Engaging EFL Readers in Literature Circles to Escalate Intercultural Communicative Competence

D Imamyartha1*, R Andayani1, A A’yunin1, A Puspa1, R F A Hudori1, A E Fardhani1 and Dafik2
1 Department of English Education, Jember University (Kalimantan Street 37, Jember, Indonesia)
2 Department of Mathematics Education, Jember University (Kalimantan Street 37, Jember, Indonesia)

* david.fkip@unej.ac.id

Abstract: Cultural clashes have driven the goal of language instruction toward mastering intercultural communicative competence (ICC). However, the instruction on ICC in expanded circles has not gained its traction in English instruction although its significance has been confirmed by teachers in teaching and testing context. This work study investigated Indonesian student-teachers’ cultural viewpoints as they encountered the notion of ‘otherness’ in intercultural circles. Thirty-five first-semester students partook in literature circles, embedded with culturally-laden readings, during 3 weeks of an Intensive Reading course. The study evinced that intercultural circles had significantly improved the students’ ICC, with Intercultural knowledge found dominant in determining the overall ICC. The students voiced positive attitude on the power of intercultural circles to encourage them to be open-minded and tolerant to cultural differences.

1. Introduction

Myriads of studies and teaching practices have acknowledged the significance of embracing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in global-wide context for developing language learners’ identity as a social agent [3][24][41]. [3] puts forward five dimensions, which comprise of intercultural awareness, attitudes, knowledge, skills of relating and interpreting, discovery and interaction skills. To large extent, current language instruction has embraced learning bound to intercultural identity. In European and American countries, this language teaching approach within intercultural context in has gained its traction in curricular setting within early education [6][34][35]. A number of studies concerning ICC in not only inner-circle but also outer-circle setting, which involves information and communication technology have reported that the language learners established novel personal and shared meanings by enhancing intercultural awareness [38], demonstrated more acute critical thinking skills [35], and shifted the learning objective of becoming and being [26]. These impacts lead to students’ reshaping their intercultural paradigm.

Asian teachers of English have witnessed the significance of embracing culture-language learning for propelling learners’ motivation and encourage their self-reflection for developing social identities [50]. Also, ICC plays more fundamental part within assessment context in China, even though the concept of its assessment has not received shared consent among English teachers [13]. Notwithstanding, in expanded circles various models of ICC implementation among English teachers took place. Despite the ubiquity of ICC, [13] points out that the fashion by which ICC should be best taught in English class still remains a conundrum to most English teachers in Asia, which has been evinced by nation-wide survey among primary teachers in [2] and an across-nations survey by [49]. [27], who probed Vietnamese teachers’ ambivalent voices on the importance of ICC and how they actualized it in their classroom, revealed that they treated it as a peripheral component in their teaching praxis, due to the focus on cultural knowledge. Their findings are in line with those of [51] case study germane to culturally responsive pedagogy in China. Training to teachers, which copes with methods to teach and integrate ICC into curricular framework, is thus called upon [1][18][51].
The present study strived to probe the potential of literature circles, which possess the properties of extensive reading for expanding student-teachers’ ICC development. This approach relates to quantity and variety, rather than quality. In spite of the significant roles of extensive reading in achieving improved proficiency across different language components and language skills as well as more positive attitude and higher motivation for English language learning [36] and [8], how ICC relates to extensive reading has been hardly investigated. Majority of studies concerning extensive reading are conducted to reveal its potential in the context of humanist-driven education, concerned with motivational, attitudinal, and instructional facet of extensive reading [37]. Despite the advantages of ER, several theorists bring forward that extensive reading alone will never be sufficient and thus it requires supplementary activities from comprehensible language output [46].

Literature circles stimulate ICC-laden reading. [22] explains that literature circles constitute student-driven dialogic reading which puts emphasis on a shared book. [22]’s research involving pre-service teachers revealed that the pedagogical structure results in fine integration between literacy skills and social studies for language learners employ both reading comprehension and communication, which eventually empowers the participants beyond the surface meanings to reveal why certain undertaking happened or why people behaved in particular way. [40] points out that encouraging learners through literature circle will help the development of their personal and critical responses. In addition, this helps them to grow beyond the narrowed view on meaning and put on a wider array of ideas into consideration, particularly when they discuss political and multicultural texts. A study conducted on children by [4] reported that the involvement in students-driven literature discussions, coupled with the aid of teacher scaffolding, can develop their leadership and social skills. This strategy acknowledges what theorists and researchers agree on sociocognitive aspect of learning: meanings recreated through social interactions set the bedrock for learning [12] [38][47].

Literature Circle was introduced by Karen Smith through an incidental occurrence. It was the late spring of 1982, and Karen was planning for one more year of instructing fifth grade at Lowell School, in Phoenix, Arizona. Claire Staab, her companion, offered Karen some materials leftover including a box of assorted novels with which she kept them in the back of the room and afterward disregarded them. A few of months later, some ten-year-old students discovered this box. They approached Ms. Smith for consent to understanding them and she casually gave the permission. Within a couple of days, she noticed that the students formed groups around their preferences of topics, allotted themselves pages to read, and were setting up a discussion of their books regularly. She participated in two or three groups and was stunned by the quality, profundity, range, and energy of the discussion she heard. She realized she was witnessing something significant occurring, the invention of literature circles, and began to build up the concept with other associates and educators. When the possibility of conducting literature circles had been coined, [7] turned into the following big-name concerned with the significant gain of comprehension strategy.

[7], who has done various writings germane to the use of literature circle ranging from kindergarten to college contexts, points out that literature circles is a small, temporary discursive collaboration related to reading the same poem, book, article, or story. Upon reading, every group is liberated to choose some parts of content, and each learner is required to be responsible for specific roles in the discussion, and every group member partakes to present their results. The discussion circles provide opportunity for regular meetings, with discussion role shifted to different students in individual session. Just as they have finished reading a book, the group members then plan to share the important points of individual reading with the other member of learning community; then they can exchange ideas with other finishing groups, determine the direction of more reading, and get into another cycle. Formal discussion in Literature circle can be dropped once the students have been able to direct their own expanded and self-sustaining discussions. In addition, [7] also point out some applicable features of literature circle to all reading levels. Literature circle should enable the students to choose their own reading materials, to form small discussion based on book choices, to use written and drawn notes as guidance, and to conduct an open and rotated reading discussion regularly. Teacher holds vital role by partaking as the facilitator, and then assessment is carried out through tests and observation.

In elementary school, children can play the same role within one group utilizing similar two-phase activity in a single meeting: to share the ideas from the pictures book they have read, drawings, or bookmarks as cues, and to invite an open discussion of events, characters, thought and feelings in
the books afterwards [7]. The use of recreational instead of instructional books became the fundamental aspect for the teachers. The predominance of using heterogeneous fictional contexts in literature circle, however, surprisingly provided opportunity to restrict students’ literary experience that enable students in 7th grade bilingual school to not fully become literate because some of them desire reading non-fictional sources or autobiography [9]. It happened because the ability to maintain topics and coherence of children differ from adults. In brief, Literature Circle becomes the ‘natural home’ of reading fictional or non-fictional texts activities and deep discussion which is suitable and frequently developed for middle and upper-level students [7].

The present study investigated the dialogic reflectivity of intercultural circles, which are germane to the focal essentials in ICC instruction and the capability of maintaining their communication style as structured by cultures encountered [25][33]. The term intercultural circle was used throughout the paper, rather than literature circles, since the shared reading dealt with topics portraying cultural diversities. The study was guided the following questions.

1. Are there any significant gains in the students’ ICC subsequent to the engagement in the intercultural circles?
2. Are there any predictors to the students’ overall ICC scores?
3. What do the students think about their engagement in intercultural circles with regard to their ICC improvement?

2. Method
Thirty-five students enrolled in Intensive Reading course took part in the study. This class consisted of 12 males and 23 females aged from 17 to 18 years old. They partook in several Intercultural Circles for four weeks. The intercultural circles were conducted for an hour in each meeting. The students were assigned on texts related to cultural diversities. The texts chosen for the discussion needed to have Flesch reading ease score between 40 and 50. The group work involved three phases, including reading the texts (thirty minutes), accomplishing the tasks in each role (thirty minutes), and managing discussion within group (fifteen minutes). The authors adopted the following roles from Oxford (2011).

a. Discussion Leader: creating three or more inquiries or probing questions concerned the text and managing group work.

b. Connector: drawing the relationships between the reading and real-life experiences of every group member.

c. Word Master: Locating unfamiliar, essential, or intriguing words and then consulting a dictionary in order to figure out their meanings. In addition, the word master shares these words with the group to ascertain correct understanding of the text.

d. Passage Person: Finding the essential details particularly related to the setting, author, illustrator, story, or anything else that is related and important.

e. Summarizer: Writing a paragraph or making a brief summary or overview of the main ideas and/or the events in the text.

f. Culture Collector: Concluding the cultural differences between the cultures described in the text and those of readers’ life.

Projected to investigate students’ perceived ICC, on the first meeting of the class intercultural communicative competence questionnaire (ICCQ) was distributed to the students. This questionnaire applied the instrument designed by [24]. It was made operative due to its Cronbach’s alpha (0.71) and the relevance of [9] ICC framework to the questionnaire, which corroborated its suitability to testing purposes. This ICC concept still embraced the ICC theory by [3] since both models were in congruence (see [9] for overview). Similarly entrenched within the same ICC framework [9], an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to the research participants, mainly intended to substantiate the statistical data and describe their opinion after being engaged in intercultural circle.

In the middle of the course, the questionnaire was also distributed to investigate any possible increase in the student’s ICC. To analyse significant improvement in their ICC score subsequent to the engagement in intercultural circles, t-test was conducted. The authors performed multi-linear regression analyses to identify possible predictors among the ICC elements. The data garnered from the open-ended questionnaire was put under analysis by deploying content analysis. Manifest content
Analysis served as the bedrock to the analysis. The categories underlying the analysis, employing [9] concept, were discussed and operationalized beforehand. What follows were the questions in the open-ended questionnaire.

a. How can intercultural circles help you to improve your cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge (knowledge about the language features of certain society)?

b. How can intercultural circles help you to see and interpret the world from other cultures’ point of view?

c. How can intercultural circles help you to improve your ability to behave and communicate appropriately with people from different cultures?

d. How can intercultural circles help you to develop your openness and positive attitude to cultural differences?

3. Results and Discussion

Upon analysing the students’ perceived ICC score, the students’ scores were mostly in the third quartile, which was indicated by an average of 3.7636. The statistical data has portrayed that majority of the students overestimated their ICC. When compared against the post-treatment ICC scores, a significant gain was identified. The mean scores after the engagement in intercultural circles attained 3.90. This gain was found significant inasmuch as the Sig. (2-tailed), 0.046, less than 0.05.

| Table 1. Paired Sample t-test on Overall Pre-test and Post-test Scores |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Paired Samples Statistics**                                |
| Mean        | N   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|----------------|-----|----------------|----------------|
| Students’ ICC Pre-test scores                             |
| 3.7636       | 35  | .31814         | .05378         |
| Students’ ICC Post-test scores                            |
| 3.9000       | 35  | .25038         | .04232         |

Further analysis was performed to conclude in which area of ICC intercultural circles generated significant bearing. According to paired sample tests, significant improvement was found in intercultural skill and attitude, which was evinced by Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.26 in both respects. This increase, however, was not evident in the area of intercultural knowledge.

| Table 2. Paired Sample t-test on Pre-test and Post-test Scores |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Paired Samples Statistics**                                |
| Mean        | N   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|----------------|-----|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Pre-test scores on intercultural knowledge                   |
| 3.8063        | 35  | .38428         | .06496         | 0.593          |
| Post-test scores on intercultural knowledge                  |
| 3.8571        | 35  | .36908         | .06239         |                |
| Pre-test scores on intercultural skill                       |
| 3.5600        | 35  | .40526         | .06850         | 0.26           |
| Post-test scores on intercultural skill                       |
| 3.7257        | 35  | .33637         | .05686         |                |
| Pre-test scores on intercultural attitude                     |
| 3.9107        | 35  | .48181         | .08144         | 0.26           |
| Post-test scores on intercultural attitude                     |
| 4.1000        | 35  | .32056         | .05418         |                |

Independent sample t-test was performed to study any gender differences with respect to their students’ overall ICC scores. The analysis results evince that gender differences play no significant bearing impact on the students’ ICC scores. This finding, although minute in scale, has acknowledged the finding in similar study by [16].
Table 3. Gender Differences with Respect to ICC Scores

| Elements of ICC at Different Junctures | Students’ Gender | N  | Mean     | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|----|----------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Overall pre-test scores               | Male             | 12 | 3.9318   | 20.189         | 0.05828         | 0.021           |
|                                       | Female           | 23 | 3.6759   | 33.551         | 0.06996         |                 |
| Overall post-test scores              | Male             | 12 | 3.9583   | 22.474         | 0.0688          | 0.327           |
|                                       | Female           | 23 | 3.8696   | 26.230         | 0.05469         |                 |
| Pre-test scores on intercultural knowledge | Male           | 12 | 3.9167   | 42.673         | 0.12319         | 0.225           |
|                                       | Female           | 23 | 3.7488   | 35.647         | 0.07433         |                 |
| Post-test scores on intercultural knowledge | Male         | 12 | 3.9444   | 30.151         | 0.08704         | 0.319           |
|                                       | Female           | 23 | 3.8116   | 39.842         | 0.08308         |                 |
| Pre-test scores on intercultural skill | Male            | 12 | 3.7000   | 27.634         | 0.07977         | 0.142           |
|                                       | Female           | 23 | 3.4870   | 44.651         | 0.09310         |                 |
| Post-test scores on intercultural skill | Male           | 12 | 3.7833   | 32.427         | 0.09361         | 0.142           |
|                                       | Female           | 23 | 3.6957   | 34.572         | 0.07209         |                 |
| Pre-test scores on intercultural attitude | Male           | 12 | 4.1250   | 25.000         | 0.07217         | 0.056           |
|                                       | Female           | 23 | 3.7989   | 53.796         | 0.11217         |                 |
| Post-test scores on intercultural attitude | Male           | 12 | 4.1146   | 29.416         | 0.08492         | 0.849           |
|                                       | Female           | 23 | 4.0924   | 33.966         | 0.07082         |                 |

The other analysis was geared to identifying the predictors to the students’ overall ICC score. This was done through multi-linear regression analysis, aimed to find out the extent to which each element contributed to ICC scores. R square was marked by 0.989, which demonstrated that 98.9% of the elements contributed to ICC scores.

Afterward, partial regression analysis indicated \( p=0.000 \) across ICC components, which pointed out that individual element posed significant impact on the overall ICC scores. Intercultural knowledge significantly accounted for the overall ICC scores by 44.3%, as reported by several previous studies [43][3][9]. In the same vein, intercultural attitude and intercultural skill were also influential in that both significantly accounted for the overall ICC scores, marked by 29.6% and 22.5%, respectively.

Garnered from the open-ended questionnaire, the students’ answers were mostly concerned with intercultural knowledge. This aspect prevailed across different questions. The students’ answers to the first question acknowledged vital role of intercultural knowledge inasmuch as most of the participants voiced the idea of enriching cultural and linguistic knowledge as a substantial element to increase their cultural as well as sociolinguistic knowledge. A couple of sub-emergent categories related to cultural as well as linguistic knowledge were identified.

Table 4. Students’ Responses to the First Question

| Categories | frequency |
|------------|-----------|
| Developing my cultural as well as linguistic knowledge | 35 |
| Helping me to be familiar with the different cultures and customs | 10 |
| Preparing me to adapt with different cultures | 4 |

Again, intercultural knowledge was of focal importance as it was deemed essential to help them interpret the world from other culture’s perspective. Intercultural circles motivated them to do so by aiding them in the following ways.

Table 5. Students’ Responses to the Second Question

| Categories | frequency |
|------------|-----------|
| Encouraging me to be objective | 5 |
• Encouraging me to be open minded
• Making me aware of various ways of behaving and thinking
• Encouraging the respect to other cultures

Upon analysing the students’ responses on the third question, intercultural knowledge remained to hold essential role. Their responses pertaining to the intercultural attitude and skill were also identified. The authors summarized the following reasons through which intercultural circles enhanced the overall ICC scores.

**Table 6. Students’ Responses to the Third Question**

| Categories | frequency |
|------------|-----------|
| Developing my cultural knowledge | 22 |
| Helping me to be aware of language | 6 |
| varieties Helping me to be familiar with the communication conventions from different cultures | 18 |
| Encouraging me to respect cultural diversities | 4 |
| Helping me to adapt to cultural diversities | 5 |

The findings confirmed that intercultural knowledge remained the ultimate aspect to enhancing their ICC. This finding was also corroborated by the opinion on the last question, which was related to growing positive attitude and openness to cultural diversities.

**Table 7. Students’ Responses to the Fourth Question**

| Categories | frequency |
|------------|-----------|
| Shaping my cultural viewpoints | 1 |
| Motivating me to interact with people from various cultures | 1 |
| Developing the curiosity on cultural diversities | 1 |
| Encouraging me to be more open-minded | 20 |
| Growing my cultural knowledge | 26 |

### 3.1 The Profile of Students’ Intercultural Communicative Competence

ICC represents a complex pedagogical as well as social construct. The framework plays increasingly more fundamental part in propelling learners’ competence. The study has shed light on language learners’ perceived ICC. This is mainly corroborated by students’ ICC scores commonly attaining the third quartile. Their perception on gaining intercultural communicative competence concluded that the construct itself was paramount in both learning and teaching English. Even prior to taking part in intercultural circles, intercultural knowledge and attitude already received focal emphasis as the students put higher scores in these regards than did they in intercultural skill. To some extent, it was quite understandable that they perceived themselves competent in these facets as both were abstract in nature, which was basically different from intercultural skill, being a more observable aspect. In addition, ICCQ was intuitive in nature, and this accounted for the students’ putting lower scores in the area of intercultural skill, a facet requiring direct encounter with people of different cultures in foreign context to the students. Their self-assessment results implied minute confidence in this regard as they had never come across foreign cultures, making actualization and reflection on ICC scarcely doable [43].

This study has demonstrated the fact that intercultural circles can serve as effective instructional structure for language teachers who aim to improve English learners’ ICC. The marked gain echoed garnered from the questionnaire has evinced the potential of intercultural circles. This finding, in large part, corresponds to the ICCQ items, particularly intercultural knowledge. This facet is germane to individual opinion on cultural diversities. Involving the extensive exposure to reading texts concerned with culture diversities across circles, this instructional structure revealed insignificant
increase on students’ intercultural knowledge, presumably because of the short timespan of engagement in the shared reading.

Empowering students’ autonomy as well as critical thinking skills [32], collaborative readings on cultural diversities have empowered the students to be more open-minded and objective when encountering cultural ambiguity, which concludes that the more students know different shades of various cultures, the more they will be tolerant and therefore open to culture diversities. The instructional structure is proven vital in enhancing their perceived intercultural skill and intercultural attitude. To this end, [9] deem knowledge as the bedrock to latent facets of ICC. Based on the students’ voices, knowing holds important values in helping them to gain intercultural understanding and further adapt to cultural diversities.

3.2 The Explanatory Power of ICC Elements
Numerous theorists have acknowledged that understanding cultural diversity will shed light on growing positive worldview toward the diversity. The present research corroborates the significance of intercultural awareness for enhancing ICC of EFL learners. In the same vein, the research findings have also confirmed the importance of cultural insights. Multi-linear regression analysis has found out that 44.3% of students’ ICC is accounted for by intercultural insight. For sure, skill and attitude were also influential in this regard, yet this was to smaller extent, 22.5% and 29.6% respectively. In a sense, this revealed the downside of intercultural circle in that it mostly exposed the students to culture-laden information, as inferred by the roles involved in it. The method did not involve any simulation requiring the students to deal with communication setting with different cultures. When deployed in discussion on social and cultural topics, it basically offered the means to reshape students’ attitude and paradigm toward cultural differences inasmuch as it required the students to formulate probing questions to which each group had to respond, encouraging the students to move beyond a mere surface understanding of the text [22] and [40]. Nevertheless, out of three levels of question, most of the students addressed the literal and interpretative understanding. The students’ critical thinking did not seem to overarch into the level of applied understanding. This explains why intercultural ability received the lowest scores, compared to other elements. [10] highlights the significance of higher-order thinking skill. Such thinking skill is deemed pivotal, without which any intercultural learning will never achieve its outmost gain. Focusing on applied understanding question will lead to more sophisticated tasks on both language learners and teachers, which eventually will evoke the demand for more intense discursive collaboration.

3.3 Students’ Voices on Their Engagement in Intercultural Circles
The data from open-ended questionnaire shed lights on intercultural knowledge. With respect to the first question, most of the participants stated that knowing numerous elements of foreign cultures was considered essential. Knowing is indeed considered the cornerstone to expand their cultural as well as sociolinguistic intelligence. Intercultural circles, geared to the exposure to norms, values, languages, and morality across foreign cultures, has enhanced the students’ insight and understanding on how they ought to adapt to cultural diversities.

Knowing various cultures holds central roles in the intercultural circles. This seems to be the primary motive to how students are enabled to interpret the world from different cultural viewpoints. The students become more mindful of numerous perspectives and behaving. Intercultural circles have escalated the students’ intercultural knowledge and minimize their subjectivity subsequent to discovering different cultural facets of others and being exposed to new perspectives on life. In the light of that, they become increasingly more open to respecting cultural diversities. [14] contends that becoming more knowledgeable of cultural diversities obviously lays crucial cornerstone in improving students’ intercultural competence. In contrast, shared reading among the students highlights the idea that intercultural circles will only attain its utmost result, that is enhanced intercultural competence in all areas, in a setting where students bring with them various backgrounds into sophisticated discussion [46]. This was evident of students’ scores in the area of intercultural skills. Shiri (2015) reported on very substantial changes in students’ knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes subsequent to their study abroad.

The study has portrayed that the students relied much on the exposure to culturally laden information in intercultural circles. In order to conduct appropriate behaviour and communicate
appropriately with others from different cultures, intercultural circles can assist in escalating students’ cultural insight. To be explicit, the shared reading helps them to be aware of the distinctive communication natures employed in foreign cultures and familiar with the language diversities. Escalated cultural knowledge helps the students to respect other cultures and further adapt to those differences. The exposure to cultural diversities is deemed pivotal to developing students’ positive attitude and encouraging them to be open-minded to cultural diversities. One student expressed pointed out further opinion in this regard. To her, intercultural circles encouraged the willingness to associate with communities with different cultural background. This subsequently encouraged her to re-establish her paradigm and become more inquisitive in understanding other cultures. Presumably, this stems from her experience of staying in several cities with copious socio-cultural backgrounds, which allows her to reflect on cultural diversities. She affirmed the findings in previous study by [24]. Their findings acknowledge that higher ICCQ scores lead to enhanced interest and motivation to learn foreign language. What she expressed corresponded to [9]. He contends that when students gain more intercultural communicative competence, they are likely to reshape their personalized frames of reference and subsequently conduct more appropriate behaviours.

Some other participants expressed the motivation acquired after the engagement in intercultural circles, which propelled them to be increasingly familiar with culture diversities and to develop their cultural knowledge. The tendency to value intercultural insight implies that escalated knowledge of target language culture triggers students’ motivation for learning foreign language. In congruence, [24] report that enhanced intercultural fibre strengthens EFL learners’ motivation for language learning and achieving successful communication when plunging into multicultural societies. This finding holds implication on English teaching, instigating teachers to involve intercultural circles to tape into establishing learners’ sound ICC for their global citizenship. The present study has indeed come in agreement with finding by [46]. He points out ICC is more likely to emerge in appropriate learning context, in which students are endowed with the boost to succeed in both language and culture learning. Consequently, as opined by the students, they can be more interculturally competent and adaptable in their outlook, therefore accruing effective communication skill across intercultural settings. Involved in discussion indeed sustained the growth of intercultural understanding as the students can learn from and with their peers [37][40][46]. By implication, intercultural circles will require more teachers’ contribution for triggering and aiding shared critical discussion on cultural diversities. Most of the probing questions correspond to lower-order thinking, which voices the dearth of higher-order thinking which is actually a pivotal aspect when it comes to developing intercultural competence [10].

The research findings also highlight another important notion to ponder, which is the absence of ICC difference in relation to gender differences, both before and after the engagement in intercultural circles. It calls forth more in-depth studies to investigate the impacts of gender differences on ICC. Contrastive previous research findings are in fact revealed in this area. Several research mention that males outperform females [17][30], while some others report that females are superior to males in ICC. On the other hand, some other studies do not reveal any gender differences on ICC [28].

4. Conclusion
Collaborative reading has propelled students’ ICC enhancement by affording the exposure to numerous texts portraying cultural diversity, coupled with the discursive collaboration wherein students can share their viewpoints. This study has unveiled the potential of intercultural circles for re-reshaping EFL learners’ intercultural viewpoints as well as believes. As a corollary, this results in enhanced intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural circle, associated with collaborative reading and discussion on cultural diversities, is proven influential for enhancing EFL learners ICC, such as culture assimilators [21] and drama [11]. This shared reading has enriched learners’ intercultural knowledge and understanding, subsequently stimulating the reflection on cultural diversities and accruing positive conduct toward cultural differences. Higher-order thinking, as reported in numerous studies, is fundamental part in developing students’ ICC. This sheds light on additional responsibilities of teachers to investigate and further escalate students thinking aptitude throughout the implementation of intercultural circles. Intercultural circle is thus worth regular application in reading courses devoted to students of English language teaching.
To even escalate students’ ICC development, intercultural circles can be applied with another method allowing direct communication with others from diverse cultural backgrounds, blended learning. There is no doubt that combining different methods is obviously advisable in this regard [32]. What accentuates the importance of ICC for the students, teacher-candidate, is that more pedagogical and curricular concerns should give more consideration to ICC with the aim to cement multicultural education in advance prior to real teaching endeavour [16] [15]. Put simply, English teaching orchestra geared to culture-laden learning will lead to learning outcome laden with respect, peace, and harmony.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Jember University for awarding the research grant, without which the research accomplishment will be impossible.

References

[1] Bastos, M. and e Sá, H. A. (2015). Pathways to Teacher Education for Intercultural Communicative Competence: Teachers’ Perceptions. *The Language Learning Journal*. Vol. 43, No. 2, 131–147.
[2] Brunstmeier, S. (2017). Primary Teachers’ Knowledge When Initiating Intercultural Communicative Competence. *TESOL QUARTERLY* Vol. 51, No. 1. doi: 10.1002/tesq.327
[3] Byram, M. (2010). Linguistic and Cultural Education for Bildung and Citizenship. *The Modern Language Journal*, 94, ii, 317–321.
[4] Certo, J. L. (2011). Social Skills and Leadership Abilities Among Children in Small-Group Literature Discussions, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 25:1, 62-81.
[5] Clark, A., & Trafford, J. (1995). Boys into Modern Languages: An investigation of the Discrepancy in Attitudes and Performance between Boys and Girls in Modern languages. *Gender and Education*, 7, 315–325.
[6] Council of Europe, 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[7] Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups* (2nd ed). Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
[8] Day, R. and J. Bamford. 1998. *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[9] Deardorff, D. K. (2004). *The Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as A Student Outcome of Internationalization at Institutions of Higher Education in The United States* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). North California State University, Raleigh, NC.
[10] Deardorff, D. K. 2011. “Assessing Intercultural Competence.” New Directions for Institutional Research. 2011: 65–79.
[11] Garcia, M. & Biscu, M. (2006). Theatre in the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence. *The International Journal of Learning*, 12(10), 327–335.
[12] Gee, J. P. (2001). Reading as Situated Language: Sociocognitive Perspective. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 44:8, 714-725.
[13] Gu, X. (2015). Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence in FL Education: A Survey on EFL Teachers’ Perception and Practice in China. *Language and Intercultural Communication*.
[14] Gopal, A. 2011. “Internationalization of Higher Education: Preparing Faculty to Teach Cross-Culturally.” *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23 (3): 373–381.
[15] Hall, J. C. and Theriot, M. T. (2016) Developing Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills: Diversity Training Makes a Difference? *Multicultural Perspectives*, 18:1, 35–41.
[16] Hladik, J. (2016). Assessing Multicultural Competence of Helping-Profession Students. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 18:1, 42–47.
[17] Kim, R., & Goldstein, S. B. (2005). Intercultural Attitudes Predict Favorable Study abroad Expectations of U.S. college students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 9, 265–278.
[18] Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). Teaching English Across Cultures: What do English Language Teachers Need to know to Know How to Teach English. *EA Journal*. Vol 23 (2). 20-36.
[19] Latendresse, C. (2004) Literature Circles: Meeting Reading Standards, Making Personal Connections, and Appreciating Other Interpretations, Middle School Journal, 35:3, 13-20.

[20] Lázár, I. (2015). EFL Learners' Intercultural Competence Development in An International Web Collaboration Project. The Language Learning Journal, 43:2, 208-221.

[21] Mader, J. & Cannerer, R. (2010). International English and the training of intercultural communicative competence. Interculture Journal, 9(12), 97–116.

[22] McCall, A.L. (2010). Teaching Powerful Social Studies Ideas through Literature Circles. The Social Studies, 101:4, 152-159.

[23] Meyer, M. 1990. Developing Transcultural Competence: Case Studies of Advanced Foreign Language Learners. In Mediating Languages and Cultures, edited by Dieter Buttjes and Michael Byram, 136–158. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

[24] Mirzaei, A. and Forouzandeh, F. (2013) Relationship Between Intercultural Communicative Competence and L2-Learning Motivation of Iranian EFL Learners. Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 42:3, 300-318.

[25] Ngai, P. and Janusch, S. (2015). Intercultural Communication Training for English Language Teachers: A Case Study of an Immersion Program for South Korean Teachers, Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 44:4, 345-368.

[26] Nguyen, T. T. T. (2017). Integrating Culture into Language Teaching and Learning: Learner Outcomes. The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal. Volume 17, Number 1, 145-156.

[27] Nguyen, L. Harvey, S. and Grant, L. (2016) What Teachers Say about Addressing Culture in Their EFL Teaching Practices: The Vietnamese Context, Intercultural Education, 27:2, 165-178.

[28] Nichols, K. P. (2011). Fostering Intercultural Competence through Study abroad: A gender-Based Analysis of Individual and Program Factors Influencing Development (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

[29] O’Mara, B. and Harris, A. (2016) Intercultural Crossings in A Digital Age: ICT Pathways with Migrant and Refugee-background Youth, Race Ethnicity and Education, 19:3, 639-658.

[30] Pan, S. (2007). Intercultural Communication Apprehension, Ethnocentrism and Their Relationship with Gender: A Cross-Cultural Comparison between the U.S. and China. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association Conference, New Orleans, LA.

[31] Pereira, F. M. (2016). From non-cultural to intercultural principles: A Proposal for English Classes in Brazilian Public Schools, Intercultural Education, DOI: 10.1080/14675986.2016.1240634

[32] Piątkowska, K. (2015). From Cultural Knowledge to Intercultural Communicative Competence: Changing Perspectives on The Role of Culture in Foreign Language Teaching. Intercultural Education. DOI: 10.1080/14675986.2015.1092674.

[33] Porto, M. and Byram, M. (2015). A Curriculum for Action in The Community and Intercultural Citizenship in Higher Education, Language, Culture and Curriculum, 28:3, 226-242, DOI: 10.1080/07908318.2015.1087555

[34] Porto, M. (2014). Ecological and Intercultural Citizenship in The Primary English as A Foreign Language (EFL) Classroom: An Online Project in Argentina. Cambridge Journal of Education. doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2015.1064094

[35] Renandya, W. A. (2007). The power of extensive reading. RELC Journal, 38(2), 133-149. doi: 10.1177/0033688207079578.

[36] Renandya, W. A., Rajan, B. R. S. and Jacobs, G. M. (1999). Extensive Reading with Adult Learners of English as A Second Language. RELC Journal. Vol 30. No 1. P. 39-60.

[37] Ribeiro, S. P. M. (2016) Developing Intercultural Awareness Using Digital Storytelling. Language and Intercultural Communication, 16:1, 69-82.

[38] Rogers, C. (1969). Freedom to Learn. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

[39] Sanacore, J. (2013). “Slow Down, You Move Too Fast”: Literature Circles as Reflective Practice, The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 86:3, 116-120
[40] Scarino, A. (2009). “Assessing Intercultural Capability in Learning Languages: Some Issues and Considerations.” Language Teaching 42 (01): 67–80.

[41] Scarino, A. (2010). Assessing Intercultural Capability in Learning Languages: A Renewed Understanding of Language, Culture, Learning, and the Nature of Assessment. The Modern Language Journal, 94, ii. 324-329.

[42] Shiri, S. (2015). Intercultural Communicative Competence Development during and after Language Study Abroad: Insights From Arabic. Foreign Language Annals, Vol. 48, Iss. 4, pp. 541–569. DOI: 10.1111/flan.12162

[43] Sue, D. W., Bernier, J. E., Durran, A., Feinberg, L., Pedersen, P., Smith, E. J., & Vazquez-Nutall, E. (1982). Position paper: Cross-cultural Counseling Competencies. The Counseling Psychologist, 42(10), 45–52.

[44] Sung, H., & Padilla, A. (1998). Student Motivation, Parental Attitudes, and Involvement in the Learning of Asian languages in Elementary and Secondary Schools. The Modern Language Journal, 82, 205–216.

[45] Swain. (1999). Integrating Language and Content Teaching through Collaborative Tasks’, in C.S. Ward and W.A. Renandya (eds.), Language Teaching: New Insights for the Language Teacher (Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre).

[46] Toyoda, E. (2016). Intercultural knowledge, Awareness and Skills observed in A Foreign Language Classroom. Intercultural Education, 27:6, 505-516.

[47] Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological process. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[48] Young, T. J. and Sachdev, I. (2011) Intercultural Communicative Competence: Exploring English Language Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices, Language Awareness, 20:2, 81-98.

[49] Zhao, H. and Coombs, S. (2012) Intercultural Teaching and Learning Strategies for Global Citizens: A Chinese EFL Perspective, Teaching in Higher Education, 17:3, 245-255.

[50] Zhang, Li and Wang, Y. J. (2016) Culturally Responsive Teaching in China: Instructional Strategy and Teachers’ Attitudes, Intercultural Education, 27:1, 54-69.