LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS SKYPE-ASSISTED INTERCULTURAL INTELLIGENCE LEARNING

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received: Revised: **Published:**

KEYWORDS

Attitude

English as a foreign language Intercultural intelligence Mixed methods study Skype

11/4/2023 Equipping learners with intercultural intelligence is one of the objectives of English language teaching and learning in the globalisation; however, it is observed that many English language learners cannot interact with 27/4/2023 foreigners well in multicultural contexts due to a lack of intercultural intelligence. This paper presents the results of a mixed methods study which aims to investigate English as a foreign language learners' attitudes towads Skype-assisted intercultural intelligence learning. A cohort of 170 learners, who had finished the course of Skype-assisted intercultural intelligence learning, took part in answering the questionnaire, and ten of them participated in the interviews. The gained data were analysed in terms of descriptive statistics and content analysis. The findings revealed that learners had positive attitudes towards Skype-assisted intercultural intelligence learning. Regarding three components of attitudes, learners were found to have good knowledge, positive sentiments, and active behaviors towards Skype-assisted intercultural intelligence learning. Based on these preliminary findings, some pedagogical implications are recommended for improving the quality of intercultural intelligence teaching and learning in the research context and other similar ones.

228(04): 239 - 246

THÁI ĐỘ CỦA NGƯỜI HỌC VỚI VIỆC HỌC TRÍ TUỆ LIÊN VĂN HÓA CÓ SƯ HỖ TRỢ CỦA NỀN TĂNG SKYPE

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Ngày nhân bài: Ngày hoàn thiện:

Ngày đăng:

TỪ KHÓA

Thái đô

Tiếng Anh như là ngoại ngữ Trí tuệ liên văn hóa Nghiên cứu hỗn hợp Nền tảng Skype

11/4/2023 Trang bị cho người học trí tuệ liên văn hóa là một trong những mục tiêu của việc dạy và học tiếng Anh trong bối cảnh toàn cầu hóa; tuy nhiên, qua quan sát cho thấy nhiều người học tiếng Anh không thể giao tiếp tốt với người 27/4/2023 nước ngoài trong bối cảnh đa văn hóa do hạn chế về trí tuê liên văn hóa. Bài báo này trình bày kết quả một nghiên cứu hỗn hợp nhằm tìm hiểu về thái độ của người học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ đối với việc học tập trí tuê liên văn hóa có sự hỗ trợ của Skype. Một nhóm gồm 170 học viên đã hoàn thành khóa học về trí tuệ liên văn hóa có sư hỗ trợ của Skype tham gia trả lời bảng câu hỏi, và 10 học viên tham gia phỏng vấn. Dữ liệu thu thập được phân tích theo thống kê mô tả và phân tích nôi dung. Kết quả cho thấy người học có thái độ tích cực đối với việc học tập trí tuệ liên văn hóa có sự hỗ trợ của Skype. Về ba thành phần của thái đô, người học nhân thấy họ có kiến thức tốt, tình cảm tích cực và hành vi tích cực đối với việc học trí tuệ liên văn hóa có hỗ trợ của Skype. Dựa trên những kết quả sơ bộ này, một số khuyến nghị được đề xuất nhằm cải thiện chất lượng dạy và học trí tuệ liên văn hóa trong bối cảnh nghiên cứu và những bối cảnh tương tự khác.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.7715

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1. Introduction

Scholars [1]-[4] have asserted the relationship between culture and language is inextricable and interdependent. Regarding the profound impact of culture on language, Kuo and Lai [1] confirm that culture affects one's behavior and linguistic skills in addition to changing his/her values and habits. Accordingly, learning a language involves not only researching the alphabet, the sounds of letters and forms, the meaning, the grammatical structures, or word patterns, but also analyzing societal behavior and cultural values [2]. It is possible to pinpoint the fact that language simultaneously reflects the culture and is shaped by it. Brown [3] delineates that a language is a constituent of culture and vice versa and their relationships are closely entwined, making it impossible to separate them without diminishing the importance of either language or culture. In other words, language is used as a medium for social interaction that facilitates the development of cultures [4].

Within the globalized context, social and economic activities are considerably increasing, and one's awareness of foreign language learning is further strengthened [5]. Everyone's comprehension of a foreign language extends beyond the straightforward idea of a communication instrument [5]. As for intercultural communication, if the interactions between the parties cannot be made within a specific cultural background, it is easy to create confusion, and the interactions are considered as failures [5]. However, in order to develop this ability and achieve the goal of being successful intercultural speakers and communicators, learners are expected to have cultural knowledge and consciousness in order to participate in the intercultural community [6]. As for the status of the English language, it is agreed that the English language has been recognised as one of the official languages for communication worldwide [6]-[12]. Accordingly, English language learners should be equipped with a wide range of cultures to be able to interact effectively and appropriately with foreigners in multicultural situations. In other words, English language learners should be equipped with intercultural intelligence (ICI), i.e., they should be both fluent in English and intelligent in cultures to avoid communication breakdown, cultural shock, conflicts, and clashes [10]-[12]. In this study context, the term ICI is understood as the capacity to work effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations by the use of a foreign language and intercultural aptitudes through communicative activities [13].

With the revolution of technology, the teaching and learning of English has transcended the use of conventional teaching modality (i.e., face to face learning). Different learning plats forms known as e-learning have been invented for the purpose of teaching and learning [14]-[16]. E-learning features different benefits from self-paced learning or personalized learning [17]. Currently, e-learning can integrate several educational apps and social networks such as Google Classroom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp, and so on as they can be accessible via various gadgets such as computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones [18]. Skype has become a prevalent and effective online platform for communication through video-conferencing tools and information exchange via a chat window [19]. Moreover, Skype is proved to be an appropriate and effective voice communication tool for English teaching and learning [20] as it can help learners interact with people regardless of cultural and spatial differences, which results in the leverage of learners' English proficiency and awareness of cultural differences [21].

The term attitude has been defined in a variety of approaches; nevertheless, in this study, it is understood as one's psychological responses to the given objects in a positive or negative way, and it is composed of three components, namely cognition, affection, and behavior [22]. The cognitive attitude refers to one's views, perceptions, or beliefs regarding the given objects of attitudes [23]. The affective attitude is about one's dispositional thoughts and sentiments towards things or phenomena, such as love or hate, agreement or disagreement [24]. The behavioral attitude is about one's propensities, behaviors, or measured reactions to respond to or behave towards objects in specific approaches [25]. Research on learners' attitudes has been undertaken to gain deep insights into English language learners' attitudes, and has significant effects on language learning success. Regarding learners' attitudes towards the use of Skype-based

interaction in English language learning, Skype is considered as a beneficial and efficient voice communication tool for English teaching and learning, and learners tend to have positive attitudes towards the use of Skype which can facilitate learners' attempts to communicate with people from different cultures and contexts, and consequently, learners can improve their English proficiency and enhance their awareness and appreciation of cultural differences [20]. Additionally, the use of Sky-based interactions can motivate and provide more opportunities for interactive exchange and collaboration between teachers and learners easily and effectively [26] [26]. Remarkably, Skype fosters an innovative learning environment for language teaching and learning to improve learners' intercultural competence [27].

With the above-mentioned rationale, the Skype-assisted intercultural intelligence (SAICI) learning was designed in an attempt to enhance EFL learners' ICI in the context of an extra English course. Nonetheless, within the scope of this paper, which is part of a big research project, only learners' attitudes towards SAICI learning are reported. To that end, the research question is addressed as follows:

• To what extent are EFL learners' attitudes towards SAICI learning?

The preliminary findings of this study are hoped to contribute further knowledge of the use of Skype in enhancing learners' ICI to the body of literature in an EFL context. Additionally, the gained findings will provide insights into EFL learners' attitudes towards SAICI learning to relevant stakeholders (e.g., teachers, learners, administrators, and parents).

2. Methodology

2.1. Research setting and participants

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches for generating data. The two research instruments, viz. questionnaire and interview, were employed for the research purpose. Regarding the training course, Skype was used as a learning modality for an extra English class, which aims at enhancing learners' ICI. The SAICI learning consists of 28 sessions conducted over a period of 14 weeks. Each session lasts 90 minutes, and there were two sessions weekly. The main course book is Solutions (Pre-intermediate, Oxford University Press), and additional cultural materials are embedded into the course. Besides, foreigners from different countries (UK, India, South Africa, Philippines, Taiwan, Cambodia, Nigeria, Indonesia, Myanmar, & France) were invited as guest speakers who presented their own cultures and got engaged in the learning activities with learners. Of 28 sessions, guest speakers were invited to nine sessions. Learners were asked to interact with guest speakers both in class and after class.

A group of 170 EFL learners coming from five SAICI classes were invited to take part in the study based on the convenience sampling technique. Of 170 EFL learners, most of them were first- and second-year students from universities. Nearly 80% of learners had learned English for more than three years, and many of them (85.5%) spent at least one hour self-studying English. Apart from that, ten learners were recruited for interviews based on their agreement.

2.2. Research instruments

A closed-ended questionnaire, which was designed based on the research focus and theoretical framework, includes two main sections: Section A is for respondents' background information; Section B is for respondents' attitudes towards SAICI learning, and it consists of 19 items with a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) which were divided into four groups: cognitive attitudes (7 items), affective attitudes (6 items), and behavioral attitudes (6 items). The questionnaire was first in English, and it was translated into Vietnamese to assure respondents' full understanding of the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was high ($\alpha = .78$).

Simultaneously, the semi-structured interview was employed for in-depth information on learners' attitudes towards SAICI learning, and it was designed based on the questionnaire and

research focus. There are five main questions designed in Vietnamese to make sure that interviewees did not encounter language barriers in responding to the questions.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

The data collection was conducted in two phases. As for the first phase, a questionnaire in Google Forms was sent to learners who had finished the training course of SAICI. It took approximately one week to collect responses, and the valid number of responses was 170. The second phase is the interview. Ten learners were recruited based on their agreement. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese via Skype and recorded for later analysis. Each interview lasted from 15 to 20 minutes.

As for data analysis, the responses from the questionnaire were statistically processed in terms of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). The mean scores were interpreted as 1-1.80: strongly disagree; 1.81-2.60: disagree; 2.61-3.40: neutral; 3.41-4.20: agree; 4.21-5.00: strongly agree. Meanwhile, the interview responses were collated and thematically analysed. The codes from S1 to S10 were added to the interviewees. Additionally, the inter-rating approach was employed for the validity and reliability of the study.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. EFL learners' attitudes towards SAICI learning

The attitudes towards SAICI learning consist of three components, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes. As seen in Table 1, the overall mean score of EFL learners' attitudes towards SAICI learning is 3.57 (SD = 0.77). It means that learners had positive attitudes towards SAICI learning. Specifically, the mean score of cognitive attitudes was the highest (M = 3.67, SD = .87), followed by that of behavioral attitudes (M = 3.44, SD = .87), and that of affective attitudes (M = 3.58, SD = 0.79). These findings indicate that EFL learners had positive cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes towards SAICI learning.

| Ma | Attitude Components | N=170 | | |
|-----|----------------------|-------|------|--|
| No. | | M | SD | |
| 1 | Cognitive attitudes | 3.67 | 0.87 | |
| 2 | Affective attitudes | 3.58 | 0.79 | |
| 3 | Behavioral attitudes | 3.44 | 0.87 | |
| | Average | 3.57 | 0.77 | |

Table 1. EFL learners' attitudes towards SAICI learning

3.1.2. EFL learners' cognitive attitudes towards SAICI learning

different cultural backgrounds." (S5)

As regards Table 2, EFL learners consented that SAICI learning could help them promote their English proficiency (item A1: M=3.69, SD=.93) and understanding of other cultures (item A3: M=3.66, SD=.97). Additionally, they agreed that they could understand their own culture (item A2: M=3.73, SD=.96), intercultural similarities (item A4: M=3.70, SD=.92) and differences (item A5: M=3.61, SD=.95) via the SMC. They also believed that they could improve their awareness of foreign cultures (item A6: M=3.66, SD=.95) and respond flexibly to intercultural encounters (item A7: M=3.69, SD=.94). In brief, EFL learners had positive cognitive attitudes towards SAICI learning.

The qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews supported the quantitative data. All interviewees concurred that they could gain positive cognitive attitudes towards SAICI learning after the course. Some examples are as follows:

"I can deepen my understanding of several intercultural topics because of SAICI learning". (S2) "SAICI learning enlightens me on the value of ICI in actual interactions with people from

3.69

0.94

N=170 SAICI learning can help me.... No. M SD promote my English proficiency. A1 3.69 0.93 understand my own culture. A2 3.73 0.96 A3 promote my understanding of other cultures. 3.66 0.97 understand intercultural similarities. 3.70 0.92 A4 understand intercultural differences. 0.95 A5 3.61 A6 raise my awareness of foreign cultures. 3.66 0.95

Table 2. EFL learners' cognitive attitudes towards SAICI learning

3.1.3. EFL learners' affective attitudes towards SAICI learning

respond flexibly to intercultural encounters.

A7

The results in Table 3 reveal that EFL learners were "interested in learning activities" (item A8: M = 3.52, SD = .84) and "happy with [their] intercultural knowledge enhancement" (item A13: M = 3.56, SD = .88) when taking part in SAICI learning. Moreover, taking in the SMC, they felt "excited about learning intercultural knowledge" (item A9: M = 3.59, SD = .87) and "confident in using English" (item A10: M = 3.59, SD = .90), and liked "interacting with foreigners" (item A11: M = 3.59, SD = .89) and "the learning atmosphere" (item A12: M = 3.62, SD = .88). This implies that EFL learners' affective attitudes towards SAICI learning.

Table 3. EFL learners' affective attitudes towards SAICI learning

| No. | Taking part in SAICI learning, I | N=1 | N=170 | |
|-----|---|------|-------|--|
| | | M | SD | |
| A8 | am interested in learning activities. | 3.52 | 0.84 | |
| A9 | feel excited about learning intercultural knowledge. | 3.59 | 0.87 | |
| A10 | feel confident in using English. | 3.59 | 0.90 | |
| A11 | like interacting with foreigners. | 3.59 | 0.89 | |
| A12 | like the learning atmosphere. | 3.62 | 0.88 | |
| A13 | am happy with my intercultural knowledge enhancement. | 3.56 | 0.88 | |

Regarding the interview findings, all interviewed learners had positive affective attitudes towards SAICI learning as they felt interested and excited when interacting with foreigners during the course of SAICI learning. They said:

"Thanks to SAICI learning, I feel more interested in navigating cultural encounters flexibly and positively in interacting with foreigners." (S3)

"...I feel excited when communicating with foreigners during the SAICI learning...." (S8)

3.1.4. EFL learners' behavioral attitudes towards SAICI learning

EFL learners (see Table 4) were in agreement that when taking part in SAICI learning, they wanted to "search for more intercultural materials relevant to the learned topics" (A14, M = 3.43, SD = .93) and "get engaged actively in the learning activities" (A17, M = 3.47, SD = .96). They wanted to interact with guest speakers "to enhance [their] English proficiency" (A15, M = 3.39, SD = .94) and "know more about [guest speakers'] cultures" (A16, M = 3.46, SD = .91), and they also wanted to spend more time "reviewing the learned lessons" (A18, M = 3.42, SD = .95) and "preparing for the new lessons" (A19, M = 3.49, SD = .96). Such findings indicate that EFL learners' behavioral attitudes towards SAICI learning were positive.

Qualitative findings corroborated with the quantitative data as learners shared that they would try to get actively engaged in the SAICI learning. They shared that:

"Honestly, I try to invest a lot of time in chatting with guest speakers to improve my English and understand more about their cultures." (S2)

"Before each lesson, I frequently spend the time searching the guest speakers' cultural information, which helps me become confident in interacting with them." (S7)

Table 4. EFL learners' behavioral attitudes towards SAICI learning

| No. | Taking part in CAICI learning I want to | N=170 | |
|-----|---|-------|------|
| | Taking part in SAICI learning, I want to | | SD |
| A14 | search for more intercultural materials relevant to the learned topics. | 3.43 | 0.93 |
| A15 | interact with guest speakers to enhance my English proficiency. | 3.39 | 0.94 |
| A16 | interact with guest speakers to know more about their cultures. | 3.46 | 0.91 |
| A17 | get engaged actively in the learning activities. | 3.47 | 0.96 |
| A18 | spend more time reviewing the learned lessons. | 3.42 | 0.95 |
| A19 | spend more time preparing for the new lessons. | 3.49 | 0.96 |

3.2. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to examine EFL learners' attitudes towards SAICI learning, and it revealed the following results. Generally, it was found out that EFL learners had positive attitudes towards SAICI learning. Regarding cognitive attitudes towards SAICI learning, EFL learners believed that SAICI learning could help them improve their English proficiency and intercultural knowledge. This finding may be due to the fact that SAICI learning was designed as an online learning modality in which learners could interact in English with foreigners and discuss intercultural issues with them both synchronously and asynchronously. That can be why learners in this study could have positive attitudes towards SAICI learning. Such a finding was partially aligned with that of the studies conducted by Le and Nguyen [28] and Raman and Krishnasamy [20] who have found that the Skype-based interactions could be helpful for learners' intercultural knowledge and English language development. This finding highlighted that SAICI learning was effective in improving learners' cognitive attitudes albeit the delimitations of the SAICI learning.

With respect to affective attitudes towards SAICI learning, learners were found to have positive thoughts and sentiments towards SAICI learning as they felt interested, excited, and confident in learning SAICI. Researchers [29] have asserted that there is a positive association between affective and cognitive aspects of attitudes, which backs up this finding. Accordingly, this could imply that the level of learners' cognitive attitudes towards SAICI learning may affect their affective attitudes towards SAICI learning. Additionally, as the use of the use of Skypebased interactions can motivate and provide more opportunities for interactive exchange and collaboration among users easily and effectively [26], learners' affective attitudes could be positively improved. This may imply that SAICI learning could be meaningful in affective attitude improvement.

As for behavioral attitudes towards SAICI learning, EFL learners responded positively towards SAICI learning. They tried to get engaged in SAICI learning as much as possible. Since foreigners as guest speakers were invited to interact with the learners in the course of SAICI learning, learners may find it motivating and interesting to get engaged in SAICI learning. This could be one of the plausible explanations for this finding. From the general observation, learners seem to be very interested and eager in interacting with foreigners, which could result in learners' positive attitudes towards SAICI learning. Moreover, Skype can foster an innovative learning environment for language teaching and learning to improve learners' intercultural competence [27]. Therefore, learners' behavioral attitudes could be postivily affected by SAICI learning.

4. Conclusion

This study reached the conclusion that the SAICI learning could facilitate the EFL learners' attitudes towards SAICI learning positively. They had good knowledge, positive sentiments, and active behaviors towards SAICI learning. Accordingly, some pedagogical implications are recommended. Firstly, as cognitive attitudes and affective attitudes are positively correlated, teachers should pay attention to learners' cognitive attitudes. It is advised that teachers should

create a wide range of learning activities in which learners can get engaged actively. In addition, teachers should understand learners' learning purposes so that they can invite foreign guest speakers to interact with learners. By doing that way, learners will be able to get familiarised with foreign cultures which they might encounter in the real life situations. Secondly, learners should be autonomous in SAICI learning because guest speakers are supposed to get involved in class within a limited time. Learners should set up their time to interact with guest speakers synchronously and asynchronously after the class. They should plan their learning goals appropriately so that they can focus on their learning intensively.

Some limitations are found in this study. First of all, this study focused only on learners' attitudes, using a questionnaire and interview. Secondly, the results may not be generalised due to the data collected via Google Forms which may affect the reliability and validity of the data. Therefore, further research should employ the experimental design to measure learners' level of ICI and combine other research instruments (e.g., tests, reflection).

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to send their sincerest gratitude to all anonymous participants and reviewers for their unconditional support.

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