

Cultural Content-Based Creative Tasks as a Bridge to Intercultural Communicative Competence: Evidence From Chinese EFL Learners

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Abstract—In the era of globalization and technological advancement, developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and creative skills has become a central goal of English education. Yet relatively few studies have explored the integration of cultural content and creative thinking within task-based language teaching (TBLT), particularly in constrained contexts such as Chinese EFL classrooms. This study investigated the effects of cultural content-based creative tasks on students' ICC development and examined how their ICC improved during classroom activities. A quasi-experimental, single-group interrupted time-series design was conducted with 111 third-year Chinese EFL learners enrolled in three intact classes at a provincial university in China, all taught by the same instructor-researcher. Over two months, these students engaged in creative tasks incorporating Chinese, British, and American cultural content. ICC was assessed through a self-report inventory administered before and after the intervention, and through observed classroom performance evaluated with the RAICC Rubrics by three independent raters at three stages. Significant differences between students' self-reported ICC scores before and after the intervention demonstrated the effectiveness of cultural content-based creative tasks in enhancing learners' perceived ICC. The upward trend in observed ICC performance scores across lessons also indicated growth in cultural knowledge, competence in managing intercultural interactions, and openness to cultural diversity. These findings underscore the potential of cultural content-based creative tasks within TBLT to foster ICC in EFL contexts comparable to the Chinese setting and provide evidence-based strategies for integrating cultural learning into language pedagogy.

Index Terms—intercultural communicative competence, cultural content-based tasks, creative task design, task-based language teaching, Chinese EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

As English increasingly functions as a global lingua franca, its role in cross-cultural communication has reshaped both its use and its pedagogy, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Beyond linguistic proficiency, EFL learners are required to develop Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)—the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2004, pp. 183-184). In China, this demand has revealed the limitations of traditional approaches centered on knowledge transmission and basic skills, prompting policy reforms that emphasize practical language use and intercultural engagement (Liu, 2023). Reflecting this shift, the ELF Advisory Board under the Ministry of Education has stipulated that ICC be recognized as a core competency for university students in the 21st century.

Despite these reforms, university English instruction in China continues to be dominated by teacher-centered, exam-oriented teaching methods that restrict authentic interaction and hinder the development of ICC (Yang, 2022). These challenges are compounded by teachers' limited exposure to English-speaking cultures, training programs that overlook ICC, and a lack of practical guidance for integrating cultural perspectives (Zhang & Cheng, 2020). To meet the demands of globalization, English needs to be reframed from a classroom-bound academic subject into a medium for meaningful intercultural engagement, supported by innovative pedagogies and systematic strategies for embedding cultural content into curricula.

Research on ICC has examined learner and teacher perspectives, instructional practices, links with intercultural sensitivity and sensation seeking, and its development through telecollaboration and virtual exchanges (O'Dowd & Dooly, 2020; Batunan et al., 2023). In the Chinese context, studies have largely focused on ICC training methods, cultural instruction, and theoretical discussions (Wen, 2022), while research on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

has emphasized translation, oral English, and comprehensive English courses (Mo & Bi, 2023). However, little empirical work has explored how cultural content integrated with creative language learning tasks can foster ICC in EFL higher education.

To address this gap, the present study applies the principles of TBLT (Jackson, 2022), creative task design (Willis, 1996), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Coyle et al., 2010) to design cultural content-based creative tasks aimed at enhancing both EFL learners' language proficiency and ICC, while also providing evidence-based insights for embedding cultural learning into language teaching and informing curriculum design in China and in other comparable EFL contexts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

ICC has been conceptualized in diverse ways, reflecting its dynamic and context-dependent nature. Byram's (1997) influential framework identifies five dimensions: cultural knowledge, attitudes toward culture, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Similarly, Fantini (2019) describes ICC as a multifaceted skill set that enables individuals to communicate both effectively and appropriately across linguistic and cultural boundaries. These varying definitions highlight how ICC is shaped by cultural, situational, and social contexts, and they underscore the need for continued empirical and theoretical inquiry (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006).

Research on ICC development in foreign language education has examined a wide range of pedagogical approaches. These include the use of instructional texts (Heggernes, 2021), telecollaboration and virtual exchange (O'Dowd & Dooley, 2020; Batunan et al., 2023), identity-oriented perspectives on teachers and learners (Gong et al., 2022), and the affordances of online learning environments (Chau et al., 2023). To assess ICC, several assessment models have been proposed, differing in their focal constructs, methodological designs, purposes, and target populations. Among these, Deardorff's (2004) Delphi-based, process-oriented model is particularly influential. It conceptualizes ICC as a developmental sequence, beginning with *attitudes* (e.g., openness to difference, curiosity, tolerance for ambiguity), progressing to *knowledge* and comprehension (e.g., cultural self-awareness, deep cultural understanding, sociolinguistic awareness), and culminating in *skills* of listening, observing, evaluating, analyzing, and relating. These elements contribute to both internal outcomes (adaptability, empathy, ethnorelative worldview) and external outcomes (appropriate and effective intercultural behavior) (Deardorff, 2009).

Despite these advances, many existing ICC assessment tools lack direct applicability to Chinese EFL contexts. As Dombi (2021) observes, contextual adaptation is necessary to ensure construct validity and measurement accuracy. In response to this need, the present study adapts an ICC self-report inventory drawing on Mirzaei and Forouzandeh's (2013) questionnaire and Deardorff's (2004) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, with an emphasis on ICC's dynamic nature and the interplay of internal and external outcomes. To complement self-report data, qualitative classroom observations and performance-based evaluations are incorporated, guided by Fong and DeWitt's (2019) formative assessment framework and standardized using Lussier et al.'s (2007) RAICC rubric, which categorizes competence as low, medium, or high. This multi-method approach enables a more systematic and comprehensive assessment of ICC development.

B. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL, introduced in Europe in the 1990s, integrates subject content and language learning, enabling non-language subjects to be taught through a second or foreign language. This study adopts Coyle et al.'s (2010) 4Cs framework—content, communication, cognition, and culture—which promotes language proficiency, cultural awareness, and critical thinking in the design of learning activities. Prior research has demonstrated the potential of CLIL to support ICC development across diverse educational contexts (e.g., Yu & Huang, 2021). However, most studies have focused on general language tasks, with comparatively little emphasis on integrating cultural content and creative tasks within CLIL practice. To address this gap, the present study investigates how embedding cultural content and creative tasks using a CLIL framework can foster ICC among Chinese EFL learners. Given that task design and implementation are central to achieving these goals, it is useful to consider how principles of TBLT can complement and strengthen CLIL practice.

C. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT, emerging in the mid-1980s from Communicative Language Teaching, emphasizes using language for communication through meaning-oriented tasks, while also addressing language form (Ellis, 2003). Influential frameworks (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003; Van den Branden, 2016) typically structure lessons into pre-task, during-task, and post-task phases. While TBLT has been widely applied in second and foreign language education (Kim & Taguchi, 2015), most research has centered on theoretical discussions and task design rather than exploring how TBLT can be combined with CLIL to implement cultural content-based creative tasks that enhance ICC. The present study addresses this gap by investigating the integration of TBLT and CLIL approaches to foster ICC among Chinese EFL learners.

D. Cultural Content-Based Creative Tasks

Building on the complementary strengths of CLIL and TBLT, cultural content-based creative tasks engage learners in meaningful, context-rich activities that integrate language use with cultural knowledge to accomplish tasks. Such tasks require students to select, comprehend, and manipulate information to produce creative outputs, including storytelling, scriptwriting, role-playing, and media projects (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003). When infused with cultural content, these tasks allow learners to apply their understanding of diverse cultural practices in authentic communicative scenarios, such as organizing festivals or simulating intercultural interactions (Long & Ahmadian, 2022), thereby linking classroom learning to real-world contexts (Long, 1985).

Participation in these tasks encourages learners to navigate unfamiliar cultural content and negotiate meaning with peers, promoting awareness of cultural similarities and differences. Through this process, learners practice interpreting and analyzing both explicit and implicit cultural values, thereby strengthening their intercultural communicative competence (Canto et al., 2014). Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating this development by guiding interaction, scaffolding tasks, and fostering engagement to ensure that learners' diverse intercultural needs are addressed (Jackson, 2022; Reinders & Thomas, 2010; Van den Branden, 2016). By situating cultural content-based creative tasks at the intersection of CLIL and TBLT, the present study emphasizes a pedagogy that simultaneously develops language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and ICC through active, learner-centered engagement.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Question

This study investigates the impact of cultural content-based creative tasks on Chinese EFL learners' self-reported ICC scores and explores how they demonstrate ICC during these tasks. Specifically, it examines:

- 1) To what extent do cultural content-based creative tasks affect the self-reported ICC scores of Chinese EFL learners?
- 2) How do Chinese EFL learners demonstrate ICC during cultural content-based creative tasks?

B. Research Design

This study adopts a quasi-experimental research design, which involves manipulating the independent variable without randomly assigning participants to groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Specifically, it employs a single-group interrupted time-series design, in which the researcher—also the instructor—implements a two-month cultural study in three existing classrooms. Data were collected before and after the intervention to examine its impact on students' ICC. As a practitioner-researcher, the instructor uses this design to assess whether the intervention improves ICC and to observe its effects over time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

C. Research Participants

The participants were 111 third-year English majors at a provincial university in Sichuan, China, enrolled in the mandatory core course *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture*. Convenience sampling, based on accessibility and availability (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2023), was employed. The sample comprised students from three classes taught by the researcher, each with approximately 36 learners. Participants were native Chinese speakers aged 19 to 25 ($M = 20$), with at least six years of prior English study but no international experience. All had passed the College English Test-6 (CET-6), corresponding to the B1 (Intermediate) proficiency level.

D. Research Instruments

(a). ICC Self-Report Inventory

The ICC self-report inventory, adapted from Mirzaei and Forouzandeh (2013) and grounded in Deardorff's (2004) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, was administered pre- and post-intervention to assess learners' perceived ICC. It comprised 20 items: 8 measuring attitudes, 6 assessing knowledge, and 6 evaluating skills, each rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Absolutely Not True, 5 = Absolutely True). Demographic information was also collected. A pilot study with five junior EFL learners (excluded from the main study) was conducted to check item clarity, response patterns, and suitability for SPSS analysis. Content validity was established using Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1976), with five experts rating each item; items scoring below 0.5 were revised, and the final items ranged from 0.6 to 1.0, indicating satisfactory validity. Reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha: pre-intervention $\alpha = .804$ and post-intervention $\alpha = .925$, demonstrating strong internal consistency.

(b). ICC Performance Observation Rubrics

The ICC performance observation rubrics were developed to assess Chinese EFL learners' ICC during cultural content-based creative tasks. Following Deardorff (2006), test inventories alone are insufficient to capture ICC comprehensively; therefore, students' performances across three classes were video-recorded and evaluated by the researcher and two colleagues using the RAICC rubrics (Fong & DeWitt, 2019). These rubrics were selected for their clear criteria across three ICC dimensions—attitudes, knowledge, and skills—and for categorizing performance levels as low (1-3), medium (4-7), or high (8-10). To establish validity, a pilot study with five students performing a cultural

content-based creative task (e.g., designing a festival fusion poster) was conducted. Each rater independently scored the students' performance from the video recordings, and inter-rater reliability was calculated using the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC = 0.949), indicating very high reliability of the RAICC rubrics.

E. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected in three phases. **Phase 1:** pre-course ICC self-report inventory (30 min). **Phase 2:** six weekly 90-minute sessions of *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture*, integrating creative, task-based activities on Chinese and English-speaking cultures. Students worked in groups of 4–5 (27 groups in total) to complete discussion tasks, which were video-recorded using mobile phones. Recordings from lessons 2, 4, and 6 were selected for analysis. Students' ICC during tasks was assessed using the RAICC rubrics (Fong & DeWitt, 2019), covering attitudes, knowledge, and skills, with performance levels categorized as low (1–3), medium (4–7), or high (8–10). **Phase 3:** post-course ICC inventory (30 min).

To address the first research question, pre- and post-inventory scores were analyzed using SPSS 28 with descriptive statistics and paired-samples t-tests. For the second research question, average ICC scores for each dimension and overall performance were calculated across lessons 2, 4, and 6 to examine progression over time.

IV. RESULTS

A. Learner Participants' Demographic Data

As shown in Table 1, a total of 111 EFL learners participated, including 93 females (83.8%) and 18 males (16.2%). Most were aged 19–22 years, with one participant aged 23–25. All were English majors who had passed the College English Test Band 6 (CET-6), indicating B1 (Intermediate) proficiency. Participants had studied English for 5–13+ years (35 for 5–8 years, and 60 for 9–12 years, 16 for over 13 years). The majority (95.5%) had no international travel experience, with only five participants (4.5%) having traveled abroad briefly.

TABLE 1
LEARNER PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Demographics	Stratum	Learner Participants (n=111)	%
Gender	Female	93	83.78
	Male	18	16.22
Age	16-18	0	0
	19-20	58	52.25
	21-22	52	46.85
	23-25	1	0.9
English language level	CET-4	0	0
Length of learning English	CET-6	111	100
Learner participants' experience of going to other countries	YES	5	4.5
	NO	106	95.50

This uniformity in proficiency and limited intercultural exposure provides a clear baseline for assessing the impact of cultural content-based creative tasks on ICC development, ensuring that observed gains are likely attributable to the intervention.

B. Impact of Cultural Content-Based Creative Tasks on Chinese EFL Learners' Self-Reported ICC Scores

To address the first research question —*To what extent do cultural content-based creative tasks affect the self-reported ICC scores of Chinese EFL learners?*—this section presents both descriptive and inferential analyses of the self-reported ICC scores collected before and after the main study.

(a). Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The ICC inventory was administered to all participants at two time points: before and after the cultural content-based creative tasks. The inventory measured learners' attitudes, intercultural knowledge, and intercultural skills through 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The descriptive statistics, as shown in Table 2 below, illustrate the overall distribution of students' self-reported ICC scores across both time points.

TABLE 2
STUDENTS' SELF-REPORTED SCORES
PRE-INTERVENTION REPORT

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	13	0.6	0.6
2	203	9.1	9.7
3	597	26.9	36.6
4	514	23.2	59.8
5	893	40.2	100.0
Total	2220	100.0	

POST-INTERVENTION REPORT

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	1	0.0	0.0
2	6	0.3	0.3
3	217	9.8	10.1
4	570	25.7	35.8
5	1426	64.2	100.0
Total	2220	100.0	

The frequency distribution reveals a notable upward shift in ICC scores after the intervention. Before the intervention, only 40.2% of students rated themselves at the highest level (score 5), while 36.6% scored at level 3 or below. After the intervention, the percentage of students selecting score 5 rose to 64.2%, whereas those selecting score 3 or below dropped significantly to 10.1%. These descriptive findings suggest a substantial improvement in learners' self-perceived ICC following participation in cultural content-based creative tasks.

Moreover, Table 3 below presents the students' self-reported ICC scores, separated into the three key components of ICC: attitudes, knowledge, and skills. These scores are reported for both the pre-intervention and post-intervention phases, allowing for comparison of students' perceived development in each ICC component following the cultural content-based creative tasks. This breakdown provides a more detailed understanding of which aspects of ICC were most influenced by the intervention.

TABLE 3
STUDENTS' SELF-REPORTED ICC SCORES BY ICC COMPONENTS

ICC Component	Score	Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Knowledge	1	7	1.1	1	0.2
	2	76	11.4	4	0.6
	3	197	29.6	78	11.7
	4	156	23.4	183	27.5
	5	230	34.5	400	60.1
Skills	1	6	0.9	0	0.0
	2	89	13.4	2	0.3
	3	215	32.3	106	15.9
	4	178	26.7	236	35.4
	5	178	26.7	322	48.3
Attitudes	1	0	0.0	0	0.0
	2	38	4.3	0	0.0
	3	185	20.8	33	3.7
	4	180	20.3	151	17.0
	5	485	54.6	704	79.3

As shown in Table 3, overall, all three ICC components shifted toward higher scores after the intervention.

For the **knowledge** component, responses before the intervention showed that only 34.5% of students selected a score of 5. After the intervention, this figure rose significantly to 60.1%, reflecting a 25.6 percentage points increase. At the same time, lower scores became uncommon. These changes suggest a notable improvement in students' self-reported intercultural knowledge following the intervention.

The **skills** component also demonstrated a clear upward trend. Prior to the intervention, responses were relatively evenly distributed, with the highest percentage (32.3%) at score 3, followed by score 5 (26.7%). After the intervention, the percentage of score 5 responses increased markedly to 48.3%, while score 4 responses rose from 26.7% to 35.4%. Meanwhile, the percentage of score 3 responses fell from 32.3% to 15.9%, and lower scores nearly disappeared. These shifts suggest that students perceived a substantial improvement in their intercultural skills after the intervention.

The **attitudes** component started with relatively high scores and showed further improvement after the intervention. Before the intervention, 54.6% of responses were already at score 5. Following the intervention, this increased significantly to 79.3%, a gain of 24.7 percentage points, while lower scores almost entirely disappeared. This suggests a strong improvement in students' openness and receptiveness to intercultural experiences.

In summary, all three components of ICC showed noticeable perceived improvement following the intervention. Score 5 responses in knowledge increased by 25.6 percentage points, while mid-level scores dropped considerably. Attitudes also saw a major gain, with score 5 responses rising by 24.7 percentage points and near elimination of lower scores. The skills component also improved notably, with score 5 responses increasing by 21.6 percentage points, changing from the second-highest to the highest chosen score among the students. Overall, the findings point to significant perceived gains in students' intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes following the intervention involving cultural content-based creative tasks. To further examine the significance and magnitude of these changes, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare pretest and posttest scores across all ICC components.

(b). *Experimental Analysis*

To examine the extent to which cultural content-based creative tasks affected Chinese EFL learners' self-evaluated ICC scores, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare learners' pretest and posttest scores across the three ICC components—knowledge, skills, and attitudes—as shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
PAIRED SAMPLES TEST ACROSS THE THREE COMPONENTS OF ICC

ICC Dimension	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Knowledge	3.79 (1.072)	4.47 (.733)	.000	.74
Skills	3.65 (1.042)	4.32 (.744)	.000	.74
Attitudes	4.25 (.929)	4.76 (.509)	.000	.68

Table 4 reveals a statistically significant increase in **knowledge** scores from pretest ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.072$) to posttest ($M = 4.47$, $SD = .0733$), $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.74$, indicating a medium-to-large effect size. Similarly, **skills** scores significantly increased from pretest ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.042$) to posttest ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .744$), $p < .001$, with the same size effect (Cohen's $d = 0.74$). The **attitudes** dimension also showed a significant improvement from pretest ($M = 4.25$, $SD = .929$) to posttest ($M = 4.76$, $SD = .509$), $p < .001$, with a slightly smaller but still medium-to-large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.68$).

These results indicate that the cultural content-based creative tasks were effective in enhancing learners' self-perceived ICC across all three components. The equal effect sizes for knowledge and skills suggest that the intervention was particularly impactful in increasing students' understanding of cultural concepts and their ability to apply intercultural skills in communication. Although the increase in attitudes was slightly smaller, this may be attributed to students already having relatively high attitude scores even before the intervention. Nevertheless, the improvement still reflects a major gain in students' openness, empathy, and respect for cultural diversity—key components of ICC.

Overall, the results provide strong evidence of improved ICC as a result of the intervention. All components improved meaningfully, with knowledge and skills being slightly more affected than attitudes which had received high scores even before the intervention. The medium-to-large effect sizes across components underscore the practical significance of the instructional design and its potential for promoting intercultural awareness and competence among EFL learners.

After examining the individual components, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the cultural content-based creative tasks had a significant effect on students' overall self-perceptions of ICC, as shown in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5
PAIRED SAMPLES TEST OF THE OVERALL ICC LEVEL

ICC Dimension	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	<i>P</i> -value	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Overall ICC	3.93 (1.042)	4.54(.683)	.000	.69

From the results shown in Table 5, the analysis revealed a statistically significant increase in overall ICC scores from pretest ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.04$) to posttest ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.68$), $p < .001$. The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.69$) indicates a medium-to-large improvement in students' overall self-perceptions of ICC levels following the intervention.

In summary, both descriptive and inferential analyses confirm the effectiveness of the cultural content-based creative tasks in improving the ICC of Chinese EFL learners. The frequency distribution shows a significant increase in the number of students perceiving the highest ICC scores, with a corresponding decrease in low scores. The paired-samples t-test further supports this finding with statistically significant improvements in mean scores and a substantial effect size. The findings support the value of integrating cultural content-based creative tasks into EFL instruction to promote meaningful development of ICC among Chinese EFL learners with limited international exposure.

(c). Chinese EFL Learners Observed ICC During Cultural Content-Based Creative Tasks

To investigate research question two—*How do Chinese EFL learners display ICC during cultural content-based creative tasks?*—in each lesson, the teacher randomly assigned students into small groups of 4-5, forming 9 groups per class and 27 groups in total across the three classes. These groups engaged in cultural content-based creative tasks, during which their ICC performance was recorded throughout all six lessons. After each lesson, the researcher and two colleagues independently assessed the students' ICC performance using RAICC rubric. They then met in the following day to review and confirm the accuracy of the ratings. The average scores were calculated using IBM SPSS 28. The researcher first computed the average scores for the three ICC components—knowledge, attitudes, and skills—for each class during lessons 2, 4, and 6, and then compared the scores across these lessons. Subsequently, the overall ICC average mean scores for each of the three lessons were calculated and compared to track students' ICC development over time. The findings related to this research question are presented below.

1. ICC Rating Scores by ICC Components: Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes

The students' ICC performance scores across three lessons categorized by ICC components, are presented in the following tables. Table 6 first displays the students' scores for the Knowledge component of ICC.

TABLE 6
STUDENTS' SCORES FOR THE KNOWLEDGE COMPONENT OF ICC

Lesson 2			Lesson 4		Lesson 6	
Class 1						
Group	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level
1	5	Medium	7	High	7	High
2	4	Medium	4	Medium	5	Medium
3	3	Low	4	Medium	5	Medium
4	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
5	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
6	7	High	7	High	8	High
7	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
8	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
9	3	Low	7	High	8	High
Class 2						
1	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
2	6	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
3	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
4	4	Medium	7	High	7	High
5	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
6	7	High	7	High	7	High
7	6	Medium	8	High	8	High
8	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
9	5	Medium	7	High	6	Medium
Class 3						
1	6	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
2	5	Medium	6	Medium	6	Medium
3	5	Medium	5	Medium	6	Medium
4	6	Medium	6	Medium	5	Medium
5	6	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
6	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
7	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
8	7	High	8	High	8	High
9	8	High	9	High	9	High
Total	5.6	Medium	6.6	Medium	6.9	Medium

Note: total score = 10, high score = 7-10; medium score = 4-6; low score = 1-3

As indicated in Table 6, the ICC Knowledge scores of all 27 student groups demonstrated a steady upward trajectory over the course of the intervention. In Lesson 2, two groups were assessed within the Low range (score = 1-3), whereas no groups fell into this category in Lessons 4 and 6. The mean scores progressively increased from 5.6 in Lesson 2 to 6.6 in Lesson 4 and 6.9 in Lesson 6. This overall shift from primarily low and medium ratings to higher scores reflects the positive influence of cultural content-based creative tasks on learners' demonstration of ICC Knowledge.

In addition to the analysis of the Knowledge component of ICC, Table 7 presents the students' scores for the Skills component.

TABLE 7
STUDENTS' SCORES FOR THE SKILLS COMPONENT OF ICC

Lesson 2			Lesson 4		Lesson 6	
Class 1						
Group	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level
1	5	Medium	7	High	5	Medium
2	4	Medium	4	Medium	6	Medium
3	3	Low	4	Medium	5	Medium
4	6	Medium	6	Medium	6	Medium
5	5	Medium	7	High	7	High
6	6	Medium	7	High	6	Medium
7	3	Low	5	Medium	6	Medium
8	5	Medium	6	Medium	8	High
9	3	Low	6	Medium	8	High
Class 2						
1	6	Medium	6	Medium	8	High
2	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
3	4	Medium	5	Medium	7	High
4	4	Medium	5	Medium	6	Medium
5	6	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
6	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
7	5	Medium	7	High	8	High
8	5	Medium	7	High	8	High
9	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
Class 3						
1	4	Medium	5	Medium	6	Medium
2	5	Medium	6	Medium	8	High
3	3	Low	5	Medium	7	High
4	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
5	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
6	7	High	6	Medium	7	High
7	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
8	6	Medium	8	High	8	High
9	7	High	8	High	8	High
Total	4.9	Medium	6.1	Medium	7	High

Note: total score = 10, high score = 7-10; medium score = 4-6; low score = 1-3

As presented in Table 7, students' ICC Skills scores showed a clear and consistent improvement across the three time points. In Lesson 2, four groups were rated in the low range (score = 1-3), indicating initial difficulties in applying intercultural communication strategies. However, no groups fell into this range in Lessons 4 and 6. The mean scores increased notably from 4.9 in Lesson 2 to 6.1 in Lesson 4 and 7.0 in Lesson 6, demonstrating the effectiveness of cultural content-based creative tasks in enhancing students' ICC Skills. This upward trend suggests increased competence in interpreting cultural contexts, adjusting communication strategies, and managing intercultural interactions more effectively.

In addition to the analysis of the Knowledge and the Skills components of ICC, Table 8 presents the students' scores for the Attitudes component.

TABLE 8
STUDENTS' SCORES FOR THE ATTITUDES COMPONENT OF ICC

Lesson 2			Lesson 4		Lesson 6	
Class 1						
Group	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level
1	5	Medium	7	High	8	High
2	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
3	3	Low	5	Medium	6	Medium
4	6	Medium	8	High	7	High
5	6	Medium	8	High	7	High
6	7	High	7	High	8	High
7	6	Medium	4	Medium	6	Medium
8	6	Medium	8	High	9	High
9	3	Low	7	High	9	High
Class 2						
1	7	High	6	Medium	9	High
2	5	Medium	7	High	7	High
3	8	High	6	Medium	6	Medium
4	8	High	4	Medium	7	High
5	8	High	7	High	8	High
6	8	High	8	High	8	High
7	7	High	9	High	9	High
8	8	High	6	Medium	7	High
9	7	High	8	High	7	High
Class 3						
1	7	High	6	Medium	6	Medium
2	8	High	5	Medium	6	Medium
3	8	High	5	Medium	4	Medium
4	6	Medium	6	Medium	6	Medium
5	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
6	8	High	7	High	7	High
7	8	High	8	High	8	High
8	7	High	8	High	8	High
9	9	High	9	High	9	High
Total	6.6	Medium	6.7	Medium	7.3	High

Note: total score = 10; high score = 7-10; medium score = 4-6; low score = 1-3

Table 8 shows a steady and meaningful improvement in students' ICC Attitudes across Lessons 2, 4, and 6. In Lesson 2, two groups were rated in the low range (score = 1-3), while no groups fell into this category in subsequent lessons. The mean scores gradually increased from 6.6 in Lesson 2 to 6.7 in Lesson 4 and 7.3 in Lesson 6, indicating that the cultural content-based creative tasks effectively fostered growth in the attitudinal aspect of ICC. These results reflect learners' heightened cultural sensitivity and increasingly positive dispositions toward intercultural communication over time.

2. Overall ICC Rating Scores

Following the analysis of individual ICC components, the overall performance of the 27 student groups was assessed, with a total possible score of 30. As shown in Table 9, the results revealed a consistent and progressive improvement over the course of the intervention.

TABLE 9
STUDENTS' SCORES FOR THE OVERALL ICC

Lesson 2			Lesson 4		Lesson 6	
Class 1						
Group	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level
1	16	Medium	21	High	22	High
2	12	Medium	14	Medium	17	Medium
3	9	Low	13	Medium	16	Medium
4	18	Medium	21	High	21	High
5	17	Medium	21	High	22	High
6	19	Medium	22	High	23	High
7	14	Medium	15	Medium	19	Medium
8	17	Medium	21	High	24	High
9	10	Low	20	Medium	23	High
Class 2						
1	18	Medium	19	Medium	26	High
2	16	Medium	19	Medium	21	High
3	17	Medium	16	Medium	20	Medium
4	16	Medium	16	Medium	20	Medium
5	20	Medium	21	High	23	High
6	21	High	22	High	23	High
7	18	Medium	16	Medium	25	High
8	19	Medium	20	Medium	22	High
9	17	Medium	21	High	19	Medium
Class 3						
1	18	Medium	18	Medium	19	Medium
2	17	Medium	17	Medium	19	Medium
3	16	Medium	15	Medium	17	Medium
4	18	Medium	18	Medium	19	Medium
5	18	Medium	21	High	21	High
6	21	High	14	Medium	21	High
7	18	Medium	20	Medium	21	High
8	21	High	23	High	17	Medium
9	24	High	25	High	26	High
Total	17.22	Medium	18.85	Medium	20.96	High

Note: total score = 30, high score = 21-30; medium score = 11-20; low score = 1-10

According to Table 9, during Lesson 2, two groups (Group 3 and Group 9 from Class 1) scored in the low range (score = 1-10). Through Lessons 2 and 4, no groups remained at this low level. Considering all 27 groups as a single cohort, the mean ICC scores for each Lesson (see Figure 1) were as follows: In Lesson 2, the average ICC score was 17.22, indicating a medium level. By Lesson 4, this increased to 18.85, still within the medium range but reflecting gradual improvement. In Lesson 6, the average score rose further to 20.96, reaching the high range of scores (score = 21-30). This progression highlights that most groups improved over time through repeated engagement with cultural content-based creative tasks, becoming more competent in intercultural communication.

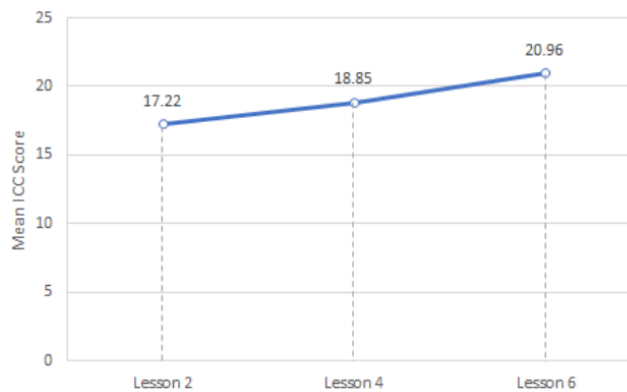


Figure 1. Growth of Mean ICC Scores Across Lessons

Figure 1 shows a steady increase in overall ICC scores across the three lessons, accompanied by improvements in each individual ICC component. Specifically, Knowledge rose from 5.6 to 6.9, Skills from 4.9 to 7, and Attitudes from 6.6 to 7.3. Among the three, Attitudes—representing openness and willingness to engage with other cultures—consistently received the highest scores, suggesting that students developed intercultural sensitivity and motivation prior to acquiring corresponding knowledge and skills. While most groups followed this upward trajectory, some notable differences were observed. For example, Group 3 in Class 1 demonstrated marked improvement of the total score from a low score of 9 in Lesson 2 to 16 in Lesson 6, whereas Group 9 in Class 3 sustained high performance, increasing

slightly from 24 to 26. These differences may be attributed to factors such as group dynamics or individual speaking ability. Overall, the results indicate that cultural content-based creative tasks positively contributed to the development of learners' ICC, albeit at different rates across groups.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Impact on Self-Reported ICC Scores

Quantitative results showed significant gains in Chinese EFL learners' self-reported ICC following the implementation of cultural content-based creative tasks. Improvements were observed across attitudes, knowledge, and skills as defined by Deardorff's (2004) Process Model of Intercultural Competence. Medium to large effect sizes suggest that these tasks had a meaningful and substantial impact, particularly for learners with limited prior intercultural exposure. The findings support Willis's (1996) argument that integrating cross-cultural content into creative tasks fosters collaboration and facilitates the construction of new intercultural awareness. Engaging in intercultural-based activities such as role-plays enabled learners to explore both their own and the target culture while encountering unfamiliar content and communication challenges. As Long and Ahmadian (2022) note, such challenges during communicative tasks can prompt learners to negotiate for meaning with peers or seek teacher support, thereby enabling comparison of cultural similarities and differences and encouraging interpretation of explicit and implicit cultural values.

The effectiveness of the cultural content-based creative tasks in developing ICC appears to stem from three interrelated factors: (1) authentic, contextually relevant content that enhanced learner motivation and engagement (Long & Ahmadian, 2022); (2) collaborative learning environments that facilitated perspective-taking and co-construction of intercultural understanding, consistent with task-based language teaching and sociocultural theory (Ellis, 2003; Van den Branden, 2016); and (3) supportive teacher scaffolding that provided linguistic and conceptual resources for critical engagement (Reinders & Thomas, 2010).

Pedagogically, these findings suggest that cultural content-based creative tasks should be systematically integrated into EFL curricula. Reflection activities should accompany tasks to help learners connect cultural concepts to real-life applications, while differentiated instruction can address varying stages of ICC development. Furthermore, providing a safe, inclusive classroom environment and incorporating diverse cultural perspectives can broaden learners' intercultural awareness.

B. Observed ICC Performance During Tasks

Classroom observations revealed steady growth in learners' ICC across Lessons 2, 4, and 6, as measured by the RAICC rubric. Knowledge and skills showed the most pronounced gains, while attitudes increased slightly due to high baseline levels in Lesson 2. The findings suggest that learners performed the tasks with a strong foundation of openness and curiosity, which facilitated their subsequent cognitive and behavioral development. This pattern aligns with Deardorff's (2004) model, which positions positive attitudes as a foundation for acquiring intercultural knowledge and interaction skills, highlighting the recursive nature of ICC development.

In addition, observation data suggest several reasons for the effectiveness of cultural content-based creative tasks in enhancing intercultural performance. First, peer collaboration promoted active negotiation of meaning and perspective-taking (Long, 2015). Repeated scaffolded practice reinforced content knowledge and communication strategies (Van den Branden, 2016). Additionally, culturally authentic and personally relevant tasks—such as cultural poster design and intercultural role-plays—facilitated meaningful connections between learners' own culture and the target culture (Willis, 1996). However, despite the overall upward trend in ICC performance, notable variability was observed among learners. That is, while many groups showed steady improvement, some groups plateaued, particularly in skill development. This divergence may be attributed to factors such as group dynamics, individual learning styles, or differences in creativity. These findings indicate that ICC development is non-linear and shaped by individual and group collaborative factors.

To enhance ICC performance in future tasks, it is recommended to begin with attitude-building activities, such as reflections on culture shock, and progressively introduce more cognitively and behaviorally demanding tasks. A variety of task formats should be employed to address learners with diverse learning preferences, while positive group dynamics can be fostered through role rotation and structured peer feedback. Ongoing formative assessment, supported by tools like the RAICC rubric, can encourage reflection and improvement. Lastly, targeted coaching or task modifications should be provided to individuals or groups showing limited progress, ensuring that all learners benefit from the tasks.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that cultural content-based creative tasks within TBLT and CLIL significantly enhance Chinese EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence, particularly in knowledge and skills. The findings underscore the value of moving beyond traditional, test-oriented instruction toward collaborative, creative, and culturally enriched learner-centered approaches that actively engage students in semi-authentic intercultural experiences and foster their growth as globally competent citizens. Ultimately, this research reinforces the importance of embedding culture and creativity in language teaching, offering evidence-based insights for curriculum design and pedagogical

practice in China and comparable EFL contexts. By foregrounding culture and creative thinking in language teaching, teachers can better prepare learners to navigate, connect, and contribute meaningfully within an increasingly interconnected world.

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