). Intercultural communication competence as a key activator of purchase intention. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 150*, 590-599. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.09.078

Jacobs, G., & Murray, M. (2010). Developing critical understanding by teaching action research to undergraduate psychology students. *Educational Action Research, 18*(3), 319-335.

Knoch, U., & Sitajalabhorn, W. (2013). A closer look at integrated writing tasks: Towards a more focussed definition for assessment purposes. *Assessing Writing, 18*(4), 300-308. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2013.09.003

Koester, J., & Lustig, M. W. (2015). Intercultural communication competence: Theory, measurement, and application. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 48*, 20-21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.03.006

LaBoskey, V. (1993). A conceptual framework for reflection in preservice teacher education. In J. Calderhead & P. Gates (Eds.), *Conceptualising reflection in teacher development.* The Falmer Press.

Lieberman, D. A., & Gamst, G. (2015). Intercultural communication competence revisited: Linking the intercultural and multicultural fields. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 48*, 17-19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.03.007

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education, 74*, 5-12.

Peng, R.-Z., & Wu, W.-P. (2016). Measuring intercultural contact and its effects on intercultural competence: A structural equation modeling approach. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 53*, 16-27. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2016.05.003

Peng, R.-Z., & Wu, W.-P. (2019). Measuring communication patterns and intercultural transformation of international students in cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 70*, 78-88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.03.004

Romova, Z., & Andrew, M. (2011). Teaching and assessing academic writing via the portfolio: Benefits for learners of English as an additional language. *Assessing Writing, 16*(2), 111-122. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2011.02.005

Rushton, D., & Duggan, C. (2013). Impact of culture on reflective writing in masters level students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 93*, 956-963. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.09.310

Şahin, G. G., & Óvez, F. T. D. (2012). An investigation of prospective teachers' reflective thinking tendency. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 55*, 568-574. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.538

Tuncer, M., & Ozeren, E. (2012). Prospective teacher's evaluations in terms of using reflective thinking skills to solve problems. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 51*, 666-671. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.08.221

Valeev, A. A., & Kondrat'eva, I. G. (2015). Axiological approach to the development of students' intercultural competences by foreign language means. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 191*, 361-365. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.377

Van Manen, M. (1977). Linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical. *Curriculum Inquiry, 6*, 205-228.

Vassilaki, E. (2017). Reflective writing, reflecting on identities: The construction of writer identity in student teachers' reflections. *Linguistics and Education, 42*, 43-52. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2017.08.001

Yastibas, A. E., & Yastibas, G. C. (2015). The use of e-portfolio-based assessment to develop students' self-regulated learning in English language teaching. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 176*, 3-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.437

YuekMing, H., & Manaf, L. A. (2014). Assessing learning outcomes through students' reflective thinking. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 152*, 973-977. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.09.352

Zhang, X., & Zhou, M. (2019). Interventions to promote learners' intercultural competence: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 71*, 31-47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.04.006

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 13-39). Academic Press.

GIẢNG VIÊN THẤY GÌ
TỪ BÀI VIẾT CHIÊM NGHIỆM CỦA SINH VIÊN
TRONG HỌC PHẦN LÍ THUYẾT GIAO TIẾP LIÊN VĂN HÓA?

Vũ Thị Hoàng Mai

Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội,
Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam

Tóm tắt: Các khóa học Giao tiếp liên văn hóa đã và đang được nghiên cứu rộng rãi, đặc biệt ở các môi trường giáo dục và đào tạo đa văn hóa. Tuy nhiên, những khóa học Giao tiếp liên văn hóa như một môn học lí thuyết bắt buộc ở các trường cao đẳng và đại học vẫn ít được nghiên cứu, đặc biệt ở những nơi mà giao tiếp liên văn hóa không phải là hoạt động thiết yếu thường nhật. Lấy cảm hứng từ những tác dụng đã được nghiên cứu của tư duy chiêm nghiệm, bài viết trình bày kết quả phân tích định tính và định lượng các bài viết chiêm nghiệm của sinh viên năm thứ 3 tại một trường đại học về học phần lí thuyết Giao tiếp liên văn hóa mà họ tham gia. Kết quả phân tích cho thấy những thông tin hữu ích về: (1) mối quan tâm và tư duy phê phán của sinh viên đối với một số vấn đề và lí thuyết trong giao tiếp liên văn hóa; (2) tính tự kỉ luật trong học tập của sinh viên trong một học phần lí thuyết; (3) cấp độ tư duy chiêm nghiệm và ý niệm của sinh viên về kiến thức được học và về việc học. Nghiên cứu này cũng nỗ lực tìm hiểu tính hiệu quả của hoạt động viết chiêm nghiệm trong học phần lí thuyết Giao tiếp liên văn hóa tại trường đại học này, từ đó đưa ra một số đề xuất đối với phương pháp chiêm nghiệm hiện đang được áp dụng tại cơ sở này.

Từ khóa: tư duy chiêm nghiệm, bài viết chiêm nghiệm, học tập tự điều chỉnh, giao tiếp liên văn hóa, học phần lí thuyết