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DIRECTOR Prof. Paolo Trovato

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COMPETENCE OF EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
WITH A FOCUS ON ENGLISH LITERATURE***

Scientific/Disciplinary Sector (SDS) L-LIN/12

Candidate

Dott. Dang Ngan Giang

(signature)

Supervisor

Prof. Paola Spinozzi

(signature)

Supervisor

Prof. Nguyễn Văn Trào

(signature)

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degli Studi
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SCIENZE UMANE**

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Settore Scientifico Disciplinare L-LIN/12

Dottoranda

Dott. Dang Ngan Giang

(firma)

Tutore

Prof. Paola Spinozzi

(firma)

Tutore

Prof. Nguyễn Văn Trào

(firma)

Anni 2018/2021

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to evaluate the intercultural competence of English language majors as well as to explore the relationship between the development of their intercultural competence and the experiences of learning literature in English language education. To achieve this aim, two non-Anglophone contexts and practices, one in Asia and the other in Europe, have been investigated. Drawing upon Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence (2006), the study has been conducted at two public universities, Hanoi University in Vietnam and the University of Ferrara in Italy.

The research instruments adopted include formal documents extracted from ministerial decrees and university regulations, questionnaire surveys among third-year English majored students, reflective journals produced by Hanoi University participants and semi-structured interviews conducted on University of Ferrara participants. The study of each location of research has focused on (1) approaches to the teaching of English literature; (2) the students' self-assessment of two constituents of intercultural competence, namely attitudes to and knowledge of cultures, after attending English Literature courses; (3) the impact of English literature courses on the development of the students' intercultural competence.

This study has shed light on the relationship between the study of English literature and the development of intercultural competence. The cross-case comparisons have led to the identification of the distinctive contexts and specific features that shape the teaching of English literature in the two locations of research and have revealed that students at both universities perceive that they are acquiring relatively high levels of the two fundamental constituents of intercultural competence.

These findings suggest that English literature teaching and learning can generate intercultural knowledge and challenge conventional attitudes towards cultural differences. The recommendations emerging from this pioneering research on the development of intercultural competence through the study of English literature at tertiary level can have applicability to Vietnam and other Asian countries.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the rationale for the study and a basis for arguments concerning the research's direction and methodological approach. It introduces the context of the study by providing an overview of English language teaching in Vietnam, discussing the role of intercultural competence in English tertiary education and presenting the current practice of English Literature teaching in higher education. It also describes the research problem; clarifies the study's aim and scope; poses the research questions; and depicts an overview of the study.

1.1. Context of the study

In the context of international integration, it is apparent that English proficiency is regarded as pivotal because of the potential employment and mobility opportunities it offers to individuals, particularly in non-English speaking countries. In Vietnam, there is an unavoidable need for employers to recruit a workforce fluent in English as this language is considered a fundamental basis for the country's development involving various sectors. Indeed, the Ministry of Education and Training has stressed that workers with good English competence can facilitate educational development, which in turn enhances the country's growth. The Vietnamese Government launched a national project called "Teaching and learning foreign languages in the public education system from 2008 to 2020" (Project 2020), specifying that English is the foreign language to be taught and learnt in public educational organizations, among others (Government of Vietnam, 2008). As a result, in formal settings, English has been compulsory in the curricula of all levels of Vietnamese education, from primary to tertiary level. In higher education, English has also become a necessary requirement to earn a Bachelor's degree and pursue graduate studies as well as for workers to apply for a job. Although each young Vietnamese citizen may wish to learn English for different purposes, they are all motivated to be fluent by the prospect of having more chances for "international exchange and better paid employment" (Hoang, 2011, p. 13).

A great number of learners of English in Vietnam are proficient in the language after years of study. This is because English has been included as a compulsory subject in the national educational system from primary to tertiary level as required by the Ministry of Education and Training. Most of these English classes tend to focus on different standard forms of the language, including grammar, lexis, and phonology (Savvidou, 2004), aiming at equipping learners with the ability to communicate and express ideas in

different situations. Consequently, many learners successfully acquire complex structures and language proficiency. Unfortunately, the mere mastery of English in terms of language does not ensure success in real-life communication with English natives or speakers of other countries. This explains the fact that many English learners still seem to have difficulties in communicating and interacting in culturally diverse settings with either English native speakers or foreigners of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The common mismatch between students' language skills and their success in intercultural interactions can mainly be attributed to the misunderstandings of learners and communities regarding the pursuit of an English Studies degree. The focus shifted to language skills as a result of the public favourable attitude towards English language in the context of globalization and increasing demands for communicative English. Meanwhile, whether an English user can communicate successfully lies more in the ability to interpret discourse in all its social and cultural contexts. This is because the forms of communication are actually culturally driven as language is strongly associated with culture. As a result, the lack of proper awareness of cultural differences and cultural understandings also hinders students' communication with people from other cultures (Tran & Seepho, 2015).

In contrast to social demands for practical ability in English, among the common goals of English language education, Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg on September 30, 2008 issued by the Government of Vietnam in 2008 highlights that students should be trained to become not only communicative but also intercultural users of English. This means that English graduates are expected to avoid "becoming a fluent fool" (Bennett, 1997, p. 16), instead should be able to communicate and behave appropriately and effectively using the target language, especially in an international market. Deardorff (2006) referred to this competence as intercultural competence, which involves different constituents such as knowledge, attitudes and skills. Such competence requires the students to have not only fluent language skills but also an ability to reflect on their own cultural values, beliefs, and behaviours so as to be prepared for the otherness, which is the differences from their norms (Byram et al., 2002). In order for students to acquire such ability, there should be sufficient integration of culture and intercultural contents in English language education in Vietnam (Ho, 2011). Learning about culture can enable students with greater sensitivity and help them adjust to other cultures in necessary cases (Brdarić, 2016). It can also encourage them to be "conscious of their own perspective, of the way in which their

thinking is culturally determined, rather than believing that their understanding and perspectives is nature” (Byram, 2000, p. 10).

Culture and the learning of culture have indeed been addressed in specific training objectives of the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English. In particular, two among its four specific training objectives focus on culture and culture learning:

Objective 1: Providing learners with broad knowledge of the English language, British and American culture, societies and literature.

Objective 4: Equipping students with active learning skills for self-study in order to continue to enhance knowledge and practical language skills, initially developing critical thinking and scientific research capacity about issues of language, literature or culture-civilization of English-speaking countries. (as cited in Ho, 2011)

Meanwhile, despite separate courses on English-speaking countries’ cultures, the importance of culture and culture learning in English language education has not been explicitly highlighted. Besides, the main reference to culture learning in relation to culture courses establishes a separate status between culture and culture learning in the curriculum framework. As a result, Vietnamese university students do not seem to be provided with explicit guidance as to how language and culture are interrelated and they tend to discover cultural knowledge “by memorising information about history, geography as well as institutions of the target country” rather than through experiential learning that encourages interactions (Vu & Dinh, 2021, p. 5).

As demonstrated in the training objectives of the Vietnamese Higher Education National Curriculum Frameworks of English, apart from specific courses on cultures of major English-speaking countries, it is compulsory for an English specialization programme at university level in Vietnam to include courses on English literature. The teaching of English Literature started in Vietnamese higher education during the country’s Resistance War against America (1954-1975). Nowadays, a course on English Literature is either a mandatory or optional course among the major core modules, accounting for three or four credits in an English Studies curriculum. English Literature courses often take place in the third academic year of a four-year program, after the students have acquired knowledge from general education courses and basic core courses in the first two

years. It generally aims to equip students with basic knowledge of literature, cultures, countries, and people who speak English as their mother tongue in order to have successful communication in international interaction and integration.

Nevertheless, the role of English literature as a form of culture in English language education and its contributions to the success of an English user tend to be ignored. According to Chilton (2016), this happens mainly as a result of the view of the study of English language itself as a tool for communication, or what he addresses as „real-world“ English, rather than a medium of expression and representation. From the researcher’s observation at Hanoi University (HANU) in Vietnam where she works, a majority of English majors tend to devote less time to learning English literature than other units. This tendency suggests that students deem that English literature is not as important as other subjects of the same module, for example, language theories, including phonetics, lexicology, and grammar. Also, separate teaching of literature from that of culture and language seems to lessen the interconnection between them. As a result, when the researchers asked her students whether they knew why they had to learn English literature, they admitted their ignorance. This aroused the researcher’s interest and curiosity with regards to how other non-English speaking countries structure their English language education and the teaching of English literature at tertiary level.

Some research studies show that similar phenomena have been observed in many other Asian countries (Chilton, 2016; Hall & Yang, 2018). Most Taiwanese undergraduate students also regard literary courses as less necessary as a result of social expectations, which perceive practical language skills as crucial (Chilton, 2016). The official English Studies curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education in mainland China includes a few courses in English and American literature and only initiates the study of the subject from the third year. Many professors as well as students in this country still view English literature as a gateway to learning the language, rather than a subject that allows for “cultural learning or personal development” (Hall & Yang, 2018, p. 55). Consequently, the students often learn the language and forget the content, believing that language is the most important skill for their future career. In South Korea, it is observed that the teaching of English literature is becoming less frequent at tertiary level, even in English departments. Moreover, literature and language education are still considered separate disciplines in most cases (Chilton, 2016).

Moving out of Eastern region to the West and Italy in particular, one can see that English language education is provided in relatively different curricula despite the fact

that English also plays a dominant role in the educational sector all over Europe, where it has been taught as the first foreign language (Faez, 2011). From the researcher's observation, one can hardly find on the Internet any Bachelor's degrees or university departments in Italy that contain „English language“ alone in its name. The „English language“ as a major is always accompanied with either „Literature“ or „Culture“ in its title, demonstrating that language, culture and literature are interwoven. A quick look into English language education at tertiary level can determine a strong focus of literature and culture in any programs despite different requirements for different career paths. Especially, it seems that English literature always takes a massive proportion of credits regardless of the fact that the graduates would end up with a job in language pedagogy, translation and interpreting or communication and media. An exposure to the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language and English Literature at the University of Ferrara (UniFe) allowed the researcher to observe the teaching of literature and culture pretty much as a priority over linguistic skills. In this context, she found that many Italian students of English language and English literature are pretty confident with their knowledge of cultures and literatures despite some struggles with communicating in the target language. Given that the development of intercultural competence is an ongoing process (Deardorff, 2006), the researcher was triggered to examine an Italian curriculum and the kind of training students receive to explore their contribution to nurturing one's constituent attributes such as attitudes and knowledge to equip students with an ability to perform appropriate and effective communication with people of different cultural backgrounds.

Given the context that different non-English speaking countries may have different views of intercultural competence development as well as various foci on English language and English literature, the researcher conducted this study to evaluate English majors' development of intercultural competence and to explore how English literature is taught in an Asian university and a European institution. As an English instructor educated in Vietnam and now pursuing a PhD degree in Italy, the researcher could analyse the development of intercultural competence and examine the teaching of English literature as a component in an English Studies program from two non-Anglophone perspectives, one from the East and the other from the West. On the basis of her educational backgrounds, the researcher was able to position herself both as an insider and an outsider to evaluate the role of English literature teaching in English studies as well as in students' development of intercultural competence. The integration of these

perspectives was also expected to bring in the similarities and differences between the goals of Vietnamese higher education and those of Italian, offering an opportunity to learn more about the educational systems of other countries as well as to appreciate the researcher's own. It should be noted that this study still unavoidably laid more focus on the Vietnamese context due to its familiarity with the researcher as a Vietnamese native.

1.2. Statement of research problem

“Every research project has to start somewhere” (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 22) and this stems both from a practical and research-based problem concerning the development of undergraduates’ intercultural competence in English higher education in Vietnam - home to the researcher.

There is no doubt that a great number of learners of English in Vietnam are proficient in the language after years of study. This is because English has been included as a compulsory subject in the national educational system from primary to tertiary level as required by the Ministry of Education and Training. Most of these English classes tend to focus on different standard forms of the language, including grammar, lexis, and phonology (Savvidou, 2004), aiming at equipping learners with the ability to communicate and express ideas properly in different situations. Consequently, many learners successfully acquire complex structures and gain language proficiency.

Unfortunately, the mere mastery of English in terms of language does not ensure success in real-life communication with English natives or speakers of other countries. This explains the fact that many English learners still seem to have difficulties in communicating and interacting in culturally diverse settings with either English native speakers or foreigners of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. One of the main causes has been proved to be the lack of awareness of cultural differences and cultural understandings, which is blamed on the inadequate integration of intercultural contents in curricula (Tran & Seepho, 2015). In other words, these English learners are challenged by low intercultural competence – a concept having recently drawn increased attention among scholars in tertiary education in general and foreign language education.

Indeed, it is the ability to interpret discourse in all its social and cultural contexts that decides whether an English user can communicate. This may stem from the fact that the forms of communication are actually culturally driven as language is strongly associated with culture. Moreover, owing to the increase of English speakers worldwide, it is more the case that students are exposed to different cultures and thus need to understand behaviours, attitudes, opinions and values that are different from their own. As a result,

there is a need for culture to be integrated into the teaching of all courses in English specialization curriculum to allow learners to not only speak, but also write, in culturally appropriate ways for specific purposes.

Besides, according to Rumbley, Altbach and Reisberg (2012), one core element of the internationalization of higher education, a remarkably widespread phenomenon all over the world, lies in the “interest in producing globally competent graduates capable of understanding and functioning in a complex and interconnected world” (p. 6). Such globally competent graduates are expected to possess intercultural competence which can be defined as an act of communication undertaken by individuals identified with groups exhibiting intergroup variation in shared social and cultural patterns (Deardorff, 2006). These shared patterns, individually expressed, are the major variables in “the purpose, the manner, the mode, and the means” by which the communicative process is affected (Damen, 1987, p.32). Therefore, it is apparent that fostering learners’ intercultural communication competence in English classes may well be among the most significant undertakings of the EFL context.

As a response to such need, in the last decades, the Common European Framework has included intercultural competence among the outcomes of higher education in the 21st century, stressing its importance especially in a context of globalization and internationalization. In other words, intercultural competence and related global learning outcomes of a university student are increasingly becoming a priority for an educational institution to develop and to assess. Unless more effort is made to develop learners’ intercultural competence, there is a high possibility that English majored graduates will not be equipped to cultivate necessary intercultural skills before entering the labour market and thus will fail to become global citizens.

Previous research on intercultural competence in foreign language education has laid much focus on four main topics. Many studies have examined the theories of intercultural competence, particularly how it is defined and which key dimensions it includes, noting that it is an unavoidably complex concept (Byram, 1997; Howard-Hamilton, Richardson & Shuford, 1998; Deardorff, 2006; Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). Other research has laid their focus on the role of intercultural competence in language education from both instructors’ and learners’ perspectives (Clouet, 2012; Byram, Holmes & Savvides, 2013; Huber and Reynolds, 2014; Sharifian, 2018). These studies have highlighted the need to incorporate intercultural teaching in 21st century foreign language education in general, ranging from upper secondary education to tertiary level and EFL

context in particular. Fewer studies have investigated teaching programs, methods and strategies to develop the intercultural competence of either instructors or learners of the foreign language classroom (Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen & Meadows, 2014; Moeller & Nugent, 2014; Habiňáková, 2015; Karimboyevna, 2020). These studies propose some pedagogical implications and stress the integration of (inter-)cultural teaching and (inter-)cultural elements in the English education curriculum development, syllabus, and material design. Of interests as well to researchers studying intercultural competence has been the enhancement of the intercultural competence of learners of English through literature (Zacharias, 2005; Rodríguez & Puyal, 2012; Rodríguez, 2013; Rezaei & Naghibian, 2018). These studies suggest that English literary texts can help improve intercultural competence as they do not only foster language skills, for example, lexical resources through exposure to authentic materials, but also cultural awareness and understanding.

According to Byram (2009), while much attention has been drawn to intercultural competence, the assessment of it should also be taken into equal consideration. Despite many studies about how to integrate intercultural competence into foreign language education, few studies explore the assessment or development of intercultural competence among foreign language learners. It can be said that how intercultural competence can be assessed in a language curriculum remains a challenge for EFL instructors (Deardoff, 2006). Indeed, minimal research attention has been directed towards the assessment of English majors' intercultural competence and the influences of English Literature on the development of specific dimensions of intercultural competence, such as attitude and knowledge. Existing studies of intercultural competence and literature are mainly action research in which literary texts are incorporated in language classrooms to explore whether the intercultural competence of English learners is developed.

Therefore, there is a need to assess English language majored undergraduates' intercultural competence as well as to make up for a lack of research that addresses the development of intercultural competence influenced by the teaching of English Literature in higher education. A study of intercultural competence assessment that considers the influences of English Literature teaching will offer leaders of institutions and EFL instructors some meaningful findings to refine the design of the English Literature syllabus and teaching methods towards developing the students' intercultural competence. The assessment of intercultural competence in this study is limited to that of its two foundational constituents at personal level, including attitudes and knowledge. According

to Deardorff (2006), the acquisition of single dimensions can make significant contributions to intercultural competence as a whole and the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication and behaviours. Therefore, the assessment of these two constructs can shed light to the development of intercultural competence as a whole.

1.3. Aims and purposes of the study

The paramount aim of this study is to evaluate the intercultural competence of English language majors as well as to explore the relationship between the development of their intercultural competence and experiences of learning literature in English language education in order to inform curriculum development. On this basis, this study aims to examine the main goal of teaching English literature in a globalized English studies, exploring what students can gain from studying English literature – a supply of „authentic culture“ (Chilton, 2016) as well as investigating how literature pedagogy can help to foster the attitude and knowledge dimensions of intercultural competence.

The objectives of this study, therefore, are: 1. to identify and explore the perceived intercultural competence, particularly the attitude and knowledge dimensions, of third-year English language majored students at two universities, one in Vietnam and the other in Italy; 2. to identify and explore the ways English Literature is taught to English language majored students; 3. to examine the influences of English Literature teaching and learning on the students“ development of the attitude and knowledge dimensions of intercultural competence.

The study is an attempt to fill a void in the existing research about intercultural competence and the influences of English Literature teaching in English tertiary education. It is also hoped to inform future practices in promoting students“ intercultural competence and improving the teaching of English Literature at university level.

1.4. Research questions

After relevant literature is reviewed, research gaps are identified and theories are considered, the following general research questions are generated to achieve the above-mentioned aim and objectives:

Question 1: In what ways is English Literature taught to the English language majored students at HANU and UniFe?

Question 2: What are the levels of intercultural competence of HANU and UniFe third-year English language majored students after the English Literature course?

Question 3: To what extent does English Literature teaching and learning influence the intercultural competence development of HANU and UniFe English language majored students?

These research questions reflect the researcher's strong belief that assessing students' intercultural competence is a crucial practice in higher education and there exists a link between the teaching of English Literature and the students' development of intercultural competence. Since these questions are quite broad in terms, more specific research questions in more narrow terms are formulated:

Question 1.1: Which methods are used to teach English Literature at HANU and UniFe?

Question 2.1: What are the levels of intercultural attitudes of the third-year English language majored students after the English Literature course?

Question 2.2: What are the levels of intercultural knowledge of the third-year English language majored students after the English Literature course?

Question 3.1: To what extent does English literature teaching and learning influence students' intercultural attitudes?

Question 3.2: To what extent does English literature teaching and learning influence students' intercultural knowledge?

In seeking answers to all these questions, mixed methods are adopted in the study to collect data. Making the most of both quantitative and qualitative research as well as using one form of data as a supporting element to the other database is essential to identify the students' intercultural competence and explore whether the teaching and learning of English Literature has any effect on their development of intercultural competence.

1.5. Significance of the study

This study aims to fill the existing research gaps on intercultural competence and English Literature in EFL context. Indeed, the uniqueness of this study lies in its pioneering role of assessing English language major students' intercultural competence in EFL tertiary education in Vietnam and Italy. It is also one of the first attempts to explore the impacts of English Literature as an individual subject on students' development of particular components of intercultural competence in Vietnam and in Italy.

The hybrid assessment carried out in this study that collects both indirect and direct evidence of intercultural competence can be used as a source of reference in educational settings. Moreover, the findings of this study will help raise awareness of the importance of intercultural competence as well as the roles of English literature in EFL

teaching and learning in general and intercultural competence development in particular. It is also hoped that the implications of this study can be capitalized as guidelines to improve teaching methods and adjust the teaching contents in the design of English Literature courses, introducing a focus on intercultural competence. Last but not least, this study is expected to lay the groundwork for further research not only on intercultural competence but also in assessing the specific impact of English Literature on the development of students' intercultural competence.

1.6. Structure of the dissertation

The thesis consists of five inter-related chapters. *Chapter I. Introduction* describes the context of the study, clarifies the major rationale for conducting it and covers the aims and research questions. It also outlines the organization and structure of the study.

Chapter II. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review provides the theoretical underpinnings for the study and discusses relevant literature about intercultural competence and the teaching of English Literature in EFL higher education. It also points out the current gaps in the research field by focusing on studies published in academic journals and scholarly reports.

Chapter III. Methodology presents the foundations for using mixed research methods that fit the study's research questions. Detailed descriptions about the research design and the instruments for collecting, analysing and reporting data are also provided in this chapter. In particular, it justifies the use of questionnaires, reflective journals and observation. Chapter III also depicts the complete procedure of conducting the study as well as highlights essential considerations for ethics.

Chapter IV. Findings and Discussion reports the key findings of the study through the analysis and synthesis of collected data. The quantitative outcomes identify participants' self-assessment of intercultural competence before and after the English Literature course as well as the approaches to teaching English Literature. The qualitative outcomes provide explanations for the link between the teaching of English Literature and the students' development of intercultural competence and triangulation with the quantitative results. Discussions of the final interpretations drawn to answer the research questions are also generated on the basis of the theoretical models introduced by Deardorff (2006) and Truong (2009).

Chapter V. Conclusion and Recommendations revisits the research aims and questions and summarises the major findings regarding the assessment of students'

intercultural competence and the influences of the teaching of English Literature on their development. It also offers the implications for further practice and future research as well as discusses the existing limitations of the study.

1.7. Summary of Chapter 1

Chapter 1 examines the overall context of the study which involves English language teaching in Vietnamese higher education, intercultural competence development at tertiary level as well as the teaching of English Literature as a component subject in EFL curricula. This chapter also describes the research problem and provides the rationale for carrying out the study. The aims and purposes of the study along with the research questions to answer the research problem are also clarified in this chapter. It also states the major contributions of the study to research and teaching practices as well as explains the structure of the study.

The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework adopted in the study and the review of relevant literature regarding intercultural competence development and assessment as well as the teaching of English Literature in EFL higher education.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides theoretical frameworks of the study and reviews existing research on intercultural competence and the teaching and learning of literature in EFL context. In particular, it entails a discussion on the interrelationship between language, culture and literature, relevant frameworks on intercultural competence and its assessment, theories of literature and literature teaching as well as a review of current studies to identify a gap in research that justifies the study.

2.1. Language, culture and literature

An understanding of how culture, language and literature are related can pave the way to tapping into how literature can be used as a fertile resource to develop the ability to communicate appropriately through language in various cultural settings. Hall (2005) asserted that there exists an interrelation among literature, language and culture. Recently, the relationships between these three concepts have been taken into more consideration in foreign language teaching and learning with the root ideas of literature as language and language as culture.

First and foremost, language is the medium of literature and literature moves in language. Edward Sapir, one of the most important figures in the early development of the discipline of linguistics, once compared the relationship between literature and language with that between the sculptor and such materials as marble or bronze or clay. Literature in this sense is viewed as not only an example of language in use but also a context for language use. Many scholars believe that in literary works, the writers can exploit a creative and emotive use of language and introduce to readers some varieties of a language to express their vision of human experience and of the world. Literature, thus, can act as a source of linguistic and communicative enrichment (Panavelil, 2010). It is then fair to claim that the study of literature basically involves the study of language in operation and that the study of language can be performed through the study of literature.

Moreover, in some linguistic schools of thought, language and culture has an intertwined link: language is a part of culture and language and culture are inseparable. According to Tran (2020), the relationship between language and culture has been analysed and discussed by numerous scholars in social sciences throughout decades worldwide. From a sociolinguistic perspective, Fishman (1991, as noted in Tran, 2020) identified language as a part, an index, and a symbol of culture. Kramersch (1995) argued that language functions as expressing, embodying and symbolising cultural reality. In fact,

language and culture are acquired together with each supporting the development of the other. According to Agar (1994), “culture is in language and language is loaded in culture” (p. 28). As explained by Edward Sapir, culture shapes our language, in which in turn forms the way we categorize our thoughts about the world and our experiences in it. In other words, there is no level of language which is independent of culture as they interact with each other. As noted by Hall (2005), culture is “constructed interactively between people, continuously, particularly through language use” (p. 66). This means that language is an integral part of culture and also an expression of culture. Kramsch (1995) also agreed with this viewpoint, claiming that language expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality. Specifically, people use language to express facts, ideas or events for sharing information from their own viewpoints (language expresses culture); the way people use language in communication to create meanings that are understandable to others (language embodies culture); language reflects a system of signs that is seen as having a cultural value itself (language symbolizes culture). It is thus widely accepted that a person cannot be considered a proficient user of a foreign language without knowledge of that foreign culture and vice versa. To conclude, language and culture have an inextricable and interdependent relationship in a way that language has the mediating role by socially constructing culture.

Last but not least, literature and culture also have inseparable relationships. Culture can be displayed and stimulated by means of language in both written and spoken forms, including literature. In general, all kinds of reading materials are believed to be implicitly loaded with diverse levels of cultural expression because they are produced by a particular community essentially depicting cultural contents (Gómez, 2012). Besides, despite different approaches of writers, literature often addresses themes that are common to all cultures and relevant to all human beings at all times such as death, love, human relationship, belief, or nature. Therefore, literature is often regarded as a form of social practice and it is within the socio-cultural contexts that literary works are produced and influenced.

In short, it is clear that language, culture and literature are closely interrelated. The learning of language involves some grasp of culture in general and literature in particular. Conversely, the learning of literature involves some grasp of culture in general and language in particular. Therefore, many academics have put emphasis on the cultural aspects of foreign language teaching with a place of literature fit in the program. This is asserted in the context that the ability to understand a culture on its own terms and not to

make judgments using the standards of one's own culture, which is known as cultural relativism, has been both acknowledged and accommodated in the classroom (Panavelil, 2010).

2.2. Intercultural competence in English language higher education

This section provides a framework for intercultural competence development in foreign language teaching and learning at universities. In particular, it includes the definitions of intercultural competence, the significance of intercultural competence development in EFL curricula, major models and main dimensions of intercultural competence, and the assessment of intercultural competence including approaches, procedures and tools.

2.2.1. Concepts of Culture

In order to understand intercultural competence, it is helpful first to comprehend the concept of culture, especially considering the variety of definitions of culture. Over the past fifty years, researchers have agreed that there is not one definition that covers the concept completely. The reason is that cultural elements are constituted within internally heterogeneous groups with a rich variety of practices and norms. Individuals belonging to these groups often challenge, change and enact such practices and norms in personalized ways (Huber & Reynolds, 2014). Thus, instead of listing various definitions offered by many scholars, it is more effective to take into consideration different approaches adopted in the process of defining culture. According to Lustig and Koester (1996), there are four main approaches that play a crucial role in the understanding of culture and intercultural competence.

Enumerating the components of culture is the most popular approach. Most scholars adopting this approach define culture as a complex concept involving knowledge, belief, customs, the arts as well as other capabilities and habits. Brislin (1990), for example, clarified that the constituent elements of culture are “ideas, values, information and uses of categories, assumptions about life, and goal-directed activities [...] by people who identify themselves as members of a society” (p. 11, as cited in Tran, 2020). According to the second approach, the social heredity of a community is emphasized, implying the transmission of its basic values, behaviours and experiences among family members within and across generations. This approach highlights the process of learning in the development of culture, asserting that a person is not born with it. The third approach considers culture as formed by the beliefs, values and norms existing in the

minds of people and governing their behaviours. It argues that people behave in a certain way thanks to the views they have developed about the surrounding environment. As a result, a person's repeated patterns and regular behaviours can reveal their culture.

The last approach lays emphasis on the way culture is demonstrated in one's own daily conversations and interactions. Culture is regarded as arising from the specific collection of symbols and meanings in its members' communication with others. They are socially constructed, historically transmitted as well as "deeply felt, commonly understood, and widely accessible" (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p. 35). Accordingly, the nature of culture is seen as dynamic, multifaceted and embedded in context. Culture, therefore, may constantly change over time as a result of not only political, economic and historical events but also interactions with and influences from other cultures. Moreover, the changes in a culture can also result from itself if its own members question the norms, values and practices of the group they identify themselves with (Huber & Reynolds, 2014).

The present study adopts a definition of culture based on its links with communication and interaction. This definition lessens the importance of the first approach which identifies components of culture. Instead, this study integrates other approaches and adopts the definition proposed by Lustig and Koester (1996). Accordingly, culture is regarded as "a learned set of shared perceptions about beliefs, values and norms, which affect the behaviours of a relatively large group of people" (p. 35). From this definition, some characteristics of culture can be identified. Firstly, culture is not something people are born with, but it is acquired through their social interactions and from the explanations they receive throughout their life for what happens around them. Moreover, culture lies in the perceptions of people and forms based on their sharing of beliefs, values and norms with a community, which can be challenged and changed over time. Beliefs refer to a group of people's fundamental common view of the world. Values refer to what a community consider important or identify as positive or negative. Norms refer to standards for expected proper conducts. Lastly, this definition also implies that culture can guide and predict daily interaction as it exerts effects on behaviours. It seems apparent that this approach to comprehending culture allows a look at it as a multi-layered concept. Exploring culture, thus, is likely to require „peeling“ cover by cover, with the outer layer formed by the demonstration of behaviours in social interactions and the inner layer consisting of beliefs, norms and values as well as assumptions about different phenomena and events in the world.

2.2.2. Definitions of intercultural competence

As much research has been conducted in an attempt to conceptualize intercultural competence since the 1960s, many different definitions and understandings from various perspectives have been provided, even leading to some confusion (Arasaratnam, 2014). It is, therefore, crucial to establish some fundamental premises of intercultural competence to serve as a theoretical basis of this study despite a high diversity in its conceptualization.

It should be noted that there were variations in the terminology used in intercultural competence studies throughout the decades. According to Fantini (2009), different words and phrases were used as a synonym for the term „intercultural competence“, which vary by discipline and approach. Some of them include cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural competence, cross-cultural efficacy, intercultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, multicultural competence, international competence, global competence and global citizenship. Despite these different labels under which this topic has been studied, there is indeed consensus amongst experts as to what intercultural competence is.

Given a great number of definitions and frameworks published on intercultural competence, an overview of how studies in it originated and evolved worldwide over time was provided by Arasaratnam-Smith (2017). She cited Smith (1966), claiming that the earliest research on this field can be traced back to the 1960s regarding the experiences of Westerners working abroad. It can be said that initially, intercultural competence tended to be elaborated with a focus on the communication problems emerging during collaboration between individuals from various cultures. Specifically, some overseas service personnel in the United States at the time, particularly those working in ships, regarded such elements as flexibility, stability, curiosity and sensitivity as the core of effective intercultural communication. Moving to the 1970s, intercultural competence was also labelled cross-cultural competence or intercultural adaptation, referring to the ability to communicate effectively across cultures or rather adapt effectively. In this period, as Arasaratnam-Smith explained, it was still agreed that fundamental factors in intercultural competence involve flexibility, openness and curiosity. During the next decade, major progress was made in developing and validating models to assess and measure intercultural competence (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009), which was encapsulated in relation to communication competence, emphasizing the interpersonal interaction between individuals from two distinct cultures. In fact, Arasaratnam-Smith asserted that most later definitions of intercultural competence were based on Spitzberg and Cupach's definition

in 1984 regarding communicative competence as effective and appropriate communication. In the 1990s, more elaborate conceptual models were introduced in an effort to evaluate knowledge and skills related to intercultural interactions (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Recent years have witnessed the maturity and momentums of research in effective and appropriate intercultural communication that laid a foundation for later definitions of intercultural competence by scholars from various disciplines, resulting in a number of theories of the term.

In order to expand on various definitions of the term and identify collective understandings of what it is, Schmidmeier and Takahashi (2018) synthesized existing definitions of intercultural competence and presented the explicit or implicit focus of each. According to Schmidmeier and Takahashi, the predominant focus of the definitions provided in Table 2.1 lies in behavioural and cognitive aspects of intercultural competence. Those relevant and adopted in educational field are shown in Table 2.1 in chronological order.

Table 2.1

Definitions of intercultural competence and their focus

Definitions	Focus
Ability to function effectively in another culture (Gertsen, 1990; Dinges & Baldwin, 1996).	Behavioural
The knowledge of other people; self-knowledge; skills to interpret and relate; appreciation of the values, beliefs and behaviour of others; and self-relativization (Byram, 1997).	Cognitive, behavioural
Ability to adapt to other cultures based on elements involved in the linguistic processes of interaction between the partners (Fantini, 2000).	Behavioural
Ability to effectively interact both with people from other cultures as those of their own culture, involving awareness of different values and behaviours as well as the ability to deal with them through non-judgment (Byram & Nichols, 2001).	Cognitive, behavioural
Ability to interact and communicate effectively with persons from other cultures and in culturally diverse settings (Paige, 2004).	Behavioural

Ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. Ability to change the references appropriately and adapt the behaviour to the cultural context. Ability to achieve goals through constructive interaction in an intercultural context (Deardorff, 2004).	Cognitive, behavioural, cultural
Capabilities necessary to achieve mutual understanding as well as for functional interaction and cooperation between people who have different cultural backgrounds (Jokikikko, 2005).	Behavioural
A complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself (Fantini, 2006).	Cognitive, behavioural
Effectiveness of an individual in developing a set of knowledge, skills and personal attributes in order to work successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds in a country or abroad (Johnson & Lenartowicz, 2006).	Cognitive, behavioural
The ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions (Deardorff, 2006).	Cognitive, behavioural
Management of the idea that allows members of different cultural systems to be aware of their cultural identity and cultural differences and to interact effectively and appropriately with others in different contexts (Kupka, 2008).	Cognitive, behavioural
The appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who represent different or divergent affective, cognitive and behavioural orientations to the world (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).	Cognitive, behavioural
Understanding the difference and the need to communicate effectively and engage with stakeholders effectively (Fitch, 2012).	Cognitive

[Source: Schmidmeier & Takahashi (2018, p. 138)]

As can be seen from Table 2.1, all of these definitions were basically built on the attempt to provide explanations for each component of the term, including „intercultural“ and „competence“. While some refer to „competence“ as single ability, others address it in plural form, inferring the complexity that it involves. Most of them agree on the context

that is „intercultural“, clarifying it entails more than one culture and interaction between people from culture that are not similar. They also mention the criteria for target performance of the competence, initially merely „effective“ then also „appropriate“. The definitions proposed by Byram (1997), Fatini (2000) and Deardorff (2004) seem more extended as they even regard relativization and adaptation as a part of the competence.

In fact, the most widely accepted definitions of intercultural competence are attributed to significant scholars in the field including those by Byram (1997), Paige (2004) and Deardorff (2004, 2006). Byram offered one of the most fundamental definitions, referring intercultural competence to the ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries. He clarified that it involves “knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others“ values, beliefs, and behaviours; and relativizing one“s self” (p. 34). As can be inferred from this definition, intercultural competence constitutes a person“s various knowledge, skills and attitudes. On this basis, Paige (2004) expanded the term by clarifying how and then it occurs, defining intercultural competence as “one“s ability to interact and communicate effectively with persons from other cultures and in culturally diverse settings” (p. 79).

In fact, Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) claimed that Deardorff (2004) provided one of the top-rated recent definitions of intercultural competence, claiming that it is “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one“s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p. 194). This definition is undoubtedly quite comprehensible in terms of language used, which has gained success in helping educational stakeholders have the most fundamental understandings about the competence. It highlights effectiveness and appropriateness, referring to the abilities to achieve desired personal outcomes and to meet the expectations and demands of the communicative situation, respectively. A few years later in 2006, Deardorff offered more comprehensive conceptualization of intercultural competence: “the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions“. In particular, compared to the one in 2004, intercultural competence in this definition takes into consideration the aspect of a process, which involves development over time („the ability to develop“), rather than merely an outcome („the ability to communicate“). Besides, it puts more emphasis to the engagement in the context, referring to it as „intercultural interactions“ in a more specific sense instead of „intercultural situations“. It also expands

the exchange between interlocutors as involving not only sharing information („communication“) but also the way it is conducted („behaviour“). Among these three scholars' endeavours, it should be noted that in the educational field, the definition by Byram is mostly preferred by administrators as it identifies the necessary knowledge and skills that can be clearly demonstrated in curricula; whereas a majority of scholars preferred the ones by Deardorff since it emphasized cognitive and behavioural aspects as essential elements of an ordinary user of language.

Apart from cognitive and behavioural aspects, many scholars also pay regard to other issues when conceptualizing intercultural competence. One of them is cultural identity. Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002) define intercultural competence as the ability to “ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities”, and to “interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality” (p. 10). According to Huber and Reynolds (2014), people often disclose various identities in different situations and contexts. In fact, identity refers to a person's sense of who they are and their own descriptions that bear their significance and value. The identities constructed on the basis of the membership of cultural groups are defined as cultural identities. Kupka (2008) considered cultural identity as an important component of intercultural competence as people from various cultures are often conscious of their cultural differences. With such viewpoint, cultural aspects are described as the context for users of language to display their intercultural competence.

When providing definitions of intercultural competence, many scholars have laid an emphasis on one's mediation between different cultures. From this perspective, Risager (1998) offered a definition:

Intercultural competence is the ability that allows learners of foreign language to function as mediators between their home culture and the target one as well as to use the target language to make contact with users of this language as first language. (p. 244)

Jokikokko (2005) added that intercultural competence also involves learners in orienting ethical ways of being, thinking and acting. As a result, an intercultural competent learner can adopt an external perspective to reflect on themselves as well as their values and beliefs, which means, in other words, to see the world through the other's eyes so as to adapt their behaviours (Sen Gupta, 2002). It can be inferred from these scholars that intercultural competence, to a certain extent, deals with the conveyance of

cultural property and symbolic values. That is to say, communicators have to not only have clear perceptions of the similarities and differences between cultures but also rely on such understandings to display behaviours that harmonize interactive communications.

Some interesting critiques of intercultural competence have also been made to criticize existing definitions of intercultural competence. Zarate (2003, as cited in Dervin, 2010) argued that intercultural competence should indeed be discussed in the plural since they can be identified in different stages of unfixed development. In this sense, the „competences“ are unstable because they are based not only on cognition, but also on affection and emotions. Consequently, a student who is normally competent in certain contexts may not necessarily be competent in other situations. Another argument was put forward by Ogay and Edelman (2016) who pointed out a mere focus on the user of the competence as well as an ignorance of influences triggered by interlocutors and interactional contexts on behaviours and attitudes. She argued that any individual can possess excellent intercultural competence but they may be easily troubled by the lack of motivation of the other, their bad intentions or their language skills. Thus, dual responsibility and engagement should be considered as vital in the definition of intercultural competence.

It can be seen that most of the definitions provided by scholars were quite general and broad in nature as they did not identify specific components that constitute the intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes mentioned. Moreover, because of its complexity, the concept of intercultural competence has been formulated in a variety of ways and a „uniform“ definition of what it means to be interculturally competent does not seem to exist. Although the established definitions of intercultural competence have been revised and adapted to different institutional settings, several key ideas about it are retained for educators (Blair, 2017). Firstly, they should bear in mind that intercultural competence is a lifelong ongoing developmental process rather than just merely an act of achievement or acquisition. During this cycle of learning, a person can experience both gains and losses in competence over time and cultural space (Deardorff, 2006). Secondly, in order to develop intercultural competence, targeted outcomes for intercultural learning should be determined on the basis of the constructs of intercultural competence that are embedded in its definition, namely attitudes, knowledge, skills. In particular, Blair (2017) stresses the need to break down these broad categories to form more specific intentional outcome statements. Thirdly, only when individual awareness is fostered through socio-

cultural interaction can intercultural competence be performed through visible and meaningful behaviours.

To sum up, scholars mainly emphasize the ability to communicate and behave in a way that is effective and appropriate in situations involving various cultural features as well as the ability to mediate between languages and cultures. Since the context of this current study is placed in foreign language education and in order to better serve its aim, the definition introduced by Deardorff (2006) is adopted. It was chosen as it represents the most comprehensive explanations and has been mostly agreed upon by intercultural scholars (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). It also in line with the way culture is defined in this study, which is demonstrated through communication and interaction. Accordingly, from this point onwards, intercultural competence refers to the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.

2.2.3. The importance of intercultural competence in foreign language teaching

Foreign language teaching and learning has undergone various periods which Byram, Holmes and Savvides (2013) refer to as a „cultural turn“. In particular, the aim of foreign language teaching has evolved from linguistic competence to communicative competence then intercultural competence. This section describes how intercultural competence gains its status throughout the history of foreign language teaching and learning.

In the period after World War II, the major goal of language teaching and learning, which involved the study of literary and other texts, was to acquire linguistic competence. That meant language learners were expected to understand and use a language through learning the linguistic system, including grammatical structures, lexical resources and pronunciation. As a consequence, language instructors were inclined to ignore or even deny the significance of socio-cultural elements in language acquisition. The need for an ability to use a language appropriately in social contexts was therefore neglected.

Since the emergence of pragmatics during the 1960s and 1970s, language instructors have come to realize that it is impossible for learners to achieve effective communication merely with a well-structured linguistic system. Lists of language function were then developed to replace grammatical structures. In the early 1970s, communicative competence was first brought up to describe several systems of rules underlying communicative behaviours. During the 1980s, the prevalent goal for language learners

was to learn how to make proper use of language in different situations, often operationalized as „politeness“.

However, the concept of communicative competence has been reconsidered and revised over the years. It has been criticized by many scholars for tending to bring into focus speech acts and discourse competence rather than cultural competence (Byram, 1997). Besides, it has been argued that foreign language teaching should involve the personal and social development of the learner as an individual rather than be concerned merely with training in communication skills. In other words, linguistic competence and communicative competence have been proved insufficient in preparing learners for study or work in a multicultural setting where intercultural encounters are common (Sharifian, 2018). This perhaps has happened as a result of factors such as globalization, modern technology and refugee migration. Therefore, in this new social context, there is a need to take into considerations the thinking and acting of speakers of different languages – including language learners themselves – and how this might contribute to successful communication and interaction.

Given that instructors and learners need to be aware of other people’s cultures as well as their own and that the goal of foreign language education should be shifted to culture as the core (Sharifian, 2018), the term intercultural competence has emerged to complement communicative competence. According to Byram et al. (2013), this has further enhanced the notion of what it means to be competent for communication with speakers of different languages and with speakers using a lingua franca. Rather than the acquisition of language skills, individual’s personal development through empathetic understanding of other countries, peoples and their languages has also been integrated as a fundamental goal of foreign language learning.

In fact, the development of intercultural competence has become crucial in contexts such as foreign language classes because of several reasons (Sharifian, 2018). Firstly, the development of intercultural competence fosters an individual’s own knowledge and understanding not only of their cultural positioning, beliefs, discourses and values but also of other people. As claimed by Jokikokko (2005), although the intercultural approach to education primarily focuses on the target cultures, comparisons between the learner’s own country and the target country are also entailed. Thus, learners can learn about and reflect critically on their own cultural affiliations, thereby developing a reflective attitude towards the culture and civilization of their own countries.

In addition, there is no doubt that learning about cultural differences can exert significant effects on learners' attitudes towards cultural diversity, and consequently their behaviours. Indeed, intercultural competence involves a lot of self-reflection during which the way one thinks and feels plays a role in mediating meaningful resolution to potential cultural misunderstandings (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999, as cited in Ho, 2011). In this sense, the emergence of intercultural competence allows learners to have flexible minds, which is a key for them to negotiate between various backgrounds and viewpoints, cross borders and accept not only the differences but also the reinforcement or change of one's own identity (Sen Gupta, 2002). Thanks to this, students can make the best use of their language skills to express appropriate attitudes and behaviours that help avoid unnecessary cultural conflicts in communication with speakers of the target language. This is crucial for preparing students to live in a global world and empowering them professionally (Pinto, 2018).

Last but not least, it can be said that intercultural competence functions as a source of personal development and enrichment. According to Huber and Reynolds (2014), the development of intercultural competence involves such attitudes as openness, curiosity and interest in people of other cultures as well as the understanding of beliefs and values rather than the abandonment of cultural identities. This would lead individuals to gradually interacting and cooperating effectively and appropriately.

In conclusion, it is essential for intercultural competence to be developed in foreign language teaching and learning for two main reasons. First, it makes learning a foreign language more than merely learning linguistic skills by equipping learners with crucial attitudes, knowledge and skills to cope with the complicatedness of an open and integrated world, therefore, developing themselves and pursuing richer and more successful interactions. Second, instructors should facilitate the acquisition of intercultural competence in their teaching because all communication and interactions in a foreign language inevitably involve cultural elements.

2.2.4. Models of intercultural competence

Along with definitions of intercultural competence, researchers have expressed strong interest in the elements influencing or contributing to intercultural competence, resulting in a comprehensive account of models. According to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), there have been two main approaches to the modelling of intercultural competence: sequential and topical. The prior tends to list one model after another and puts emphasis

on their uniqueness, whereas the latter examines concepts across models and discusses their commonalities. On the basis of both approaches, they proposed some categories of intercultural competence models, namely compositional, co-orientational, developmental, adaptational and causal process, which are commonly used in education, training and research.

In details, compositional models describe (or, indeed, list) components such as traits, characteristics, skills of intercultural competence. Despite the effectiveness in identifying basic variables of intercultural competence, these models are not useful in specifying how they are related. Co-orientational models mainly focus on components of a successful intercultural interaction involving communicative mutuality and shared understandings. Developmental models take on the time dimension and emphasize the process of individual progression over time. They identify stages of maturity through which intercultural competence hypothetically develops. Accordingly, individuals advance from a mono-cultural mindset and worldview to more pluralistic and multicultural perspectives. However, the traits that compose intercultural competence are neglected and not determined in these models. Adaptational models present the elements of the developmental models in an interactional context of adjusting to another culture and highlight the interdependence of these components. In these models, the role of mediating factors such as context and identity are acknowledged. The key emphasis of these models lies on the demonstration of competence in mutual alteration of understandings, actions and attitudes. Finally, causal process models, in a form similar to a path model, specify the components of intercultural competence and situate them in an interaction in which they influence each other. On that basis, the criteria of intercultural competence are identified as a set of outcomes.

Despite some important distinctions, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) noted that these five categories of models may share some common features. In particular, all models and theories of intercultural competence comprise three basic components: motivation/attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Also, there is a possibility that an individual who possesses the ability of one of the dimensions cannot as well possess that of other dimensions (Dai & Chen, 2014). Within these five categories, some models are more widely referenced in language education. Some were primarily produced by one author while others were the works of a group of authors. An overview of the most common models of intercultural competence is provided in Table 2.3 following chronological order.

Table 2.2*A summary of intercultural competence models*

Source	Name	Constructs/ Domains	Model type
Byram (1997)	Intercultural Competence	Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; attitudes.	Co-orientational
Howard-Hamilton, Richardson & Shuford (1998)	Compositional Model of Intercultural Competence	Knowledge, attitudes and skills across awareness, understanding, appreciation of culture	Compositional
Deardorff (2004)	Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence	Requisite attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, skills, desired internal outcome and desired external outcome.	Compositional
Deardorff (2006)	Process Model of Intercultural Competence	Attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, skills; desired internal outcome; desired external outcome.	Causal path

*[Source: original by the researcher]***Intercultural Competence Model – Byram (1997)**

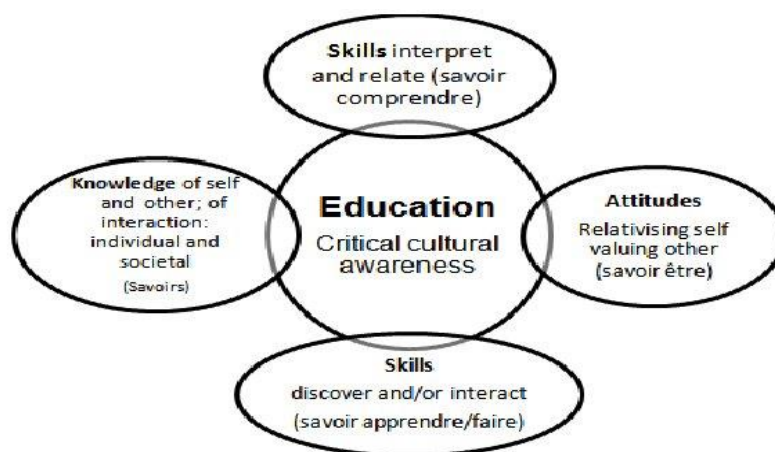
With the approach from the aspect of foreign language teaching, Byram (1997) described a co-orientational model with a great focus on language as a fundamental element in communication. In his model, the dialogue between people from two different cultures is viewed as a process involving intercultural factors. In details, such communication is established on the basis of mutual understanding and respect together with one's own willingness and ability to express themselves and listen to others. It allows people from various backgrounds in language, culture and religion to exchange their viewpoints freely and respectfully. This model also highlights the role of a competent intercultural speaker as a mediator between cultures who makes use of the understanding of not only their own culture but also that of other social groups.

According to Byram, intercultural competence entails the following five „savoirs“: knowledge of oneself and the other (savoirs), attitudes of relativizing oneself and valuing

the other (*savoir être*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/ faire*) and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). These five „savoirs“ can be categorized into three main aspects: knowledge, skills and attitudes. Among these components, Byram considered the ability to create positive attitudes to be most fundamental to intercultural competence.

Figure 2.1

Byram's (1997) model



[Source: Byram (1997)]

In particular, each of the above „savoirs“ comprises different elements. First, knowledge refers to the understandings of the rules for individual and social interaction as well as the awareness of social groups and their practices both in one’s one culture and in the other culture. It requires an individual to be conversant with beliefs, historical relationships, and religious values and puts emphasis on the recognition of cultural products with cultural issues engaged in written documents such as literary texts (Rodríguez, 2013).

The second aspect proposed in Byram’s model is skills, which are subdivided into the skill of interpreting, the skill of relating and the skill of discovering. The skills of interpreting and relating describe an individual’s ability to interpret, explain, and relate events and documents from another culture to one’s own. As these skills help build intercultural knowledge, they imply that becoming intercultural requires an individual to be not only understanding and tolerant of the cultural differences but also critical of them (Rodríguez, 2013). When a person is able to understand something new and relate it to their existing knowledge, the skill of discovery is developed. According to Byram, the

skill set of discovery and interaction allows the individual to acquire “new knowledge of culture and cultural practices”, including the ability to use existing knowledge, attitudes, and skills in cross-cultural interactions (p. 98) and involves a range of communication forms, namely the verbal and non-verbal mode.

Besides knowledge and skills, attitudes also constitute an important aspect of intercultural competence. Byram explained that attitudes entail the ability to relativize one’s own self and value others, including curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about their own cultures and those similar to their own or even strange. Such attitudes are opposed to prejudice and intolerance, which are popular in causing cultural misunderstandings among people from various backgrounds. Last but not least, on the basis of one’s knowledge, skills and attitudes, critical cultural awareness is fostered. It is described as the ability to use perspectives, practices, and products in one’s own culture and in other cultures to make critical evaluations of the similarities and differences. In this sense, a person can be fully aware that cultural homogeneity does not exist.

It can be seen that despite some strengths, Byram’s model has certain limitations. Although it shows both interrelated and separate relationships between the dimensions of intercultural competence, the model seems to ignore the process an individual learner goes through to attain deeper levels of intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. However, it is still widely adopted in research on intercultural competence, especially in studies that lay focus on fostering its specific components holistically.

Compositional Model - Howard-Hamilton, Richardson and Shuford (1998)

Howard-Hamilton, Richardson, and Shuford (1998) proposed a compositional model, claiming that components of intercultural competence include knowledge, attitudes and skills across three levels from awareness, understanding to appreciation of another culture. In particular, each level is demonstrated as follows:

Table 2.3

Howard-Hamilton, Richardson, and Shuford’s (1998) model

	Knowledge	Attitudes	Skills
Awareness	Knowledge of ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self as it relates to cultural identity • Similarities and 	Values ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own group • Group equality 	Ability to ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in self-reflection • Identify and

	differences across cultures		articulate cultural similarities and differences
Understanding	Knowledge of ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oppressions • Intersecting oppressions (race, gender, religion, etc.) 	Devalues ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination • Ethnocentric assumptions 	Ability to ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take multiple perspectives • Understand discrepancies in various contexts
Appreciation	Knowledge of ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements involved in social change • Effects of cultural differences on communication 	Values ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk taking • Life enhancing role of cross-cultural interactions 	Ability to ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge discriminatory acts • Communicate cross-culturally

[Source: Howard-Hamilton, Richardson & Shuford (1998)]

According to this compositional model, intercultural competence is better achieved when a person acquires deeper attitudes, knowledge and skills. This model is clearly useful in specifying the contents and scope of the concept, yet fails to explore their relationships. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) argued that it provides merely an episodic snapshot of intercultural competence. Moreover, they also claimed that this model seems to define and label some elements too broadly, for example, engaging in self-reflection while proposing other elements that reflect a much narrower range of action, for example, challenging discriminatory acts. Also, they note that the important factor of time is missing in this model.

Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence - Deardorff (2004)

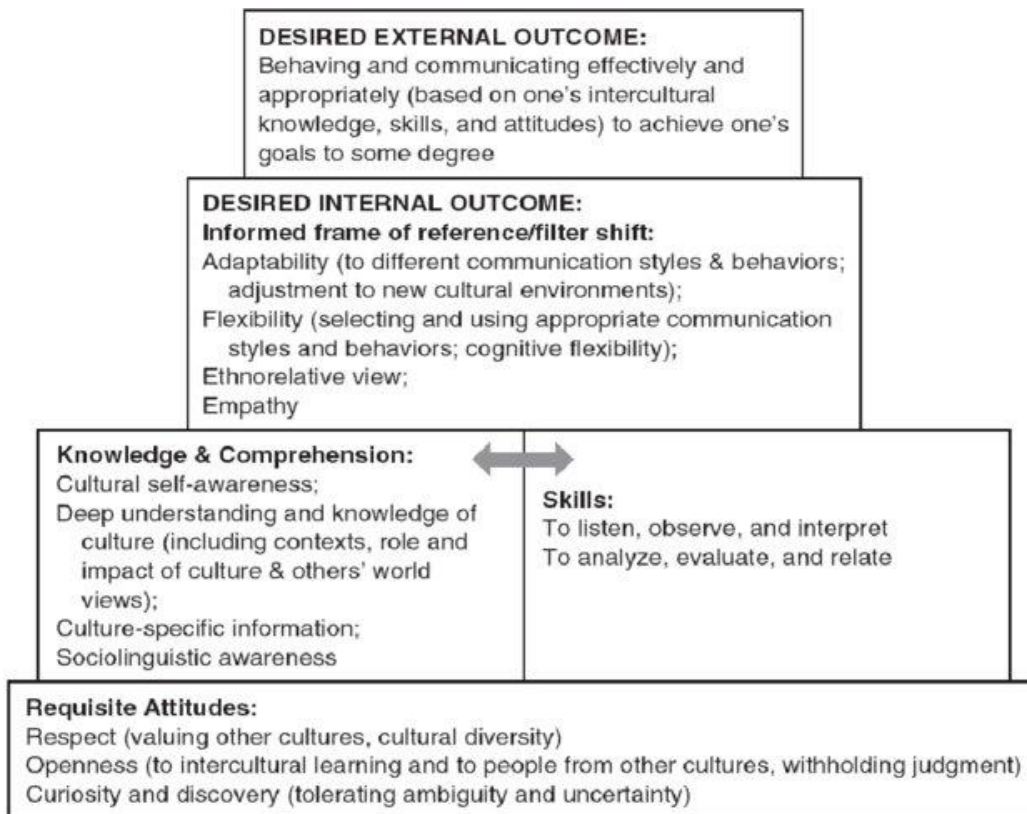
The pyramid model of intercultural competence proposed by Deardorff (2004) consists of different levels moving from individual to interpersonal or interactive level. It includes five different domains in four levels. They are requisite attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, skills, desired internal outcomes and desired external outcomes, representing motivational, cognitive and skills components, respectively. This model incorporates the context within these elements with the lower levels being believed to enhance the higher levels. As a result, it can be inferred that the acquired degree of these underlying components can determine the degree of intercultural competence a person

possesses. That is to say, the more elements acquired and developed, the more competent a person is in an intercultural context. Deardorff also affirmed that intercultural competence is a continuous process.

In particular, this model, like Byram's, emphasizes the importance of attitudes as a fundamental basis of intercultural competence. Such requisite elements are one's respect for other cultures and cultural diversity, their openness to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures without judgment, as well as their curiosity and discovery along with the tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty. Besides, the comprehension of knowledge and skills also plays an essential role in this model. In order to be intercultural competent, a person needs to understand culture thoroughly and be well aware of sociolinguistic features so as to listen, observe, interpret as well as to analyse, evaluate and relate to culture-specific contexts with various worldviews. On the basis of these attitudes, knowledge and skills, it is expected that an intercultural competent person can produce some desired outcomes both internally and externally. At a lower level, they are expected to be able to adapt to different styles and behaviours of communication and new cultural environments, be flexible in communicating in appropriate styles and manners, and be empathetic. At a higher level, one's own goal is hoped to be achieved through their effective and appropriate communication and behaviours in intercultural situations, which is considered somewhat visible. Deardorff emphasized the usefulness of the model, claiming that the specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills outlined in it can be used to derive specific indicators and criteria in each of those domains. Furthermore, these components are not merely listed but implied to be closely related to each other in a sequence of development.

Figure 2.2

Deardorff's (2004) Pyramid model of intercultural competence



[Source: Deardorff (2004)]

Process Model of Intercultural Competence – Deardorff (2006)

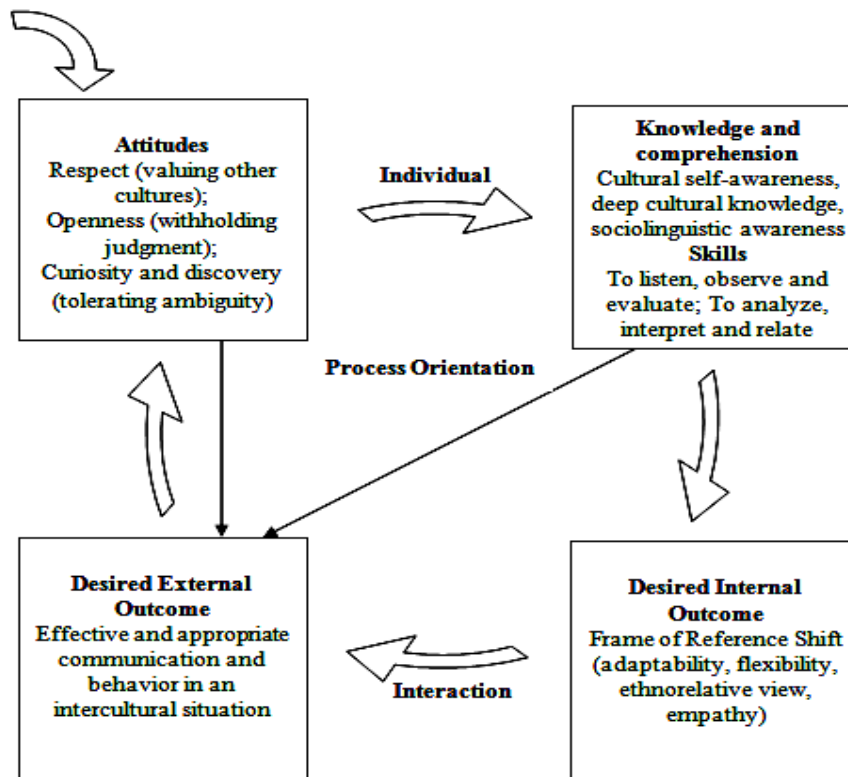
Deardorff (2006) also proposed another model, which is a causal path model outlining the relationships between attitudes, knowledge, and internal and external desired outcomes of intercultural competence. It maintains the unique elements of each component of the Pyramid Model discussed previously and also considers attitudes of an individual, particularly respect, openness, curiosity and discovery, the most critical component of intercultural competence as they are demonstrated as the starting point of the process.

However, as their names suggest, the Process Model and the Pyramid Model of intercultural competence present several differences. First, the former introduces components of intercultural competence from a perspective of a dynamic process of acquisition rather than merely fixed levels. Also, it implies that the external outcome can be achieved after owning appropriate attitudes, knowledge and skills but without having fully acquired the internal outcome. Another crucial point of this Process Model is that intercultural competence is described as an ongoing process of development. That is to say, the acquisition of intercultural competence is a continual process of improvement of dimensions, thus, one may never fully achieve ultimate intercultural competence. As a result, it can be inferred that intercultural competence is not something that can always be

guaranteed. The most outstanding advantage of this model is that it may have solved the problem of not only the relationship among components but also the time factor missed in previous ones, including Howard-Hamilton, Richardson, and Shuford's (1998) compositional model.

Figure 2.3

Process Model of Intercultural Competence



[Source: Deardorff (2006)]

In summary, it is clear that these above four models share some similarities and differences. Despite being developed on the basis of different approaches, they generally agreed that the cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitudes) and behavioural (skills) components are fundamental dimensions of intercultural competence. They all prove that these elements are interdependent. However, further descriptions of these constructs vary by scholars. Some scholars even include other specific components such as motivation and adaptability. Also, there is disagreement over the role of linguistic competence and the role of context in a learner's performance of intercultural competence. While Byram's model advocates the importance of linguistic competence, other models do not mention it. Last but not least, while other models describe constituents of intercultural competence as

equally important, Deardorff's models assume that attitudes act as a foundation for the development of this competence, making it stand out from existing models.

2.2.5. Assessment of intercultural competence

As any assessment in general, the assessment of intercultural competence remains a significant issue to all parties concerned in higher education institutions worldwide (Deardorff, 2017). As discussed in the previous section, the notion of intercultural competence is remarkably complex owing to many dimensions and constructs, including attitudes, knowledge and skills, which make it significantly challenging to assess it (Fantini, 2009). However, this does not necessarily mean that assessment of intercultural competence cannot be carried out. This section provides a pathway to making the assessment of intercultural competence a feasible task by highlighting some key related issues.

Some considerations in assessing intercultural competence

Due to its complexity, it is important for educational practitioners to be aware of some considerations before conducting any assessment of intercultural competence. Deardorff (2011) proposed several key points that need to be taken into careful considerations in order to conduct effective assessment of intercultural competence.

To begin with, as discussed in section 2.1.1, the development of intercultural competence is a lifelong on-going process; therefore, assessment should be continuous rather than just once after interventions. Moreover, it is important that individuals have a chance to reflect on and assess the development of their own intercultural competence. Secondly, it has been proved that an individual is able to acquire and evaluate knowledge without critical thinking skills. As a result, it is suggested that the assessment of a learner's intercultural competence should involve the assessment of their critical thinking. Furthermore, it is argued that attitudes remarkably influence all other aspects of intercultural competence, making it crucial to take the assessment of attitudes, particularly respect, openness and curiosity, into consideration. Last but not least, intercultural experts agree that the ability to see from others' perspectives is an important aspect. This is because such in-depth cultural knowledge can give way to a more holistic understanding of a culture, including historical, political and social contexts. Since knowledge alone cannot ensure the development of intercultural competence, fostering skills of intercultural thinking rather than just acquiring knowledge of such conventions as foods, greetings,

customs and so on becomes more important. It is thus necessary to consider the assessment of global perspectives and the ability to understand other worldviews.

Additionally, educators should be aware that there will always be some subjectivity in assessing intercultural competence. Therefore, they have to take into account the three concepts that are traditionally regarded as fundamental to any assessment: validity, reliability and practicality (Council of Europe, 2001). Validity indicates the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. It guarantees that the information gained is an accurate representation of the students' competence. Reliability refers to the degree to which the data collected are stable and consistent. It should be noted that a measure can be reliable without being valid, but it cannot be valid without being reliable. Practicality means that the measure is practical and is likely to work under time limits. These three qualities are crucial to ensure the quality and equality in judgments made regarding students' knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Last but not least, Fantini (2009) also insisted that in order to fully assess intercultural competence, it is important to conduct the assessment of foreign language proficiency. He argued that current assessment tools do not often take an individual's foreign language proficiency into consideration, which poses a major drawback as the acquisition of foreign language significantly develops all dimensions of intercultural competence. Being proficient in the target language indeed helps a learner develop communication strategies in a way that allows their habitual view of the world to be expanded and altered. As a result, their perception, conceptualization, expression, behaviours and interaction can be improved in order to prevent them from thinking and acting based merely on their own native system. However, according to Dervin (2010), assessors should still bear in mind that an excellent command of a foreign language does not necessarily and automatically lead to good intercultural competence and vice versa. Also, continual exposures to citizens of a particular country do not guarantee perfect mastery of intercultural competence.

In short, before conducting any endeavour to assess intercultural competence, to ensure the reliability and validity of the assessment, it is crucial to be aware that intercultural competence development is a lifelong process which involves critical thinking, intercultural thinking and linguistic skills with a great influence of attitudes over other domains.

Procedures and instruments to assess intercultural competence

There has been a consensus among intercultural scholars regarding crucial steps and procedures of assessing intercultural competence. Similar to any other assessments, the assessment of intercultural competence also consists of such fundamental steps as identifying the purposes, selecting the assessment methods and tools, collecting data using chosen tools, analysing data and making interpretations, and using assessment results. On that basis, this section describes what educators should do in an attempt to assess intercultural competence of an individual given its complexity.

One of the important first steps of assessing intercultural competence is to determine a definition of it based on existing literature and practice. Since most definitions and models tend to be somewhat general, only when the concept is defined can educators proceed with further assessment. Then, it is essential to identify what is to be assessed, in other words, which specific aspect of intercultural competence is focused on (Fantini, 2009; Deardorff, 2011). It is then best to prioritize specific aspects of intercultural competence within the learning context on the basis of the overall mission, goals, and purpose of the course or program rather than assess them all. Deardorff (2017) suggested that only two or three specific aspects should be assessed at a given time to control the amount of time, effort and resources necessary in performing assessment.

Next, since the constructs of intercultural competence are still broad, Deardorff (2017) argued that each prioritized aspect should be broken down into pieces that are more specific and manageable. They should be aligned to the goals of the course or program and demonstrated through distinct and measurable learning objectives or outcome statements. She also explained that the development of such statements is crucial because they will later help determine the assessment methods and tools to be used. As an attempt to build in such required specificity, Blair (2017) argued that constituents of Deardorff's Process Model should be disaggregated, providing "the supplemental definitional clarity for a fuller understanding of the nature and interaction of the model's individual component parts" (p. 113).

The disaggregation of intercultural competence then brings into focus the issue of what should be used to collect evidence that indicates the students' progress towards achieving the prioritized learning objectives. Blair (2017) emphasized that the assessment of intercultural competence as a single construct or with any sole instrument at any particular moment may not be feasible. To put it in other words, there does not seem to be a single instrument, method, or assessment to help us grasp the complexity of the data (Deardorff, 2017). As a result, due to the complexity of intercultural competence, there is

a need for a combination of approaches involving multiple methods, perspectives and layers. While advocating the use of multiple measures in assessing intercultural competence, Deardorff (2017) advised educators to carry out both direct and indirect assessments to collect reliable, valid data and ensure stronger measurement. Direct measures gather information about the students' actual learning during their learning experience. Some examples of direct evidence include course assignments, reflections, projects, observations of performance, peer assessments, learning contracts, tests and so on, whereas indirect measures deal with the students' perception of intercultural learning and intercultural competence development and collect evidence outside of the learning experience, such as surveys, interviews and focus groups. Deardorff (2017) also provided brief descriptions of some particular measures that can be integrated into an assessment plan of intercultural competence, including critical reflections, observations of performance, learning contracts and surveys.

Reflection has long been believed to play an essential role in not only promoting but also assessing student learning through collecting direct evidence. It can be in the form of journaling, blogging, and reflection papers, but go beyond journal writing and allow students to experience a deep exploration of knowledge and skills towards the learning outcomes. In particular, effective reflection engages students in examining their opinions and attitudes, exploring their relation to others, facilitating their interactions with people in socio-cultural contexts (Rice & Pollack, 2000, as cited in Deardorff, 2017). As a result, it is considered a fertile source of data for researchers to assess the students' intercultural competence. Critical reflection can be facilitated by asking a set of questions about what students think they can attain as a result of learning, or using writing prompts. With the growth of information technology, reflection papers can be placed in an e-portfolio with other artefacts such as term papers and photos of the students' learning and can be assessed through rubrics developed by each institution.

Observation of students' performance in intercultural communicative situations is another way to collect direct data regarding the effectiveness and appropriateness of students' behaviours and attitudes. Observation can be carried out either directly by assessors through interactions in the classroom or indirectly by a host family through a reflection on a student homestay. The students' learning performance requires them to apply intercultural knowledge and skills in relevant contexts. In maximizing this tool, it is crucially important to make use of assessment specifications during observation.

Deardorff (2017) also described learning contracts as another effective measure to assess the students' intercultural competence, which has long been used since the 20th century. What she defined as the learning contract involves the students' negotiation with the instructor on specific knowledge, methods of learning, timeline for learning, evidence of learning and actions taken in consequence. She claimed that it is helpful for the students to develop their learning objectives aligned to the overall intercultural competence goals. By this way, not only can a learning process become more effective and relevant but the evidence for successful learning can also be clearly showed to students.

Assessors should also know that intercultural competence was measured directly by standard cultural tests including multiple-choice questions. However, according to Sercu (2004), although users find them easy to administer and correct, they only test a person's factual knowledge, which is sometimes generalized and stereotypical, thus failing to indicate their intercultural competence.

A typical measure to collect indirect evidence of students' intercultural competence is through surveys from their perspectives. Fantini (2009) suggested that many surveys that assess intercultural competence with a pretty high degree of reliability and validity are available. However, in order to make the best use of surveys and achieve effective indirect assessment, it is emphasized that users are well aware of the goals pursued and objectives measured and how relevant they are to the stated learning outcomes (Deardorff, 2017). In addition, the collection of this kind of evidence in combination with direct data from other perspectives is strongly recommended in order to conduct effect assessment of the students' intercultural competence. These multiple approaches can provide a more comprehensive picture of the changes occurring during the development of the students' intercultural competence as well as address the complexity of the concept more properly.

In addressing the last step to be conducted in assessing intercultural competence, both Deardorff (2017) and Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) stressed that no matter what measure is used, either directly or indirectly, it is crucial to analyse the information collected and then identify emerging common themes and issues. Then the assessment results should be provided in the shape of constructive feedback to the students in order to further enhance their intercultural competence. This is to ensure that the direct and indirect data gathered are related to the purpose of assessment.

To conclude, the assessment of intercultural competence, either as a whole or involving that of separate constituents, should follow four main stages, including:

- (1) identifying the definition of the concepts, areas to assess and prioritized aspects;
- (2) determining measurable learning objectives;
- (3) deciding on appropriate assessment methods and collecting both direct and indirect evidence;
- (4) using assessment results to provide feedback to students.

It can be said that this procedure highlights the importance of the learners themselves within the assessment process, properly forming a learner-centred and process-oriented approach to assessment. In this sense, assessment is no longer perceived as something done to the students but rather with the students. As a result, assessment can be integrated in the learning itself with more authentic evidence gathered during actual interactions within and beyond the context of a classroom, rather than through pre- and post- measures.

2.2.6. Theoretical considerations for intercultural competence in the current study

On the basis of the theoretical foundations for intercultural competence and its assessment at tertiary level provided in Section 2.2, this study adopted Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence as a skeleton for evaluating HANU and UniFe third-year English majored students' constituents of intercultural competence at personal level, including attitudes and knowledge. This model was used, firstly, to maintain the consistency of the study since it also uses the definition provided by the same author, which refers to intercultural competence as the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions. Secondly, the Process Model of Intercultural Competence stood out from other models due to its emphasis on attitudinal dimension as requisite constituents and the view of the development of this competence as requires on-going learning. It is thus proper to be utilized in a study conducted after training for participants.

In order to facilitate the assessment of students' intercultural competence, its attitude and knowledge dimensions are defined and broken down into more specific and educationally manageable elements, as suggested by Blair (2017). Such disaggregation took into consideration the scope of the study. Since the participants of the study are third-year English language majored, it is assumed that they have proper socio-linguistic awareness, thus, this sub-construct is not included in the assessment. Besides, the sub-construct „Deep cultural knowledge“ is understood as “culture-general knowledge that is

useful in interpreting, coping with, and adapting to cross-cultural interactions” (Carlson, 2016, p.26). As a result, the cultural knowledge addressed in this study refers to the students’ recognition that a new situation may be influenced by cultural differences rather than their specific knowledge about the cultural norms and practices of a particular country or region. It should be noted that only the attitudes and knowledge dimensions of intercultural competence are assessed in this study, while the skills dimension was not taken into consideration. This is because on the basis of the Process Model of Intercultural Competence which considers attitudes and knowledge as foundational to intercultural competence and the performance of outcomes, the study assumes that the assessment of these two dimensions can illustrate the participants’ levels of intercultural competence and predict their success in communicating and behaving in intercultural situations.

In particular, the framework used in the assessment of intercultural competence is presented as follows:

Table 2.4

Theoretical framework for assessing intercultural competence

Dimension	Component/Sub-construct	Descriptions
Attitudes	Respect (Value other cultures and culture diversity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To value and appreciate cultural diversity • To be willing to bridge cultural differences
	Openness (Be open to people of different cultures, allow the possibility of seeing from more than one perspective and suspend judgment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To show willingness to interact with culturally different others • To allow the possibility of seeing from more than one perspective • To suspend judgment in valuing cultural interactions
	Curiosity and discovery (Set a foundation for ways to turn differences into opportunities and tolerate ambiguity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To view cultural interactions as learning opportunities • To ask complex questions about cultures and people • Be eager to move out of comfort zone • To tolerate ambiguity
Knowledge	Cultural self-awareness (Understand the ways in which one’s culture has influenced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the ways in which one’s culture influences one’s identity • To articulate how culture shapes one’s

one's identity and worldview)	worldviews
Deep cultural knowledge (Understand other worldviews)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explain what culture is and how it affects people • To acquire basics of the target culture's history, politics and society • To identify links between beliefs, practices and history • To compare and contrast cultures

[Source: Deardorff (2006)]

In the following section, the theories of the teaching of English Literature at the tertiary level are provided and the theoretical framework used to analyse the approaches to English Literature teaching is discussed.

2.3. Literature in English language higher education

This chapter provides a theoretical basis for the teaching of English Literature as a component of English language education at tertiary level. In particular, it introduces the most fundamental aspects that one has to pay attention to when it comes to literature teaching. They include a discussion on the concepts of literature, the history of the inclusion of literature in English language curricula, the benefits literature brings to English language education, the main approaches to teaching literature as a component in English language curricula and some challenges instructors have to face when teaching literature.

2.3.1. Concepts of literature

It is crucial to reflect on the nature of literature in order to better understand its role in foreign language teaching and learning. Definitions of literature have highlighted different aspects through time.

The word „literature“ was introduced into English language in the late fourteenth century and carried the meaning of „acquaintance with books“ and „book learning“ in general for many centuries, regardless of the kind of book (Pope, 1998). In other words, literature was mostly perceived as anything written and concerning „the ability to read and write“. Thus, it could be said that the notion of „literature“ in early days was defined in a very broad sense and shared a similar meaning with how we refer to „literacy“ nowadays. It did not take into consideration the values of the written works.

Literature as learning was promoted until the eighteenth century. The term „literature“ not only included printed books and primarily reading ability but also entailed reading experience and social values. It referred to valued writings in society, including philosophy, history, essays, letters and poems, signalling acquaintance with polite and humane learning. However, during this period, literature remained an area categorized as rhetoric and grammar (Berlin, 1996). A piece of writing could be counted as a literary work if it contained words with meanings related to external factors, for example, ancient languages and biographical circumstances of the authors. These definitions of literature paid no particular attention to the distinction of genres, the aesthetic quality of the work or the felt experience of readers.

The concept of literature changed significantly in the nineteenth century. The most important shift was the disappearance of both the reading ability and the reading experience in defining literature. Literature was then perceived as being characterised by books of some values, to be specific, “an apparently objective category of printed works of a certain quality” (Berlin, 1996, p. 5). On this account, the notion of „literature“ was narrowed to a category of so-called „imaginative“ or „creative“ work. This specialization of literature implied a belief that to write about what did not exist somehow aroused more emotions and brought more values than fact (Eagleton, 1996). It was a response to the dehumanizing conditions of the industrial capitalist marketplace. Literature was placed against the social context of a mechanical world, “the inhumane realm of work in a cruel, exploitative economic order - an order in which the language of currency was rational and informative discourse” (Berlin, 1996, p. 6). In this sense, the term „literature“ referred to a whole alternative ideology and carried social implications. It took on a task of transforming society and speaking with the voice of the people while distanced itself from history. Literature, at this point, was restricted to works of some particular genres, for example, poems, plays, and fiction, and was opposed to writings that were factual, true or historical.

The perception of literature as an objective category and in association with values during the nineteenth century also demonstrated a shift from literature as learning to literature as sensibility in defining the criterion for literary quality. It took place when churches as institutions and religion had a less crucial role to play in society; thus, literature served a less practical function than a religious one. The development of the bourgeoisie also accompanied this new definition of literature. They considered their subjective experience of certain texts as an objective quality of the texts themselves and

the ability to have such experience was taste or sensibility (Berlin, 1996). This practice gave ways to criticism as a movement, with a discriminatory function, away from text production and towards text consumption. It also called for a selection of texts with values asserted by criticism, leading to the formation of the canon. Therefore, literature was restricted to a national collection of written works with quality judged by a group of educated scholars.

The early twentieth century witnessed attempts to define literature from more linguistic approaches. In particular, Russian Formalists introduced a need to distance themselves from a quasi-mystical view of literature to shed light on its material aspects. They argued that literature should be defined not on the basis of „imaginative“ elements but by the use of language in peculiar ways that transform and intensify everyday speech. To them:

Literature was not pseudo-religion or psychology or sociology but a particular organization of language. It had its own specific laws, structures, and devices, which were to be studied in themselves rather than deduced to something else. The literary work was neither a vehicle for ideas, nor a reflection of social reality, nor the incarnation of some transcendental truth, it was a material fact, whose functioning could be analysed rather as one could examine a machine (Eagleton, 1996, p. 2).

Later on during the century, New Criticism also promoted the attention to „words on the page“ and valued literature for its ability to use the resources of language, stretched to its limits (Hall, 2005). It can be seen that this approach saw literature as words and structures rather than as a way for authors to express their minds. Although it no longer restricted literature to imaginative works, it still focused more on the text itself and did not take into consideration either the content or factors beyond the text. However, poetry seemed to be considered as the most typical form of literature while works of other genres were difficult to fit in the definition, thus tended to be ignored.

Attempts to see literature through a more culture-related lens have become prominent since the end of the twentieth century. Literature is no longer seen as an objective, descriptive category as in the nineteenth century because it does not exist in a way a physical entity does. It is also not merely defined on the basis of literary language as in the early twentieth century. Literature has come to be considered as a process involving the assumptions of a certain social group and social ideologies. In fact, it is becoming

increasingly popular to view texts in association with their contexts, in other words, to understand literature in history and culture. A literary text is now examined in its continuous existence involving various factors, from the moment of composition shaped by the writers' personal circumstances, historical events and current worldviews to all subsequent moments of reproduction and reception, when it is read and studied. As Eagleton (1996) put it, all written works are rewritten by the societies which read them; thus, there is no reading of a work which is not also a rewriting. In other words, all works are changed when being exposed to new groups of readers and other relevant texts should also be taken into consideration in examining a text as one text could lead to and influence another. This approach puts more emphasis on the interpretations of a text. Therefore, any particular definition of what can be counted as literature would appear unstable and unconvincing. In the context of language education, it is worthwhile to examine literature in the relation to the canon and discourse because it offers better ways to explore this complex multi-layered notion and its constituents.

Literature and the canon

Literary authors have been classified according to their prominence at a national and international level and permanence throughout time. These criteria have been used to form a canonical body of literary texts, where the canon includes those that are representative of a genre or a period and achieve high status across the world. Therefore, canonical works are often presented in university syllabi. According to Altieri (1983), in canonical works, major writers set standards for others to achieve, explore the possibilities to become strong identities and challenge their capacities to make further developments in a genre or style. For readers, the canon has much to teach about the society in which they were produced and have influenced many other works of literature. Therefore, it is claimed that we should read works by canonical writers in order to be aware of their identities as they are shaped by the pressures put on their legacy.

Bloom was one of the most popular advocates of the canon, which he defined as a negotiation between knowledge and opinion. In his book in 1994, he stated that the strangeness of a literary work is what makes it canonical. He explained it as "a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange" (p. 3). Moreover, Bloom also argued for its quality as a way to view and define literature, claiming that canonical works were written from aesthetic motives rather than any supposed political or moral content. It is this aesthetic power that helps the canon to

survive the question of time. The canon often demands great cognitive and imaginary effort on the part of the reader, and usually requires rereading, which distinguishes it from other kinds of writings.

However, according to Kinder (2018), since the 1960s, there has been a shift in opinion towards the canon. The validity of the canon has been in doubt due to its lack of diversity. Postmodern studies have argued that the canon is biased in terms of focus and gender. In fact, many scholars have raised questions regarding the authority of the canon and its hierarchical ranking, in particular the source of power to determine what works of literature are worth reading. The literary canon began to be reassessed when different literary and social movements started to push to the forefront literature that had been previously ignored. In the following decades, feminist scholars have gained higher status and more attention has been drawn to works by gay and lesbian writers as well as those by writers from the working classes. These days, literary works from all the corners of the globe, by writers of all ethnicities, gender and sexual orientation can be considered as part of the canon.

According to Fowler (1979), when we think about literature within cultural frameworks, a literary work considered canonical in this period may not be viewed as canonical in another phase of history. Indeed, it is argued that over time, literary works may be omitted from the canon to reflect the relevance of contexts and thoughts of society. This notion was proposed by Altieri (1983) who referred to the canon as “an institutional form for exposing people to a range of idealized attitudes” (p. 42). The concept of literary canon, in this sense, may vary from age to age and reader to reader. In fact, the determination of the canon is integrated with the readers’ judgments of values that literary texts bring up, given that there was a gradual recognition of readers along with their judgment and expectations after the eighteenth century (Ross, 1996). As various generations of readers in different periods of time may reevaluate or devalue a canonical work, changes in the literary canon may be brought about. Thus, Eagleton (1996) argued that the literary canon, which is considered “the unquestioned great tradition of literature” (p. 10), should be recognized as a construct that is fashioned by particular people for certain reasons at a specific time, therefore, an unstable affair.

On a final note, the dynamics of literature lie in the fact that the judgments of its values are often closely related to social ideologies and assumptions exercised by certain powerful groups. Although people find it uncomfortable and inappropriate at times to bear the previous canon on their shoulders at their time, they have to be aware that the new

canon cannot be built from scratches. Even though there is no fixed standard to decide what is canonical and what is not, a framework to serve as a basis for literature and canonical works is still in need. It is suggested that scholars of literature have to face this circulation and that literature is inherently subjective and ever evolving (Kinder, 2018). As a result, the broadest and most diverse range of literary works should be considered in order to select the ones that are important and should be read and studied.

Literature as discourse

With regards to the view of literature as discourse, Hall (2005) defined discourse as „language in use“. On that basis, literature as discourse refers to a view of literature as containing language in situated social actions, for example, reading, understanding and writing. In particular:

Discourse is „how it is said“ and „how it is read“, and the context in which language is used and processed, both immediate, linguistic, and in wider social and cultural terms, explain how meaning arise between language users. (p. 2)

This approach exposes literature to interrogation, confrontation and interventions since it views literature as a response to other utterances and also as a call for a response, in the same way as a conversation in which language is used. Literature and its language, thus, are viewed as part of an on-going social interaction and context becomes an element of importance when examining a literary text. On that basis, it is believed that thanks to literature, learners of language can be motivated to talk about death, life, love and other human experiences, implying a functional concept of use of a language. In fact, it is necessary to relate literature to discourse because the rules of language, which are common to everyone who uses it, constitute only a fraction of the rules which govern our concrete verbal production. They only provide a standard for grammatical combinations within a sentence, phonology, and a common meaning for words.

According to Carter and Long (1991), there has existed a contrast between a view of literature as text and a view of literature as discourse. The former is proposed with a hope to equip readers with knowledge about literature and help them gain access to universal values and qualities by decontextualizing words. However, literature as discourse fosters the readers“ knowledge of literature by encouraging their engagement in active interpretations in contexts as well as interventions, transformations and rewritings

by themselves. Literature in this relation is viewed as educational because literary experience introduces the tip of an iceberg that is made up of social assumptions, casual conversation and multicultural society. Hall (2005) proposed that the view of literature as discourse offers students “more sensitive, practical and precise ways to negotiate foreign language literatures of particular relevance to the language learner” (p. 57). As a result, when a student learns literature in foreign language education, learning is perceived as a mediation of new positions instead of assimilation or devaluation of values and skills of their language and culture.

To conclude, it seems difficult to reach a consensus regarding the way literature is perceived. Initially, literature used to be viewed as a kind of text containing difficult language and limited to one main kind of literary language – the poetic one. However, from a linguistic point of view, literature contains special yet ordinary components that can create a more powerful impact on its readers than other genres, including its integration with language and civilization in a concerted way. Moreover, literature should also be seen as an evolving and unstable matter rather than an objective, descriptive category. It can therefore be claimed that the answer to how literature is defined should actually lie in how it is read, but not in its nature. As a result, the definition of literature adopted in this study applies to any kind of literary text within and beyond canonical works that contains linguistic and cultural aspects. Such definition of literature allows students to broaden their knowledge of the target language and culture in a diachronic and synchronic perspective.

2.3.2. The inclusion of literature in the EFL curricula

English Literature plays a significant part in the English Studies curriculum at tertiary level. The study of English language and Anglophone literatures has become well established in Europe in the 20th century and has spread to Asian countries since the second half of the century.

The teaching of literature has been significantly influenced by the teaching of a language and English Literature is not an exception. According to Vera (1991), the teaching of English Literature at tertiary level in EFL context serves two major purposes: as study and as a resource for English language learning.

In the first type of teaching, English Literature is considered a discipline to be studied as a cultural product. Two possible approaches to such teaching were proposed and distinguished by Maley (1989). The first approach takes into account the

interpretation aspects beyond the literary production, for example, historical, social, critical or biographical elements. Vera (1991) clarified that this approach focuses on the „literariness“ of the texts, including the plot, characterization, motivation, value, even the author and their background, with the aim to promote learners“ interpretations of the texts. Therefore, the teaching of English Literature in this way does not only expose the students to literature but also requires studies of literature, involving the reading of literary works as well as referential and contextual information. The second approach pays much attention to the text itself, using the analysis of its linguistic features as a basis for interpretation. In this case, literature is viewed as a source of textual materials to be discovered and examined from a stylistic point of view, aiming to gradually develop the readers“ interests and enjoyment of literature (Vera, 1991). This approach is based on the belief that literature involves more than mere systems of language.

The other type of teaching makes use of English Literature as a resource to develop linguistic competence. In other words, with this approach, literature is employed as a medium for the purposes of acquiring the language. In particular, literature provides “a subject-matter with a definite content in which the four skills can be practiced” (Vera, 1991, p. 170). This approach to teaching allows students to have opportunities for meaningful language exchange, better acquisition of new words as well as heightened awareness of language. This is because literature can provide a source of input which can be gained in a relaxed and anxiety-free situation, facilitating the development of a foreign language. Since the purposes of these two major types of teaching English Literature are closely interlinked in EFL context, particularly given the connection between the teaching of language and literature, Hall (2005) argued that the teaching and learning of English Literature at university level should take place from the third year onwards, particularly when students have had enough linguistic competence.

2.3.3. Advantages of literature in foreign language education

Since literature was welcomed back to the process of language teaching and learning after a period of being underappreciated and ignored, many researchers, particularly on language teaching, language learning and acquisition, and psychology, have made attempts to reinforce the positive contributions of literature in foreign language education. Literature has been proven to bring benefits not only to the acquisition of the target language but also to the personal development of a learner, for example, reading skills (Gilroy & Parkinson, 1996), critical thinking (Truong, 2009), cooperative skills (Narančić-

Kovać & Kaltenbacher, 2006), interpretative and inferential skills (Hall, 2005) and emotional intelligence (Roohani, 2009). This section presents an overview of the multidimensional benefits that literature brings to students of foreign language throughout the last decades. It is structured with a focus on possible contributions of literature to the language learners' development of intercultural competence.

To begin with, literature can help learners of language heighten their sociolinguistic awareness. It is obvious that literature can provide an aid to language acquisition through vocabulary expansion. A wide range of both formal and informal vocabulary and dialogues can be introduced by reading literature (Collie & Slater, 1987). Literary texts are also characterized by diverse styles, registers, forms as well as syntactic and lexical resources with various linguistic uses as they address different moods or situations and are written by different people. An exposure to such input can enable students to gain familiarity with and improve awareness of not only target linguistic forms but also communicative functions as well as to acquire an articulation of differences in verbal and nonverbal communication. Moreover, literature can help sharpen students' language skills as the variety of styles does not only offer diversity but also different expressions of originality and authenticity. Therefore, students can attain, as Hall (2005) put it, the development of „a feel for“ language.

Literature offers opportunities to not only acquire a rich source of language input but also produce meaningful output, thus, improving students' use of the target language. To be specific, taking communicative approach, literature classes can allow students to use the target language for a real purpose. Students may be actively involved in decoding the meaning of lexical units or phrases presented in literary texts. On this account, literature can serve as a bridge between transmission of information and meaning construction (Kern, 2000). Also, it is clear that literary texts can expose students to purposeful contexts replete with interesting characters and descriptive language where they can get engaged in the plot of the story or develop feelings to the characters. Thus, responses from students can be elicited when they are acquired to generate interpretations and multiple opinions during the reading process. Since each individual may have their own conceptualizations of the literary contents, learners can be involved in interactions with their peers and their instructors through discussion and group works to share about how they view, feel about or comprehend the texts (Duff & Maley, 1990; Lazar, 2005).

Literature can also exert positive influences on students' attitudes towards cultures and differences. In detail, literature can help students develop their respect, open-

mindfulness and tolerance of various human expressions and cultural experiences (Gómez, 2012). Written by different authors at different periods of time, literary texts were influenced by the cultural and personal perspectives of the authors in different historical contexts. In other words, literature introduces personal interpretations of the life and values experienced by the authors (Hanauer, 2001). Reading and understanding literary texts, as a result, allows students to become more aware of the diversity in ways of thinking, experiences and notions of life and develop more respectful attitudes towards cultural differences. Students would also have a chance to reconsider and overcome culturally based prejudices and stereotypical perceptions (Rodríguez & Puyal, 2012). This would allow them to reduce negative attitudes towards differences and become more open and empathetic to different cultures. Gradually, they can suspend judgment, avoid culture shocks during intercultural interactions and grow as interculturally competent individuals.

The exposure of students to cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space also helps them to become more aware of their worldviews and those of people from other cultures. The reason is that literature can create a favourable condition for them to go through reflective thinking to examine why things are the way they view them, or why things are different from their expectations. In particular:

When students read literature, „horizons of possibility“ come to mind, moving them to reflect on and interpret ideas at hand; students raise questions, recognize problems, seek causes and solutions, and make connections. They explore multiple perspectives and imagine scenarios. (Langer, 1997, p. 5)

To put it another way, when interacting with a literary text, students may have to base themselves on their existing knowledge and experience to work out the meaning of the text. With such process of thinking, they can have a better understanding of how their views are shaped. On that basis, literature can also assist students in learning to use different lenses to view common issues in the world.

Another contribution of literature to students“ development is the provision of cultural knowledge. Literature offers a fertile source of cultural-specific knowledge that underlies texts to support language learners (Collie & Slater, 1987; Duff & Maley, 1990; Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000). Most works of literature, such as novels, short stories, and poems often portray a world in which learners can get to know vivid settings. In particular, a literary text may provide detailed descriptions of individual characters, the way they

live, and the imprint of their society because, either as a living or a historical document, literature is born of the lives of its maker and its civilization. As a result, literature can introduce probably one of the most effective ways for students to be exposed to and comprehend the culture and traditions of the target language, especially for those who have no feasible chance to spend a period in the countries where the language is spoken. According to Carter (2007), students can perceive traditions of thoughts, feelings and artistic forms in the target culture, which is crucially important in the context of globalization where universally shared values are of great concern. Students can have a chance to experience a community of readership by sharing their interpretation of the text with the instructor and their classmates. In this way, they can engage themselves in an encounter between at least two cultures and develop better understandings of cultural contexts.

To summarize, what literature brings to the foreign language education is actually far beyond linguistic aspects. It can make meaningful contributions to the comprehensive development of an individual by exerting influences on these above-mentioned closely interrelated aspects. It can be claimed that literature is an important vehicle for the learning of a foreign language on the basis of the research studies that aim at justifying the students' linguistic and cognitive development promoted by literature and describing the affective essence of the interaction between the learner and the literature of the target language.

2.3.4. Approaches to teaching literature

The categorisation of the approaches to teaching literature in the context of language education rests on various foundations, including the influences of language teaching models and the approaches to literary analysis. This section provides a description of these approaches, structured by different bases of the categories.

Approaches categorized by the influences of language teaching models

In the context of language education, Hall (2005) synthesized the main approaches to teaching literature, noting that they were affected by foreign language teaching approaches, among which Grammar-translation method and Communicative Language Teaching were most influential. On that basis, he categorized the approaches to literature teaching into three main groups: traditional approaches, approaches prompted by communicative language teaching and sociocultural approaches.

The traditional approaches to teaching literature were significantly influenced by notions of the canon and morality in the 19th century. These approaches are developed on a belief that sensitivity to language would produce sensitivity to literature. Therefore, they often feature the comprehension of passages or extracts, grammatical exercises, vocabulary questions and drills. Recently, some tasks involving communication have been added. The criticism of literary texts also has some role to play, but mainly for students whose linguistic competence is judged sufficient to allow them to discuss themes and ideas. In his discussion on these approaches, Hall also pointed out some of their disadvantages. First, concerns over language are often neglected, which may be problematic for students at lower levels because “language can never cease to be at the centre of literary reading, especially if language is understood as discourse rather than simply words and sentences” (p. 49). Besides, it is likely that lessons adopting these approaches would be lecture-based due to much formal textual analysis without taking into consideration creative, cultural and affective factors.

The approaches deriving from the Communicative Language Teaching approaches view literature as discourse and literary texts as containing culture. Hall explained that these approaches highlight the importance of meaning and personalisation, affective values, original materials and powerful communication. On this account, learners are encouraged to negotiate meanings and learn by doing things with language in contexts, gaining access to culture. These approaches also promote greater awareness of the differences among learners, their interests and backgrounds. They are adopted on the assumption that the study of literature is not always enjoyable or meaningful for all learners. In other words, learners should be prepared for unpredictable situations beyond their linguistic proficiency level as in the actual world. These approaches promote responses, pleasure and appreciation and overlook worries over linguistic details.

Hall described the sociocultural approaches to teaching literature as those drawing much attention to “the inevitability of different responses to text by different readers, according to background, gender, nationality, or in general the contexts of reading” (p. 49). These approaches view the study of literature in association with discourse and culture, with communication at the centre. Literature is then approached from a humanistic perspective with an emphasis on experiences of learners. In this sense, learning means to explore how people are similar as well as different from each other and to tolerate or accommodate differences, implying the development of intercultural skills. While arguing

that these approaches can promote intercultural understanding and mutual respect, Hall noticed that these dynamics are difficult to conceptualize.

It can be seen that these approaches reflect the perceptions of language education and the concepts of literature throughout time. While traditional approaches focus much on teaching and learning literature as conducive to the acquisition of language and linguistic knowledge, the other two groups of approaches take into consideration the output performance in which learners demonstrate the use of language in cultural contexts through communication.

Approaches categorized within literary analysis approaches

The discussions on the approaches to teaching literature have also generally been situated within the approaches to literary analysis. They have been categorized under various terms by different authors, among which intrinsic and extrinsic approaches (Wellek & Warren, 1984) and stylistic and critical approaches (Maley, 1989) are most popular. The former categories distinguish between an approach requiring instructors and learners to particularly focus on the text and the one asking them to dig deeper into the social, political or historical contexts that help frame the text. In the latter categories, the stylistic approach aims at making textual discoveries and interpretations through the description and analysis of the language used in a literary text, while the critical approach focuses mainly on how literary the texts are through the analysis of motivation, characterization, background and other elements. These approaches are categorized on the basis of their focus in literary analysis and the involvement of learners in the reading process. In details, there are two main directions discussed among these approaches: first, students as readers can take into consideration elements either within or beyond the text and second, they can play an either passive or active role in the interpretation of the literary work.

In a more particular level, it is argued that six major approaches have been adopted throughout the history of literary analysis, namely New Criticism, Structuralism, Stylistic Approach, Reader Response Approach, Language-based Approach, and Critical Literacy Approach (Truong, 2009). Each of these analytical methods to interpret literature has their own advantages and disadvantages.

The first approach - New Criticism, which appeared after World War I, defines the learner's role as seeking the correct meaning of the literary text. This approach states that meaning is entirely contained in the text and the analysis examines formal elements, for example, rhyme, imagery and theme. Meanwhile, contextual factors as the political,

social, or historical background of the text, along with the readers' reactions to the author's intentions, are not taken into consideration during the interpretation of the literary work. This is because the world of literature is viewed as self-contained and should be objectively interpreted by readers (Thomson, 1992). The classroom adopting this approach would dedicate most activities to deciphering literary devices used in a literary text rather than exploring its beauty and value.

The positive aspect of New Criticism is believed to be the opportunity for learners to analyse and achieve the use of literary elements such as symbolism, metaphors, similes and irony, which is expected to widen their use of linguistic features in the target language. However, Thomson (1992) claimed that this approach ignores the connection between the text and the learner's experiences and also the historical and sociolinguistic influences evoked during the reading process. In addition, Truong (2009) argued that due to the lack of students' subjective responses to the meaning of the literary work and the heavy dependence on the instructor to examine it, the New Criticism steals students' progress in language skills as well as enjoyment, motivation or recognition of the value of literature, which may result in a negative attitude towards literary texts. The last disadvantage of New Criticism is that the corpus is generally selected among the traditional, famous, classic, award-winning sources which are too long, too linguistically difficult, culturally unfamiliar and historically irrelevant to students' experiences. As a result, students often face obstacles in understanding the language and comprehending the deeper meanings of the literary work. This leads instructors to offer translation in a large part of classroom time (Truong, 2009).

The second approach, namely Structuralism, gained a significant status in the middle of the twentieth century and shared some similarities with New Criticism. Rather than treat a literary text as a separate entity, Structuralism determines whether a literary text belongs to a framework that could be applied to general literature (Dias & Hayhoe, 1988). It approaches a literary text scientifically with total objectivity by requiring learners to apply their knowledge of structures and themes to place the work into a meaningful scientific and hierarchical system. In this approach, the mechanical, formal relationships of the literary and linguistic components of the text are of much interest. That is to say, Structuralism pays more attention to the process and structures involved in the production of meaning. Therefore, the aesthetic aspects of literature and elements of literary communication such as the context, the writer and the reader are often neglected.

In the discussion of Structuralism, Carter and Long (1991) pointed out its disadvantage, asserting that this approach lessens the role of an individual in constructing meaning. This is because it views literature as a scientific system without single subjective implication and leaves no room for subjectivity and the reader's responses in analysing literary works. In other words, it allows little interaction between the reader and a literary text. As a result, Structuralism does not seem to make much significant contribution to the students' personal development, enhancement of cultural awareness, and development of language skills. Moreover, this approach seems less relevant than New Criticism to the teaching of literature as language instructors and learners tend to lack enough skills and knowledge to have a scientific approach to a literary text. As a result, by overemphasizing on the linguistic systems and codes and considering them as the only determining factors of meaning, this approach can make the study of literature becomes futile and students may feel poorly motivated in reading literary works (Truong, 2009).

The late 1970s witnessed the appearance of Stylistics. This approach aims at analysing the features of literary language that can develop students' sensitivity to literature. Such features include the unconventional structure of literature, particularly poetry, with the use of language in a non-grammatical and loose manner despite the debate on whether they are effective in expanding the learner's knowledge of the target language (Truong, 2009). In the Stylistics approach, learners are encouraged to apply their linguistic knowledge in forming aesthetic judgments and interpretations of a literary work. Although this approach still pays much attention to the language features, it highlights the aesthetic value of the literary work, making it opposed to New Criticism and Structuralism. For example, they can make a comparison between the registers used in a literary work with those used in non-literary texts in order to acknowledge the disparities between literary and non-literary language as well as different ways of using language to execute things.

The Stylistics approach makes sense in literature teaching as it can help develop the learner's appreciation of the power and flexibility of various types of language used to express a vast range of human experiences and feelings (Truong, 2009). In particular, with the adoption of this approach, students can explore the language and form of such motivating and attractive literary features as poetry, drama and fiction with a focus on meaning, thus, their aesthetic values are highlighted. However, the Stylistic approach also poses some challenges to both learners and instructors in the classroom. These challenges include language learners' frustration in identifying irony in literary texts of a foreign

culture, poor communicative competence in English as well as inexperience of and insensitivity to various registers in daily life circumstances (Truong, 2009). Another possible obstacle is the requirement for instructor's knowledge about the terminology of literary devices so as to provide students with guidance in analysis of a literary text, which does not seem to be a priority in instructor training and development.

The Reader-Response approach was developed on the basis of the readers' role in the process of reading literature, in other words, the interaction between readers and a literary text. It questions other theories that focus primarily on the author or the content and form of a literary work, claiming that "a text has no existence until it is read" (Gilroy & Parkinson, 1997, p. 215). This approach encourages learners to act as active agents in the interpretation of literature through activities that promote the involvement of their own background knowledge, personal experiences, opinions and feelings. It assumes that the readers' familiarity with the topic of the text can facilitate their comprehension and interpretation. On this account, the meaning of a text can be derived from the reader and their real existence through the reading process. Unlike the previous approaches, Reader-Response predicates on the interrelationship between learners and literary texts.

As such, the Reader-Response approach has much to offer to learners. Indeed, this approach activates learner's background knowledge and personalizes the learning experience, thus, it facilitates their prediction and deciphering of the literary language and theme. In this way, literary texts become more comprehensible to learners, which results in more motivation for reading literature and probably individual and group participation. To prove this, Truong (2009) acknowledged the positive reactions of her students when adopting the Reader-Response approach and reported that it generated comfort, interest and curiosity among them. Learners, therefore, become the centre of the literature classroom and their language acquisition can also be promoted through process-oriented activities.

Nevertheless, similar to other approaches, instructors may encounter some problems presented by the Reader-Response approach (Truong, 2009). Firstly, instructors may have difficulty in carrying out evaluations when their learners provide interpretations that are significantly different from the literary text. Moreover, the selection of literary texts as materials may become trickier to instructors. This is because the language difficulty and cultural contents have to be taken into careful consideration so that learners are exposed to those appropriate with their competence and culture. Instructors also have to pay more attention to their linguistic guidance to facilitate their students' ability to

comprehend and respond to the text. Last but not least, it is unavoidable that the disparities in students' cultures and that of a text may hinder them from sharing feelings and reactions in an open and willing manner.

The next approach is Language-based approach which shares a similarity with the Stylistics approach in its emphasis on the awareness of the language of literature. The difference between them is that Stylistics requires linguistic analyses for interpretations; meanwhile, Language-based approach views the language used in literary works as a source of input to develop learners' language foundational skills. Literature, thus, is used as a useful vehicle for learners' language practice through interaction, collaboration, as well as student's independence and peer's instruction. In this sense, compared to Stylistics, the Language-based approach offers more accessibility for learners as it gives more way to their reactions to and experience with literature (Carter & Long, 1991). Language instruction activities are often carried out in accordance to this approach, such as background knowledge activating by brainstorming, ending rewriting or plot summarizing, vocabulary cloze tests, and opinion forming and group collaborating through jigsaw readings. The Language-Based approach also clarifies that in the classroom, rather offering interpretations, instructors play a role of an instructor and facilitator by introducing and explaining literary terms, preparing and providing proper classroom procedures as well as intervening timely with prompts when necessary to support learner's literature reading process.

It has been demonstrated that learners can enjoy many benefits offered by the Language-based approach (Truong, 2009). To begin with, their needs in studying literature can be satisfied as they are equipped with techniques and skills to not only analyse texts but also form sensitivity to different genres and find enjoyment in literature, particularly those relevant to their experience. Furthermore, the approach also meets learners' demand for language learning. They can conduct group discussion in the target language and improve their language competence, as a result, they become active in their own learning with the support and guide from their instructors. In short, the Language-Based approach is motivating because it not only assists learners in handling a literary text and boosts their interest in literature, but also enhances their autonomy and language learning. However, this approach may make use of literature a mechanistic way that pays too much attention to instructor-organized language activities and ignores the relationship of content to culture, turning a text into an isolated and de-contextualized set of linguistic elements.

The last approach is Critical Literacy, which was developed on the basis of various theories, including critical language studies, educational sociology and feminism (Luke & Freebody, 1997). This approach focuses on the interrelationship between language use and social power; therefore, it can make a meaningful contribution to the teaching of both language and literature. Critical Literacy attempts to examine the role of language in producing, maintaining and changing social relations and power as well as to allow student to challenge and understand why a premise is accepted. On this account, it helps improve learners' awareness of the relationship between language and society. Besides, this approach also motivates learners to investigate how social and political circumstances shape the language they are learning. As a result, they can have better awareness of the socio-political motives for their use of certain language varieties (Shor, 1999).

The biggest challenge of the Critical Literacy approach for instructors is the selection of text. To employ Critical Literacy successfully, instructors must take into careful consideration the learners' social experiences and worldviews as well as degree of openness of their society and culture so as to create a safe learning atmosphere for them (Truong, 2009). This is because some literary texts with ideological assumptions may pose the risk of adverse effects on learners' sense of security which leads to the hindrance of their participation in class. Compared to previous approaches, Critical Literacy seems to offer the broadest approach as it allows learners to involve and draw conclusions from multidimensional perspectives on how a literary text is formed rather than limits them at linguistic or textual meanings.

To summarize, with some elements in common, these six different approaches have their own strengths and weaknesses. According to Truong (2009), New Criticism and Structuralism have gone through a period of disuse because of their mere interest in the study of the formal elements of the literary text, leaving aside the reader and the subjective meanings. To be specific, the study of literary with the New Criticism approach terms ignores the connections between the text and the readers' experiences, while Structuralism prioritizes the purely formal components of the literary text without any focus on its cultural, social or ideological aspects. Although Truong promotes the use of the Stylistic, Reader-Response, Language-based and Critical Literacy approaches in foreign language learning contexts, there are some remaining obstacles. The Stylistic approach faces problems because of the inability to recognize irony in foreign literature or the lack of experience and sensitivity to regular kinds of registers. Similarly, some of the limitations of the Reader-Response approach include deviant responses of students'

interpretations from the original literary work and the lack of linguistic guidance for choosing appropriate materials. With regards to the Critical Literacy approach, students' cultural background should be taken into account.

In order to evaluate how relevant an approach is to teaching English literature to language undergraduates, Truong suggests that some core principles of Communicative Language Teaching should be considered carefully. These principles include the place of meaning (in a two-way relationship between texts and readers), the purposes of learning (enjoying literary styles, forging strong connections with literary elements, embracing critical thinking), activities in the classroom (collaborative group work and active involvement), role of the students (active and autonomous participants) and role of the instructor (as a facilitator and guide rather than a passive observer). The consideration of these approaches in association with the Communicative Language Teaching is necessary given the role of English literature in English language education. This practice can help instructors choose the most appropriate approach and make the most use of English literature in an English Studies curriculum.

On a final note, because the use of one single approach with its advantages and disadvantages do not seem to generate comprehensive outcomes in literature teaching, it is generally agreed that there is a need for an integrated approach to teaching literature in foreign language education contexts. Various elements discussed above, thus, should be incorporated in a systematic way so that literature can be more accessible to EFL learners and most beneficial for them. In detail, it is suggested that the approaches to teaching English literature should take into consideration some crucial factors, including language level, type of institution, examination requirements and students' cultural orientation.

Models of teaching literature

On the basis of the afore-mentioned approaches, some models of teaching literature have been proposed, among which the one by Carter and Long (1991) seems most relevant to language education. According to these two researchers, there are three models of teaching literature to university students, namely language model, cultural model and personal growth model. The language model is developed on the basis of the notion that literature can be exploited as a fertile source of contextualized linguistic features. It is characterized by its intense relationship with both linguistic form and literary meaning with the aim of developing language competence and awareness. The

activities carried out within this model pay little attention directed to either literary quality of the text or interaction between readers and the text. The cultural model considers literature as content, to be specific, an optimal channel to transfer cultural notions such as history, literary theories, genres, biography of the different authors and other concepts. In this sense, the language of literary texts is viewed as a cultural artefact associated with an investigation from social, political, literary and historical perspectives. This model is often claimed to be easily instructor-centred with instructors taking the dominant role in analysing the texts and relevant background aspects. The personal growth model considers literature as the stimulus for personal growth as it involves their personal, intellectual and emotional experience in the comprehension of a literary text. With a focus on the particular use of language associated with a specific cultural context, it is believed to bring about the development of a learner as a person through the emphasis on their interaction with the text.

Process and activities of teaching literature

Some processes and activities to teach literature in language education at the tertiary level have also been recommended. In general, the process of teaching literature often comprises three phases in accordance to the process of reading a literary text. The purpose of the first phase is to frame or prepare learners to deal with the text (Maley, 1989). It can activate learners' real or literary experience to prepare for and anticipate the main themes and context of the literary text. Besides, some activities involving the theme of the literary text can be carried out, for example, brainstorming on the topic, reading a passage on a relevant topic and sharing ideas about it. If the Language-based approach is adopted, learners may also be provided with pre-reading vocabulary work with a focus from context-based meaning of the words, or some writing tasks to activate their background knowledge. The historical context and bibliography of the writer may also be discussed to give students some general ideas of the text. In the second phase, learners can read or listen to the text with a focus on particular contents in the text and be engaged in the process of making interpretations of the text. They may be guided to identify the textual meaning and analyse the overall structure of the text to explore how the message is conveyed through special uses of language. It is also recommended that learners can either discuss and present their comprehensions and interpretations or rewrite the story from their different points of view (Gajdusek, 1988). Vocabulary exercises involving key phrases and utterances from the text can also be offered to facilitate students'

understanding of the text. The last phase often aims at extending the theme and eliciting learners' opinions, feelings and thoughts about the literary text. Learners may participate in debates of issues discussed in the literary texts to share their experiences and relate them to their cultural background.

It can be said that such three-phase process of teaching literature appears to be fundamental and somewhat rigid yet flexible as certain phases can be carried out either in class or out of class. It emphasizes both the interaction between learners and the text as well as between learners and instructors. Through this process, students can gain opportunities to not only master their linguistic and communicative skills through knowledge and use of lexical and grammatical structures, but also get access to a literary world that can widen their social and cultural understanding. In addition, learners are also provided with strategies to analyse and interpret language in context so as to have better understanding of how and why language is manipulated.

2.3.5. Challenges to teaching literature

Although the use of English literature is of great benefits to EFL students, it is undeniable that there still exist some major challenges that require more attention from instructors (McKay, 2001; Savvidou, 2004; Lima, 2011). These difficulties can be categorized into three main groups based on the subjects involved in teaching and learning of literature in classroom, namely text-related challenges, student-related challenges, instructor and pedagogy-related challenges. The following section discusses these obstacles and provides some considerations for instructors in order to make the best use of literature in English language education.

Despite their advantages, instructors and students may have to tackle some problems that arise from literary texts themselves. The first significant text-related shortcoming of literature teaching is the language used in the literary texts, including syntax and vocabulary. According to Lima (2011), even the most popular literary works contain literary language that are regarded as too difficult and complicated. They are criticized to be far from the convention of Standard English, thus, not appropriate for various levels of learners (McKay, 2001; Savvidou, 2004). As a result, learners may be put in a quite inconvenient condition and the reading of literature becomes a significantly demanding activity. Moreover, Lazar (1993) added that they may find it difficult to apply literature language in most common usages and sometimes have their conventions distorted. This is because the unrestricted and creative use of lexical items and

grammatical structures may bend and even break the understanding of such features rather than provide examples of further practical use of the language (Lima, 2011). That is to say, this literary use of language may be confusing and misleading for EFL learners although native speakers find it interesting and refreshing (Widdowson, 1983). Another major difficulty in teaching literature has something to do with the length of the literary text. According to Duff and Maley (1990), it is proved that most students have a tendency to feel uneasy about reading long works of literature. However, shorter texts may also become trickier for students to handle with if extended contextual support and repetition is nowhere to be found as in longer texts.

Regarding the challenges stemming from students, it is reported that the productivity of literature teaching and learning process is often influenced by students' low language proficiency and lack of appropriate cultural and social backgrounds introduced in the literary text (Hussein & Al-Emami, 2016). The first challenge can be explained by the fact that literature may contain complicated language as discussed in the previous part. Moreover, it is often the case that learners within a classroom are at different levels of language proficiency, making it challenging for instructors to choose a text that can be proper for all. Learners' lack of cultural issues presented in literary texts is another serious problem in literature teaching. According to Duff and Maley (1990), non-native learners as an outsider of a culture may find it difficult to completely comprehend cultural factors introduced in works of literature. They may have troubles in relating the themes and characters of the literary texts to their personal experiences, which may negatively affect the enjoyment and interpretation of literature since their interest in literary texts cannot be aroused (McKay, 2001). This even results in quite a few of them considering literature something that exists in a separate sphere from their normal lives and that it holds little to no personal value to them.

Instructors and their pedagogy may also present difficulty in their own teaching of literature. Their choices of text may create an ineffective and uncomfortable learning environment for learners if they do not take into careful consideration different factors such as their language proficiency, age, gender and background knowledge (Khatib, Rezaei, Derakhshan, 2011). Lima (2011) stressed that these factors are crucial because instructors' desire to expose their learners to literary experience may lead to a source of conflict. It is simple due to the fact that as discussed above, if the language is too difficult or the subject matter too culturally distant, learners may not have proper linguistic, literary and cultural competence to comprehend and interpret the text, thus, find learning gains

minimal (McKay, 2001). Moreover, it is argued that instructors may have the tendency to adopt an approach that is too instructor-centred by providing their own explanations of the literary works without empowering students to make interpretations. As a result, learners may find literature boring and fail to come up with a link between their background or experiences and the literary texts. In other cases, if instructors choose the literary work written in straightforward and simple language, though learners may find it helpful, interest, appeal and relevance may not be aroused (Collie and Slater, 1987). Hall (2005) also argued that literature is often taught in traditional ways by focusing on literariness and underestimating linguistic elements.

In order to make the best use of literature in EFL curricula, it is crucial that instructors take some factors into serious consideration. Some scholars in the field have put forward several suggestions regarding this issue. While addressing literature teaching in EFL contexts, Divsar and Tahriri (2009) identified three main aspects to consider so as for any literature teaching process to take place: linguistic, cultural and communicative. The two authors noted that linguistic perspectives of the literary texts should serve as a prerequisite for literary discussion. This is because EFL learners are not native speakers and many of them are not proficient enough in the target language in order to handle the texts without linguistic support. Cultural factors should then be taken into considerations after the linguistic analysis of the literary text. Indeed, cultural barriers should be prioritized because language and culture have an intertwined connection, thus, narrowing the gap between the learners and the target culture can facilitate the success of their foreign language learning.

Furthermore, instructors should also take into consideration the generalization of culture in literary texts. There exists an argument that literature is produced by individual bearing single perspective and thus does not represent the culture of the whole community (Hanauer, 2001). Therefore, it is important that the teaching of literature should involve the presentation of various interpretations and viewpoints in order for learners to avoid generalizing culture from the work of literature to the society as a whole. Last but not least, communicative aspects should be taken on to create a learning environment that can help stimulate learners' language capacity. Divsar and Tahriri (2009) explained that this can be achieved thanks to the active involvement of learners in the interpretation of the text's multiple layers of meaning.

2.3.6. Theoretical considerations for the approaches to teaching English literature

On the basis of the approaches to and models of teaching literature discussed in previous sections, the current study attempted to examine the approaches adopted in the two locations of research, namely HANU and UniFe, by taking into consideration the following criteria, of which the descriptions are not considered as polar extremes.

- *Who*: learner-centred and instructor-centred
- *What*: linguistic practice and cultural interaction
- *Where*: within the text and beyond the text
- *How*: reading-based and activity-based
- *Who with*: individual work and group work
- *Which level*: acceptance and appreciation
- *Why*: literature as text and literature as discourse

In particular, the *Who* criterion refers to the agent mainly involved in the English Literature lessons. Learner-centred classes are those in which students play an active role rather than solely relying on their instructors for the provision of knowledge or the analysis and interpretation of literary texts as in instructor-centred ones. Besides, the *What* criterion distinguishes between the teaching of literature as a source and practice of knowledge of language and linguistics and that as an opportunity for exposure to cultural elements. The *Where* criterion refers to the particular focus of the teaching, whether it lies on the text, its grammatical structures and language or involves factors other than the text, such as biography of authors, context of history and society and responses of readers. The *How* criterion is dealt with the activities carried out in the lessons, either on the basis of reading the text or of practicing the language elements learnt. Regarding the *Who with* criterion, activities in the lessons can be identified as non-interactive as in individual work, or interactive as in group work. The *Which level* criterion describes the level to which a literary text is analysed, whether the analysis merely discusses stated facts in the text or generates judgments and opinions from readers. Lastly, the *Why* criterion refers to the holistic view of literature, as a source of knowledge of language and content by decontextualizing words or by engaging readers in active interpretations in contexts. It should be noted that four most recent contemporary approaches summarized by Truong (2009), including Stylistics, Reader-response, Language-based and Critical Literacy are also used as a foundation for the investigation and analysis of approaches to English Literature teaching.

2.4. Research gap in studies incorporating intercultural competence and English Literature in English language education context

There have been a number of primary research studies on either intercultural competence or English literature in English language education. Those addressing the prior mainly focused on building a theoretical basis for developing intercultural competence in education (Sinicrope, Norris & Watanabe, 2007; Dunne, 2011). Empirical attempts include those proposing models to incorporate intercultural teaching in higher education (Nguyen, 2013; Dimitrov et al., 2014), investigating methods and activities to enhance intercultural competence (Le & Tran, 2014; Rezaei & Naghibian, 2018; Chau & Truong, 2019; Karimboyevna, 2020), identify factors affecting the integration of intercultural competence in language teaching (Ho & Ton, 2020) and exploring perceptions of instructors and learners regarding intercultural competence development (Clouet, 2012; Tran & Seepho, 2016; Vo, 2018; Bal, 2019; Vu & Dinh, 2021). Some studies were also conducted with the aim to justify the use of certain tools in evaluating intercultural competence (Alzimami, 2016). Fewer attempts were made to perform actual assessment of the intercultural competence of learners (Tran & Seepho, 2016), which may be due to the fact that it is a complex and lengthy process.

More studies have been conducted on the teaching of English literature in English tertiary education context. They mainly focused on the effectiveness of using English literary texts in English classroom, strategies and activities to incorporate literary works in teaching the English language (Nguyen, 2018), as well as learners' perceptions of the use of literature in the language classroom. There are, however, a limited number of scholars and researchers conducting studies on the teaching of English literature with the aim of developing EFL learners' intercultural competence. This section provides a study-by-study review of such studies in chronological order.

Zacharias (2005) undertook a secondary research on developing intercultural competence through literature. He argued that cultural learning can be best facilitated by literature. In particular, his paper discussed how the selective choice of literary texts can pave the way to cultural awareness and reflection. It also claimed that through literature, students can learn about culture as well as experience personal enjoyment and emotional gain throughout the process. He concluded his paper with suggested activities regarding the use of literature. It can be seen that this research provides a helpful justification for enhancing intercultural competence through literature; still, it is theoretical-based and no specific context is provided.

Among primary research in the field, Rodríguez and Puyal (2012) carried out a study with the aim of showing how to foster students' intercultural competence by having them read English literary texts within content and language integrated learning contexts. They collected qualitative and quantitative data through observation of students' responses during a unit of literature and questionnaire, respectively, to provide evidences for the initial hypothesis that literary texts can enhance intercultural competence. They concluded that literature serves as a rich resource to develop students' intercultural awareness, particularly tolerance and empathy. However, this research was conducted on a pretty limited scale with a population of forty students. Moreover, although both direct and indirect data were collected, the observation was carried out in only one unit, which may affect the validity and reliability of the data.

Another attempt was made by Rodríguez (2013) with an action research conducted in an advanced EFL classroom at a public university in Colombia in 2011. He proposed incorporating authentic multicultural literary texts in the EFL classroom as a means to develop intercultural competence. The study adopted a holistic approach and collected data through observations, students' journals, artefacts (response papers) and semi-structure interviews to explore how students acquired cultural knowledge, developed critical intercultural skills, and created positive attitudes, which are aspects of Byram's model of intercultural competence. The findings showed that integrating language and literature in EFL constitutes a pedagogical contribution to construct critical intercultural awareness. This study took into account students' opinions about teaching procedures, materials, and academic processes used in the EFL classroom. However, the literary text chosen in this action research pose difficulties for learners because of its unfamiliar lexical resource.

Recently, Olsen (2018) made an effort to answer the question of how the novel "The Outsiders" might be employed to promote intercultural competence in an English language classroom in Norway. She utilized an action research and based on an analysis of the novel with the intercultural perspective in focus. Direct evidence of performance through group discussions and critical reflection with recorded individual logs were collected. Her study concluded that learners have a positive attitude towards working with the novel in conjunction with the film adaptation, and that the novel in conjunction with the adaptation does aid in promoting intercultural competence. It cannot be denied that this research stood out as novelty in the field. Nevertheless, since its focus lies on the use of a

novel and its adaptation, cannot prove that the study of literature leads to a development in the learners' intercultural competence.

One of the most recent studies in the field was carried out by Nemouchi and Byram (2019), which argued for the importance of using literary texts in encouraging „aesthetic reading“ toward developing intercultural competence. It was an action research project that took place in two universities with lessons planned on the basis of Byram's model of intercultural competence. It targeted intercultural encounters with people from other cultures yet within one's own country. The results found that the teaching of literary texts with a focus on students' aesthetic reading response could positively influence their empathy. This study highlighted a relatively new approach which targets developing cognitive skills to prepare learners for interaction culturally different others within one's own culture.

In conclusion, all of the studies above were carried out to address the question of how literature aid to the development of intercultural competence. Their focus were laid on using English literary texts as elements to facilitate intercultural teaching and explore whether this practice helps foster learners' intercultural competence. They all have some limitations and the research results remain somewhat ambiguous, thus, implications in a larger scale may not be assured. There is no doubt that these studies have added to knowledge of the field, particularly the significance of intercultural competence, ways to foster it through literature, the impacts of literature on intercultural competence enhancement and effective methods to assess such impacts. However, the amount of research placing their aim in assessing the intercultural competence of English majors under the influences of the teaching of English literature as a subject/module in higher education still remains limited. In fact, there is a gap in such research conducted particularly in the context of Vietnam and Italy. Due to this research gap, the researcher attempted to conduct a study to assess the relationship between intercultural competence development and literature so as to make a significant scholarly and practical contribution to knowledge of the field. It is, thus, indicated that this study is distinctive and different from previous research.

2.5. Summary of Chapter 2

In summary, this chapter provides insights into theoretical frameworks concerning intercultural competence and the teaching of English literature in English language higher education. Section 2.1 discusses the interrelationship between language, culture and

literature. On that basis, Section 2.2 gives descriptions of how intercultural competence is defined and how significant it is to be taken into account in foreign language teaching and learning. Moreover, popularly-agreed constituents of intercultural competence in different important models are also explained. It also discusses some considerations with regards to how intercultural competence should be assessed. Section 2.3 offers a theoretical basis for the teaching of literature in English language higher education. In particular, the most fundamental aspects to be taken into consideration when it comes to literature teaching are discussed. They include how literature is conceptualised, with reference to canon and discourse; what benefits the study of literature contribute to English language education, how to teach literature as an individual component in an EFL curricula at tertiary level and what instructors often face with in literature teaching. These insights serve as useful sources of reference for theoretical considerations of the present study, which serves as a guide for the whole research project, from data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, reporting and discussion of findings. Existing studies regarding intercultural competence and literature teaching were also reviewed in Section 2.4, drawing out a research gap that this study aims to void.

The following chapter presents the methodological considerations for answering research questions, including the rationale for choosing mixed methods study, descriptions of locations of research and participants of the study as well as the instruments, data collection procedure and data analysis adopted.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 aims at describing the research methodology chosen for the current study. It is organized into seven main sections. The first section provides an overview of the mixed method approach chosen as an appropriate approach to provide answers to the research questions. It also justifies the research design for implementing this mixed method study. The fourth section discusses the participants of the study, followed by the fifth section which presents the research instruments employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data for the study. The sixth section describes the procedures for data collection and the approaches to data analysis, including steps and methods adopted for presenting, interpreting, validating the data and indicating the outcomes of the study. The seventh section concludes the chapter by addressing several ethical considerations for mixed method research.

To fill the gaps in existing literature regarding the assessment of intercultural competence in tertiary EFL context and the influences of English Literature classes on students' development of intercultural competence, this study was conducted to answer three main following research questions:

Question 1: In what ways is English Literature taught to the third-year English language majored students at HANU and at UniFe?

Question 2: What are the levels of intercultural competence of the third-year English language majored students after the English Literature course at HANU and at UniFe?

Question 3: To what extent does English Literature teaching and learning influence the intercultural competence development of the third-year English language majored students in at HANU and at UniFe?

3.1. Research approach and its rationale

A mixed method approach was adopted in the current study. Mixed method approach has witnessed a rapid rise in diverse fields and prevailed in educational and social sciences. Despite being considered a relatively new methodology that originated around the late 1980s and early 1990s, the mixed method approach has proved its distinguished status beside quantitative or qualitative approach. Johnson et al. (2007) defined mixed method research as "the type of research in which a researcher combines elements of qualitative and quantitative for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (p. 123). This means that both qualitative and quantitative data are gathered, analysed and linked in response to the research questions of a single study.

According to Creswell (2012), the mixed method approach is based on the idea that there is no method without bias and weaknesses. Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem and more complete evidence can be acquired thanks to the uses of multiple databases. It should be noted that although different terms have been given to this approach, such as blended research, integrative research, multiple methods, triangulated studies, and mixed research, recent publications tend to use the term mixed method research (Johnson et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2018).

In a broad sense, mixed method approach is a widely accepted design in social science research as it is proved that researchers can gain a number of advantages brought by this approach (McKim, 2017). Firstly, because it synthesizes ideas from both qualitative and quantitative approaches, it helps researchers build on the strengths of both forms of data and minimize the disadvantages of each form. Quantitative approach is useful in identifying attributes of a large population of participants through rapid data collection. In comparison with quantitative research, Wei (2019) asserted that qualitative research is more likely to provide a deep and subtle analysis of phenomena in society in general and in education in particular. Thus, the two methods can make up for each other when being used in a single study. Moreover, since different paradigms are combined to undertake mixed method research, it can allow investigation from both the inductive and deductive approaches. As a consequence, researchers can compare and integrate different perspectives of the studied phenomenon to both generate a theory and test a hypothesis. However, it is unavoidable that mixed method approach also poses some challenges to researchers. These include the requirement for extensive data collection and the intensive time dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data.

Because of its merits, the mixed method approach was adopted in the current study. First, using the mixed research method approach in the present study can maximise its complementary and expansion values. The results from the quantitative enquiries into the subjective assessment and interpretation of intercultural competence can complement and expand the results of the objective realities of the English literature education and intercultural competence development. Second, the adoption of the mixed method approach for the present study is also supportable on the ground that it fits the research questions and appropriate with Deardorff's (2006) suggestion that the assessment of intercultural competence should make use of multiple data from different instruments. The research purposes of this study include both exploring and explaining the English majors' development of intercultural competence, the teaching of English literature at tertiary level

and their relationship. It thus started with broad research questions and subsidiary questions which are multi-faceted. Therefore, the mere use of either qualitative or quantitative does not seem sufficient to address the research problem or provide comprehensive answers to the research questions. The use of mixed method approach, instead, can offer an alternative perspective to the study and present not only a condensed but also a detailed understanding of the research problem. In this sense, the quantitative method can yield useful information about the participants' levels of intercultural competence and the use of teaching methods in English literature classes; while the qualitative approach can offer a more in-depth understanding of how the teaching of English literature influences specific dimensions of intercultural competence. For these reasons, the researcher is convinced that mixed method research is the best approach for this study to provide a holistic understanding about the research topic regarding the relationship between intercultural competence development and literature teaching.

3.2. Research design

A research design provides a framework for the whole research process, including the collection, analysis and interpretation of data, and ensures that the data collected can provide answers to research questions in a convincing manner (Bryman, 2012). There have been various ways of classifying research designs. One of them is to make a clear distinction between experimental research design and non-experimental research design (Creswell, 2012). An experimental research design is one in which researchers manipulates an independent variable to observe how it affects one or more dependent variables, whereas a non-experimental research design is one in which researchers relies solely on analysis of the variables or concepts of interest without making any interventions or manipulations. The current study is more relevant to non-experimental design since it does not intervene with or manipulate any concepts of interest but bases merely on the empirical analysis of these concepts.

Another way to classify research designs is to distinguish between a single method design and a mixed method design (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2012). As suggested by their names, a single method design uses only one method, either the quantitative or the qualitative method, whereas a mixed method design combines both quantitative and qualitative methods within a single project. Since the mixed method research approach was adopted in the current study, the mixed method design was chosen as a basis for conducting it.

Due to many variations in mixed method design, it is suggested that a number of factors relating to the research procedures should be taken into consideration. These factors form the bases for the classification of types of mixed method design. They include the timing of data collection, the emphasis placed on each database and the use of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2012). The first factor, the timing of data collection, refers to the sequence of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in the study, which means whether the two datasets are collected simultaneously or sequentially with one after the other. Secondly, the priority or weight given to the form of data can help determine the choice of a mixed method design. The two sets of data can be emphasized equally or unequally, depending on the research problem and questions. The last factor refers to how the researcher wants the two sets of data, qualitative and quantitative, to be integrated: merged, connected or embedded. If the data are merged, they are analysed separately then compared side-by-side, transformed or displayed jointly. Connecting the data involves using the analysis of one set of data as a basis for the collection of the other. If one database is embedded within a larger design, one set of data is not examined in isolation from the other. Moreover, the use of data also deals with the phase in the research process where the two datasets are mixed: during data collection, between data collection and data analysis, during data analysis or in the discussion of the study results.

On this basis, Creswell (2012) classified mixed method design into four main types, namely convergent design, explanatory design, exploratory design and embedded design. Table 3.1 below provides an overview of these types.

Table 3.1

An overview of basic types of mixed method design

Type of mixed method design	Timing of data collection	Emphasis	Use of data
Convergent	Simultaneously	Both qualitative and quantitative data	Comparing/ merging
Explanatory	Quantitative data first, then qualitative data	Quantitative data	Connecting (qualitative data refine quantitative data)
Exploratory	Qualitative data first, then quantitative data	Qualitative data	Connecting (quantitative data build on/explain qualitative data)
Embedded	Simultaneously	Primary form of	The second dataset

or sequentially data

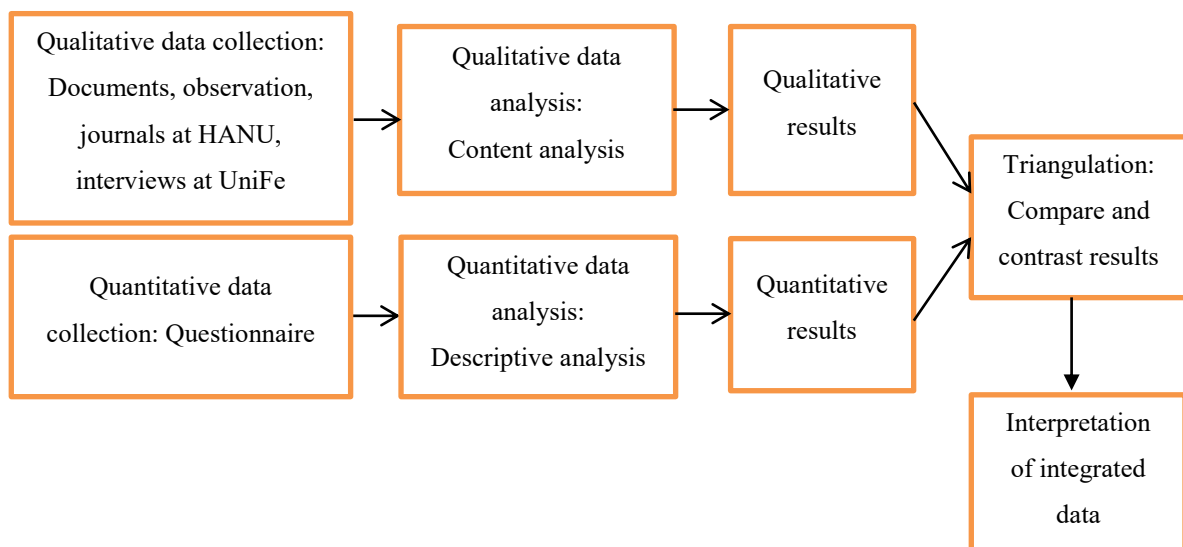
provides additional information not provided by the primary dataset

[Source: based on (Creswell, 2012)]

Since the research questions of this study are equally important, the current study adopted a convergent mixed method design. Accordingly, the qualitative data and quantitative data were gathered concurrently in each research location, producing two different data sets for each location. Data collection at the two research locations was carried out before data analysis started. Each data set of each location was analysed separately and then the results were merged, interpreted and compared to form answers to the research questions. This design allowed the data collected from the small sample of UniFe students to be enhanced by the triangulation with descriptive analysis of quantitative data. It also helped capture the broadest and deepest goal of the research phenomenon, which is to explore EFL tertiary students' development of intercultural competence as a result of the English Literature course. Figure 3.1 below demonstrates the convergent mixed method design of the current study.

Figure 3.1

Research design of the study



[Source: original by the researcher]

Detailed descriptions of the data collection procedure that adopted this convergent mixed methods design are provided in section 3.3 while the instruments used are described in section 3.4.

3.3. Locations of research and participants of the study

This section provides a detailed description of the locations where the current study was conducted, including two public universities, one in Hanoi, Vietnam and the other in Ferrara, Italy. It also describes the participants involved in this study.

3.3.1. Locations of research

The first location of research was Hanoi University (HANU), Vietnam where university students pursue English education as a discipline to get a BA, MA or PhD degree in English Language Studies. HANU was chosen to be a location of research thanks to the following factors. Founded in 1959, this public university can be considered fairly representative of Vietnam's institutions of English higher education. This is because HANU is one of the few longest lasting and most established universities in Vietnam that offers official training for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in English Language Studies. Adaptability to international work environments is considered as one of the core values of the institution, which underpins intercultural competence. Moreover, courses on English Literature are compulsory for English majors in this educational setting, as in accordance to the regulations of Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training. In addition, this location can add a facet of diversity to the current study. The reason is that the English Literature course is taught by more than one instructor who could adopt different criteria for text selection and various approaches to their teaching. Although the instructors are not native English speakers, English language is frequently used as a medium of instruction and communication within the classroom. Therefore, the researcher believes that this location can yield the richest information to comprehensively address the research problem and questions and adequately provide a look at the context in Vietnam.

At the location of research in Vietnam, there are two courses on English Literature taking place in two semesters of an academic year so that third-year students can choose to register in whichever semester they prefer. One of the courses selected in this study were taught in the second semester of the 2019-2020 academic year and two others in the first semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. These courses were not only appropriate to collect more reliable and updated data at the time of the study but also convenient for the

researcher to be in situ. Each course on English Literature lasted in 13 weeks and the students attended in-class lessons once per week, which took about 3.5 teaching hours each.

The second location where the current study was carried out was the University of Ferrara (UniFe), Italy. This public university offers BA, MA and PhD programs of Modern Languages and Literatures. English Literature courses are also compulsory for students choosing English language as their focus of study here. This study was conducted in UniFe because of the following reasons. This public university, founded in 1391, has provided one of the most traditional degree courses in foreign languages and literatures, which has always been taught since its existence. UniFe was chosen mainly because its English Literature courses have been fairly experimental and innovative in terms of teaching contents and approaches compared to other Italian universities.

At UniFe, there is only one course on English Literature for third-year students per academic year. The course selected in this study was carried out during the first semester of the academic year 2020 – 2021. The course contents were entitled „British Poetry and Society from the Early Modern to the Contemporary Age“. The course was run in 20 lessons in 40 teaching hours. The students participated in classes twice per week, equivalent to 4 teaching hours. Due to health measures during the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy at the time of the study, classes were offered on a web-based virtual learning environment named Blackboard Collaborate. On this platform, instructors and students could participate in a lesson using audio, video, and recording capabilities. Private and public chat, a whiteboard and application sharing are also available to facilitate an interactive learning environment.

3.3.2. Participants of the study

The target population consists of Vietnamese students pursuing a Bachelor degree in English Studies at HANU and Italian students pursuing a Bachelor degree in Modern Languages and Literature at UniFe (with a focus on English language). Since the study focuses on the influences of English Literature on the students' development of intercultural competence in particular, the sampling frame involves third-year students who were participating in courses on English Literature in both locations of research at the time of data collection. They are Vietnamese and Italian students with the age range from 19 to 21 with an average English level of B2.

In order to specify the specific sample in each location of research, a sampling strategy was adopted in this current study. According to Creswell (2012), there are different sampling strategies: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. While the prior refers to a selection of individuals from the population who are representative of that population, the latter refers to a selection of individuals from the population who are available, convenient and represent some characteristics that a researcher seeks. This study used nonprobability sampling, more specifically, convenience sampling to select participants for both the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. Thus, participants were recruited on a voluntary basis, assuming that such randomness could yield a more comprehensive answer to the research questions and that more willing participants may be more motivated and may exhibit clearer intercultural competence. Moreover, the researcher had the permission of the two institutions' administrators to access this sample and obtain the students' consent to participate in the study.

The sample from HANU includes 105 third-year English language majored students from three different classes of English Literature. Meanwhile, although the same number of students registered in the English Literature III course at UniFe, over half of them were non-attending students as attendance was not compulsory at this research location. Therefore, the sample from UniFe includes 30 third-year students majoring in Modern Languages and Literatures out of nearly 40 attending students. The qualitative data were gathered from smaller samples, which include 10 HANU participants and 5 UniFe students. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the numbers of participants recruited in different stages of the study:

Table 3.2

Description of the sample size of the study

Type of data	Instrument employed	Number of participants
Quantitative	Questionnaire	105 at HANU
		30 at UniFe
Qualitative	Reflective journal	10 at HANU
	Interview	5 at UniFe

[Source: original by the researcher]

3.4. Research instruments

The study used various instruments to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data, including self-assessment questionnaire, observation, reflective journal and interview.

According to Deardorff (2006) and Fantini (2009), these tools have received strong consensus among intercultural scholars as effective tools for assessing intercultural competence. Among them, data regarding the participants' intercultural competence at the end of the English Literature course were collected from the questionnaire and reflective journals at HANU and interviews at UniFe; data regarding the ways English Literature was taught to the participants were gathered from the questionnaire and observation; the influences of the English Literature course on their intercultural competence development can be revealed through Section 4 of the questionnaire and reflective journals at HANU and interviews at UniFe. The research questions addressed in accordance to the purposes of the research instruments are summarized in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Purposes of the instruments

Research question answered	Research instrument used	Type of data analysed
1. In what ways is English Literature taught to English language majored students?	Observation	Qualitative
	Questionnaire	Quantitative
2. What are the levels of intercultural competence of the third-year English language majored students?	Questionnaire	Quantitative
	Journal at HANU Interview at UniFe	Qualitative
3. To what extent does English Literature teaching and learning influence the English language majored students' development of intercultural competence?	Journal at HANU Interview at UniFe	Qualitative

[Source: original by the researcher]

3.4.1. Documents

According to Creswell (2012), a valuable source of qualitative data can be public documents, including regulations issued by ministries or universities. The analysis of these documents can provide data on the contexts within which research participants operate. They also represent a convenient source for text without any necessary transcription required with other types of data. It is apparent that government guidelines and university curricula can indicate the conditions that impinge upon the teaching of English Literature and development of students' intercultural competence. It is, therefore, worthwhile to take a look at these public documents. The data yielded from documents were expected to be used as a way to verify findings or triangulate information about the teaching methods of

English Literature and the participants' development of intercultural competence collected from other instruments.

The public documents were chosen based on their feasibility to demonstrate the contexts of intercultural competence development and English Literature teaching at HANU and UniFe. Those at ministerial include the Decision No. 36/2004/QĐ-BGD&ĐT issued by Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training promulgating the Curricula of Foreign Language Studies in Higher Education and a Decree determining the classes of university degrees issued by Italy Ministry of University and Research (Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca) in 2000. Those at university levels are the HANU curriculum of English Studies, the UniFe curricula of Modern Languages and Literatures, the English Literature syllabus at the English Department, HANU and the English Literature III course description at UniFe. These public documents provide detailed descriptions of the goals, learning outcomes and teaching contents relevant to English Literature in English language higher education context. The ministerial policy texts were translated from Vietnamese and Italian to English to facilitate data analysis.

3.4.2. Observation

Another source of qualitative data collected in this study is observation, which is also widely used in educational research. Observation involves looking and taking systematically notes of people, behaviours, events and settings (Cohen et al., 2018). This is a useful instrument thanks to a number of its benefits compared to other research tools, mostly its flexibility. Firstly, observation allows researchers to collect less predictable data, for example, interactions in certain contexts, thus, more freshness can be generated during data collection. Besides, by conducting observation in practical sites, researchers are also enabled to record non-verbal behaviours of the research participants, which may not be identified in other instruments such as questionnaire or journals. Since observation also allows reality check of information provided in such structured tool as questionnaire, more thorough understandings of the settings can be acquired. However, the researcher was well aware that some data may be missed and not recorded during an observation.

In the current study, the researcher performed the role of a non-participant observer or non-interventionist in her direct observation, which means to sit in a convenient place to watch and record phenomena without being involved in the activities at the sites. According to Cohen et al. (2018), researchers taking such role do not exert any influences on or control over the situations or pose any questions for the research subjects.

The researcher conducted unstructured observations, in which she observed and took notes of information regarding the instructor's teaching methods as well as the students' interactions and attitudes that may be helpful in determining their intercultural competence. The detailed procedure of observation is described in Section 3.5.

3.4.3. Questionnaire

Given a large number of students in the location of research, this study developed a questionnaire so as for the participants to self-assess their intercultural competence and identify how English Literature is taught. The questionnaire is a popular and useful research instrument for collecting quantitative information nowadays. This tool was selected to collect data for this study thanks to its main advantages, including its practicality, the scale on which it can be used, and the high levels of confidentiality and anonymity that are possible (Thomas, 2003; Fowler, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Cohen et al., 2018).

To begin with, the questionnaire allows a researcher to gather data from a large number of respondents about the topic in a relatively short period of time. As a result, the use of a questionnaire in this study was in fact more economical and time-saving compared to interviews and other methods. It is because the number of subjects is large and the time allowed for data collection is fairly limited. Another advantage of using the questionnaire is that it tends to enable more straightforward analysis because of the numerical data it generates. The questionnaire also produces differentiation of responses as the respondents can have various ways to fill it out (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). Last, although the participants were asked to put down their names, they were well informed that their responses would only serve the purpose of the research and that their identities may not be disclosed. Thus, their answers could avoid being affected by worries about being judged, allowing them to be more motivated to complete the questionnaire and ensuring that the data would be more reliable.

The questionnaire used in this study (see Appendix A) was developed considering two main factors: (1) the aim of examining intercultural competence from Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence that identified specific constituents of intercultural competence as well as determining the approaches adopted to teach English Literature; (2) the desire to use a survey instrument that is recent, reliable, validated and freely available with accepted scales of measurement.

3.4.3.1. Descriptions of questionnaire contents

The Questionnaire used in the current study aims at providing data to answer the research questions regarding the students' intercultural competence and the approaches to teaching English Literature. In particular, it consists of three major sections with a total number of 51 items: Section 1 has two items to gather some background information about the participants' experience in interaction with people of different cultures; Section 2 includes 33 statements using rating scales to collect ordinal data on the participants' self-assessment of two components of intercultural competence – attitudes and knowledge; Section 3 contains 16 rating items to collect data on the approaches adopted in the teaching of English Literature. Table 3.4 demonstrates the main components and aim of each section in the questionnaire.

Table 3.4

Overview of the questionnaire contents

Component	No. of items	Type of items	Aim
Section 1	3	Rating scale Open-ended	To gather background information about the participants
Section 2	33	Rating scale	To assess the students' intercultural competence (attitudes and knowledge)
Section 3	16	Rating item	To identify the approaches to the teaching of English Literature

[Source: original by the researcher]

Section 1 of the questionnaire includes two items. The first item with five answer options aims to discover the frequency of interaction between the participants and a person of different nationality, given the assumption that English language is used as a means of communication in such situations. The second item, which is an open-ended item, requires the participants to describe problems they experienced in their interactions with foreigners. Such less structured and word-based question also offers opportunities for participants to express their personal opinions, which are relatively difficult to acquire in other types of question in a questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2018). These two items help gain general understanding of the respondents' backgrounds, helping to better interpret their intercultural competence level.

Section 2 of the questionnaire was divided into two sub-sections that address the two focused constituents of intercultural competence: Items 1 to 19 address the participants' attitudes to cultures while item 20 to 33 identify their general knowledge of cultures. These items were formulated on the basis of Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence and her descriptions of each constituent and its sub-constructs. It should be noted that the questionnaire uses different items to demonstrate one component of intercultural competence as an attempt to ensure the reliability and validity. The items in each section of the questionnaire were grouped into subcategories of intercultural competence to facilitate data analysis despite the fact that it was actually difficult to do so as the components are interconnected in nature. Table 3.5 below illustrates the components of intercultural competence described in each item according to the Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence.

Table 3.5

Description of items in Section 2 of the questionnaire

Dimension	Components	Item number
Attitudes	Respect (value other cultures and culture diversity)	1 – 6
	Openness (be open to people of different cultures, allow the possibility of seeing from more than one perspective and suspend judgment)	7 – 12
	Curiosity and discovery (set a foundation for ways to turn differences into opportunities and tolerate ambiguity)	13 – 19
Knowledge	Cultural self-awareness (articulate how culture influences one's identities and worldviews)	20 – 24
	Deep cultural knowledge (understand other worldviews)	25-33

[Source: original by the researcher]

Section 3 of the questionnaire, consisting of 16 statements, aims at determining the approaches adopted by instructors in their English literature classes and gathering data on how English literature was taught. 9 out of these 16 items were adapted from the questionnaire used in the study of Krishnasamy (2015), including item 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 15. They were used because Krishnasamy's study also aimed at identifying the approaches used by instructors to teach English literature and was built on relevant literature. The subjects of these items were adapted in order to gain data from students' perspectives instead of instructors' views in the original version. The other 7 items were

formulated developed based on the literature review on major approaches to the teaching of English literature and literary analysis as discussed in Chapter 2.

3.4.3.2. Description of the questionnaire pilots

Before the official quantitative data collection procedure was carried out at HANU, the questionnaire was piloted. This practice was highly recommended by Dahlberg and McCaig (2020) as it helps ensure the reliability, validity and practicality of the final questionnaires, thus, reducing difficulties participants may encounter when completing them. The pilot questionnaire in this research aimed at collecting participants' comments and responses in order to evaluate the time taken to fill them out, check their levels of readability and remove ambiguities in wording.

The first pilot questionnaire was delivered to a convenience sample including 15 Vietnamese third-year students who had already finished the English Literature course in the 2018 – 2019 academic year at HANU. As a result of this pilot, sub-categories were added to Section 2 to clearly arrange items into two groups (Attitudes and Knowledge). This aimed to make sure the participants understand what the items aim to measure and refine the logical structure of the questionnaires. At the end of the pilot when the researcher asked the respondents to comment on the questionnaire, some of them revealed that they somewhat got lost in the process of filling out Section 2 of the questionnaire due to the length and complexity of the items. They seemed to read the first items carefully but lost patience during the last ones, thus, providing responses that seemed random and unreliable. As a result, Section 2 of the questionnaire with the items designed to assess respondents' intercultural competence was refined to improve its flow and the participants' comprehension. In particular, half of the items in the original questionnaire were adjusted by simplifying their structures. Some compound and complex sentences were changed into simple sentences to avoid the conflict in responses to more than one clause within an item. For example, item "4. *I am open to modifying my own values, beliefs and behaviours and adapt to the social manners although I might not agree with these.*" was divided into two separate items and clarified: "4. *I am open to modifying my own values, beliefs and behaviours.*" and "6. *I am open to adapting to the social manners (for example with respect to greeting, clothing, etc.) of the country I am visiting, although I might not agree with these.*" The language used in some items was also simplified and unnecessary components were eliminated to be more participant-friendly yet ensure the contents they target. An example of this is the item 11: "*I judge other people when they behave in a way that I do not understand.*", which was originally "*I hold judgement of*

other people if they display unfamiliar behaviours that I may find difficult to understand". Besides, the participants commented that they found Question 1 in Section 1 confusing. Therefore, this item (originally *How often do you use English as a means of communication with a person of different culture?*) was clarified by paraphrasing "use English as a means of communication" to "are involved in interactions" and changing the word "culture" to "nationality" to give the participants a better idea. The respondents also shared that the students had no difficulty understanding and completing Section 3 of the questionnaire, which identify the pedagogical methods adopted in the English Literature course and explore its influences on the participants' intercultural competence development.

The second pilot was sent to 67 English majored students attending English Literature course in the first semester of the 2019 – 2020 academic year via a Google Form link. However, as the online surveys tend to generate lower response rates compared to paper-based face-to-face ones, only 32 of these informants provided their responses. The questionnaire was also piloted at UniFe before being delivered to the target participants. The researcher was able to ask only 5 Italian students attending the English Literature course in the 2019 – 2020 academic year to fill in the online version of the questionnaire and their feedback revealed that they had no problem understanding the items. The data generated were used to achieve the internal consistency of the items through the analysis of Cronbach's coefficient alpha as described in Table 3.6 provided in the next section.

3.4.3.3. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire

In designing the data collection tool, several measures were taken with the aim to maximize the reliability and validity of the items in the questionnaire, enhancing the validity and reliability of the quantitative data collected.

Apart from the rating item in Section 1, the questionnaire made use of rating scales, also known as interval scales or continuous scales. These scales allow informants to respond to options with assumed equal distances by choosing one that best aligns with their views. According to Cohen et al. (2018), rating scales are useful in research because they not only generate a flexible response but also determine frequencies, correlations and other forms of quantitative analysis. Specifically, rating scale responses have been proved more effective in measuring attitudinal components of intercultural competence compared to other measurements (Griffith et al., 2016). By determining a respondent's level of

agreement or disagreement with items reflecting components of intercultural competence, the researcher believes that their intercultural competence can be revealed in a certain level.

It should also be noted that when making decisions on the number of response options, the researcher was well aware that the participants may tend to avoid using extreme response categories and choose the mid-point of an odd point scale. This central tendency is particularly popular among East Asian respondents due to the influence of Confucian culture and the „doctrine of the mean“ (Cohen et al., 2018). The consequence is that the middle value becomes a safe option and its reliability may be questioned. Despite this risk, the researcher decided to use an odd number scaling system for a series of reasons. Firstly, the „neutral“ answer is still meaningful to the respondents and may provide important data for the study, making the scale of five more perceptive of students' attitudes and knowledge than that of four. Moreover, a „forced choice“ method may cause unease among informants, reducing response rates.

As a result, the questionnaire in this study made use of two types of five-level Likert scaling. The items in the Section 2 of the questionnaire used agreement, ranging from 1 as *Strongly disagree* to 5 as *Strongly agree*, with the mid-point 3 as *Neutral*, while the rating items in Section 3 of the questionnaire used frequency, ranging from 1 as *Never* to 5 as *Always*. In order to minimize possible problems associated with using scale items such as the misinterpretation of the mid-point, the items in questionnaire of this study were in the form of statements rather than questions and the mid-point was defined clearly with the label of *Neutral* rather than merely a number. Another effort to increase the reliability of the questionnaires was to provide a word-based label for each and every point on the scale instead of merely using labels for the end points of numerical scales. In particular, side point options were labelled carefully as *Slightly agree/disagree* as suggested by Worcester and Burns (1975, as cited in Tsang, 2012). Extreme words were also avoided in the end-point descriptors so as not to exert any significant impacts on respondents.

In addition, the design of the questionnaire used negative items apart from positive ones in each sub-dimension. This is because of the argument that negative wording can help obviate bias-related problems as well as to boost the participants' sense of responsibility in completing the questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2018). In particular, negative wording was applied in five items: 3, 7, 11, 12 and 17. They all lie in the first part of the questionnaire as an alert to the respondents when choosing responses, believing that they

would read the rest items carefully. Moreover, the researcher decided to use only a small number of negative items in order to make sure the mix of two ways of wording may not exert any serious effects on internal consistency of the scales yet still contribute to reducing the risks mentioned.

The reliability of the questionnaire was also evaluated by determining the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient with the use of SPSS. This was an attempt to assess how well the questionnaire measures what it should measure and whether it has internal consistency. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient often ranges from 0 to 1, with values over 0.7 to be considered as reliable (Pallant, 2011). It should be noted that for the set with less than ten items, the value of 0.6 is also regarded as acceptable. After the pilot test of the questionnaires was gathered from a subset of the population, responses were imported to SPSS. Separate tests of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient were run to test the internal consistency reliability of the items, including the sets of items under two categories – Attitudes and Knowledge in Section 2 and Section 3 of the post-questionnaire. The results showed that all sets of items have alpha coefficient greater than 0.6, which proves acceptable levels of reliability of the items. Besides, the alpha coefficients of all items in one scale set were positive, which shows positive correlation between them. Two items with weakest correlation (under 0.5) referring to Curiosity in Attitude dimension were removed from Section 2 of the questionnaire in order to increase their reliability, which ensures items are inter-related and can help obtain reliable data. The Table 3.6 summarises the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the sets of items in the questionnaire.

Table 3.6

Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the questionnaire

Section	Set of items	Cronbach’s alpha	Number of items
2	Respect	0.719	6
	Openness	0.712	6
	Curiosity and discovery	0.625	7
	Self-awareness	0.703	4
	Deep cultural knowledge	0.724	10
3	Literature teaching approaches	0.742	16

[Source: original by the researcher]

The content validity of the questionnaire, which refers to the extent to which a measure represents all facets of a given construct, was ensured. Firstly, the items were

adapted from credible sources and developed on the basis of a justified theoretical framework. Moreover, the adequacy of the response format was justified and the instructions and linguistic aspects of the items were clear thanks to the comments from the professors of the field. During the process of designing the tool, the researcher consulted her supervisors with their expertise of intercultural competence and English Literature teaching to make sure the items appear valid and measure what they aim to measure.

3.4.4. Reflective journal

Reflective journal is a common method used to collect qualitative data in educational field. According to Dahlberg and McCaig (2010), the reflective journal is also referred to as a kind of diary studies that records the participants' perspectives, feelings, behaviours and experiences, which allows their voices to be heard. By writing journals or diaries, subjects keep track and note down their experiences or activities in their own expressions by answering structured questions.

This current study collected qualitative data from reflective journal as it has been proved advantageous in educational research for the last decades (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). Firstly, journal is one of the most helpful methods to collect data in research that deals with personal thoughts, perceptions and experiences. The reflective journal is also beneficial in recording distinctive events and experiences of various subjects. Moreover, the participants have more autonomy and privacy to share what they want in journals compared to other methods such as interviews.

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the reflective journal, when designing the journal prompts (See Appendix B), the researcher came up with instructions about the procedure of writing. In particular, the instructions specifically address what to write about (what they acquire from the lessons), how the contents should be formatted (either as an essay or free writing), how long the journal entries should be (at least 200 words) and how important it is to write their thoughts as legibly as possible. A prompt and some guided questions were also provided to help the participants have a better idea of what to write and how to write the reflection. The prompt starts with "I learned that" to remind the participants to reflect on what they acquired from the lessons, then continues with "This is important because" to encourage them to write down their opinions. It ends with "As a result of this learning, I will" to let the participants assess the outcomes of what they had learnt. The suggested questions were mainly to remind the participants to touch upon how they perceive culture, how they react to cultural differences and what they have

acquired after the English Literature course. In this study, journals were written in soft form as compared to paper-and-pen ones, the online versions were more time-saving and convenient to collect in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.4.5. Interview

In this study, individual semi-structured interviews were utilised to yield information from UniFe participants. An interview occurs when the researcher asks one or more participants general, open-ended questions, records their answers, then transcribes and types the data into a computer file for analysis (Creswell, 2012). Since reflective journals could not be used at UniFe as the researcher was not present due to the Covid-19 pandemic, online interviews were adopted with the aim to gather direct evidence on the students' intercultural competence and their perceptions of how the English Literature course influence their attitudes and knowledge towards culture. The data were expected to be triangulated with the results of the questionnaire to form a more valid and comprehensive picture at the students' intercultural competence as well as provide an answer to the third research question of the study.

The study made use of semi-structured interviews because they not only can help ensure that the questions can be fully understood and respondents' answers can be more easily achieved but also enable the interviewer to gain more in-depth information about an interesting point in the respondent's answers. The participants attended the interviews on voluntary basis and contacted through the email addresses they provided in the questionnaire. In order to facilitate the procedure, each interview was carried out according to a semi-structured interview protocol. It is helpful in structuring the interview, reminding the interviewer of the questions and recording notes (Cohen et al., 2018). The interview questions (See Appendix C) were developed on the basis of the Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, which were also used as guided questions for the journals at HANU. Although the researcher was aware of the misunderstanding that may be caused, all the interviews had to be conducted in English as it is the only means of communication between the researcher and the UniFe students.

3.5. Data collection procedure

Particular attention was directed to data collection procedure because, among many other factors, the quality of the study depends significantly on the quality of data collection procedure (Bryman, 2012). Adopting a convergent mixed methods design, the collection

of data at HANU took place during the second term of the academic year 2019 - 2020 and the first term of the academic year 2020 - 2021, while data at UniFe were collected during the second term of the academic year 2020 - 2021 when the researcher was present at the locations of research. A common procedure was carried out at both locations of research to facilitate the systematic collection of data and their comparability. In detail, at each location, national documents were gathered from credible online sources while university documents were provided by the instructors in charge of the English Literature courses. At HANU, face-to-face classes were observed, printed questionnaires were delivered on site to the participants and some of them were required to write reflective journals. Meanwhile, at UniFe, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions at the time of data collection, online classes were observed, the questionnaire was sent to the students via their emails in the form of an online link and interviews with the participants were carried out online. The following section describes the procedure in details along with the descriptions of the research instruments adopted.

At HANU, the policy texts concerning the context of English higher education and literature teaching at tertiary levels were accessed. They include documents at ministerial and university levels: the Decision No. 36/2004/QĐ-BGD&ĐT issued by Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training promulgating the Curricula of Foreign Language Studies in Higher Education, the English Studies curriculum at HANU and the English Literature syllabus. The governments' policy texts were accessed through the official websites of the Ministries, while the university documents were provided by the instructors at the two institutions.

During the course, two classes of English Literature were observed with a total number of seven hours of teaching and learning. As mentioned in section 3.5.3, the researcher carried out unstructured observations in the classes with the role of non-participant observer using a predetermined checklist and notes. The observations were overt, rather than covert, as the instructors provided the researcher with their consent and the students were informed of her appearance in the beginning of the first class she observed. The researcher sat in the back of the classrooms, which facilitated her observations. During the classes, she took notes of phenomena taking place in the classes, including teaching activities, students' interactions, behaviours and attitudes as a way to collect unpredicted incidents and information happening in the observations. It was pretty easy for her to listen to and notice the students' comments and discussions during the class by sitting near a group of them.

The questionnaire was handed out to the participants at HANU in the last lesson of the English Literature course. The researcher decided to show up in the classrooms to provide detailed explanations about the research and its objectives so that the students could have an overall understanding about intercultural competence and (inter)cultures addressed in the research. This was an attempt to make sure that the meanings of the items in the questionnaires were correctly comprehended, thus, ensure the reliability and validity of the research instrument. At the outset, the students were informed of aim of the whole research as well as the questionnaire, its structure with the number of items and the time they may have to spend filling them in. To avoid unwanted effects on the responses, the researcher stressed that the students should neither try to provide „ideal“ results to „please“ her nor worry that their academic performance may be judged based on how they answer the questionnaire. They were also reminded that their identity would be kept anonymous throughout and after the research to encourage more honest responses. After that, each questionnaire was distributed to each participant. During the time, the researcher went out of the classroom to prevent her presence at the site from exerting unnecessary pressure or other kinds of effects on the participants and their responses. Before collecting the questionnaires in person after the participants finished filling them out, the researcher asked them to check whether they left any item incomplete in order to ensure the validity of the responses.

After collecting the questionnaires, the researcher contacted the respondents willing to participate in another part of the study via the email addresses and phone numbers they provided in the questionnaires. While twenty three respondents were willing to continue participating in the study, after receiving a clear explanation of how the qualitative data would be collected through reflective journal, only ten of them agreed to attend. The researcher sent an email to these participants to provide them with writing prompt and a list of guided questions for the reflection. The participants were asked to send their journals within two weeks after the end of the English Literature course and reminder emails were sent to those who failed to submit their journals timely.

At UniFe, the researcher got access to the Decree No. 245 issued by Italy Ministry of University and Research promulgating the Determination of the classes of university degrees, the Modern Languages and Literatures curriculum and the English Literature III syllabus. Four online classes were observed, equal to eight hours of teaching and learning, through the Blackboard platform. During the observations, the researcher also took notes

of the teaching activities and the students' responses, both in verbal form when they raised voices and in written form as messages in the chat box during the classes.

The researcher also distributed an online version of the questionnaire to the UniFe students so as to collect quantitative data. An email was sent to all the students attending the course on English Literature III with a description of the aim of the study and the deadline for the responses. Being aware that the online surveys tend to generate lower response rates compared to paper-based self-administered ones (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2020), reminders to encourage the completion of the questionnaire were sent after the initial email. All responses were gathered after four weeks.

Via the email addresses provided by five participants willing to be interviewed, the researcher provided a detailed explanation of the study and its purposes. Schedules for interviews were agreed based on the participants' availability. The interviews were performed online via Google Meet because the participants were not present in the location of research due to the Covid-19 pandemic at the time of data collection. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher reminded the interviewees of the purposes of the study and the protection of their confidentiality. The interview was recorded and used a list of prepared questions, which was also provided for the participants writing reflective journals at HANU. Notes were also taken during the interview so as to facilitate the organisation of themes later in the data analysis.

3.6. Data analysis

Different methods were employed to analyse the two separate sets of quantitative and qualitative data of the current study. This section describes the analysis of each dataset.

3.6.1. Analysis of qualitative data

The analyses of qualitative data in the current study involved the analyses of the documents, the observations, the HANU students' journals and the transcribed interviews with UniFe students. In general, these analyses followed five major interrelated steps: organising and transcribing data, exploring and coding data, building descriptions and themes as key findings, representing and reporting findings, and interpreting findings. Within these steps, the Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence was used as the basis for analysis.

The current study selected the content analysis approach. According to Cohen et al. (2018), content analysis has the advantage of bringing language, linguistic features and

meaning in context into sharp focus. Besides, this method allows verifying data through re-analysis as the data are in a permanent form of texts. This approach which involves searching and coding a documentary text for themes to be analysed (Neuman, 2009). Coding is the process of making sense out of text data, segmenting, labelling the text to form broad themes in the data, examining codes for overlap and redundancy and collapsing them into broad themes (Creswell, 2012). Codes are created as a result of the coding process and are used to label and retrieve data efficiently.

The analysis of the policy documents was carried out mainly on the basis of pre-determined descriptive codes. Therefore, only certain parts of the curricula and syllabi were analysed. These parts contain codes that were identified by the key concepts and theoretical framework adopted in the study, including the dimensions of intercultural competence and their components as well as the approaches to teaching literature. The analysis also made use of the codes that emerged from the data through the process of coding itself in order to acquire a rich qualitative dataset.

Regarding the observations, the researcher read the field notes several times and conducted data analysis each time in order to obtain deeper understanding of the data. The analysis of this kind of data followed a temporal sequence (chronology) of the field notes to report critical or crucial activities and behaviours. Analytic codes were used to form interpretations of events presented, involving the recorded times each activity was carried out in the classes based on the checklist.

With regards to the analyses of reflective journal, the researcher analysed all responses of a single participant and then moved on to the next participant. According to Cohen et al. (2018), this way of analysis helps retain the coherence and integrity of a participant's responses and allows the comprehensive portrayal of that individual. In particular, she read the journals written by each participant for several times to gain general sense of the data and marked the texts with descriptive codes to have an overview of the segments reflected and described. This process employed hand analysis rather than any software, as it is more convenient for small database and provides hands-on feeling (Creswell, 2012). After individual analysis, the researcher brought together the issues addressed in all participants' journals and used analytic codes to mark the texts. In doing this, she searched for common themes relevant to the development of attitude and knowledge dimensions of intercultural competence in the responses as well as agreement and disagreement among them. The discussion of the results was also drawn on how the

participants perceived the influences of English Literature teaching and learning on their attitudes towards and knowledge of cultures and (inter)cultures.

The recordings of interviews were transcribed and converted into text data to prepare for the hand analysis with no use of computer programs. In particular, the researcher read the text, marked parts of the text by hand and divided it into segments. The process of coding and forming themes to come up with the key findings was similar to the analysis of the participants' reflective journals.

3.6.2. Analysis of quantitative data

The analysis of the quantitative dataset provided by the questionnaire consists of three major steps, including screening the data, preparing and organising the data for analysis and choosing and using the techniques for analysing the quantitative data. It was carried out with the help of a statistical software package named Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS), originally named Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. This software is used widely in social sciences to analyse statistics and has relatively user-friendly interface. SPSS was chosen out of many software programs thanks to its benefits. It is simple for even beginners to use and often assists in analysis and attainment of results, even though the collected data set is large (Pallant, 2011).

Upon receipt of survey responses in each location of research, the returned responses were checked for completion to make sure they were valid. After that, the researcher entered the responses manually into SPSS with numeric variables and in form of ordinal data. The numbers entered into SPSS represents the „weight“ of the Likert scale, with Strongly disagree=1, Slightly disagree=2, Neutral=3, Slightly agree=4 and Strongly Agree=5 for Section 2 and Never=1, Rarely=2, Sometimes=3, Often=4 and Always=5 for Section 3. The negatively stated items in Section 2 were then recoded as different variables by reversing values from 1 as Strongly disagree to 5, from 2 as Slightly disagree to 4, from 4 as Slightly agree to 2, and from 5 as Strongly agree to 1. This is necessary in order to avoid distorting the outcome results of the questionnaire.

With the help of SPSS, the researcher carried out descriptive analyses to report the results provided in the Section 2 and Section 3 of the questionnaire regarding the intercultural competence of the participants and the approaches to English Literature teaching adopted in the courses, respectively. The individual items in Section 2 were combined into a single composite score in accordance to the subcategories to measure the intended aspect either as a sum or the mean of the combined items. For Section 2, means

and standard deviations of the groups of items in the subsections were identified. Mean refers to the average value, which is the most common measure of central tendency, and standard deviation shows how much variation there is from the average value (Pallant, 2011). In order to understand the means to determine the central tendencies of the items' responses, the weighted averages for the scale were calculated. This was done by dividing the distances between the scale values (4 in a 5-point Likert scale) by the number of values (5); and the period length ($4/5 = 0.80$) is then used to interpret the weighted averages. Besides, the analysis also examined the frequencies of responses to each item in Section 2 and Section 3 to describe the trends in the data.

3.6.3. Triangulation of two data sets

Since the nature of the mixed research method study comprises both the quantitative and qualitative data, it was crucial to merge and integrate the two different types of data analysis together. Regarding when to mix and how to mix different data sets, Creswell (2012) suggested that the two types of data might be compared, consolidated or integrated at various stages: the data collection, the data analysis, interpretation or at all the three phases. In the current study, the mixing of data occurred at data interpretation, which means after each type of data had been objectively analysed without being affected by the analytical result of other types of data. In other words, after separate analyses, the two types of data were merged and triangulated in order to form final interpretations of the research findings and answer the research questions. Therefore, the study presented the qualitative and quantitative data collection separately but combined them in the analysis and interpretation to seek convergence or similarities among the results.

3.7. Ethical considerations

It is inevitable that ethics should be taken into careful consideration in conducting research studies, particularly in educational settings and those involving human subjects. Indeed, Creswell (2012) emphasizes the need for ethical considerations to occur at multiple points in the research process, from what and whom to study to how data is managed and used, even to how the research is published and communicated. The following steps were taken throughout the research process in order to guarantee no ethical criteria were violated.

Prior to the study, necessary approval of the institutional and department leaders were obtained to gain access to the participants, implement the research and collect data although the researcher works in the university. The leaders were informed of the purposes

of the research, the time span and its expected outcomes as well as contributions to the institution and department. This was expected to generate more values to the research and avoid unnecessary interruptions during the research process.

Before the data collection process, the researcher respected the participants' willingness to participate in the survey. The participants were clearly informed that they have the rights to withdraw at any stage of writing journals and to have their personal information kept confidential. This is to ensure their participation in the research is based on voluntary grounds and confidentiality is guaranteed with their privacy and anonymity reassured. The instructors of English Literature received explanations about the potential of the research to improve their teaching so as to agree with the researcher's observations to be undertaken.

During data collection phase, the participants were regularly reminded of the purposes of the study so that they could provide the most reliable and valid information as possible. They were also motivated by the benefits of participating in the research, which include either gifts or positive effects on their learning process.

The analysis of data after the collection phase made sure that confidentiality was maintained by replacing the name of the participants in the journal entries with numbers to protect the participants' identities and not sharing the questionnaires with any individuals outside the project. Data were then reported honestly without making any changes to the findings to satisfy any certain interests. Last but not least, credit was given for materials quoted from other studies to avoid plagiarism.

3.8. Summary of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 has explained the rationale for adopting mix methods approach as it is the most appropriate research design for this study. It also discusses in details the methods and instruments of data collection and analysis with a clear description of the procedure of gathering and analysing data. An overview of the research procedure is provided in Figure 3.1.

First, the national and university documents were gathered to explore the context of intercultural competence development and literature teaching at tertiary level. Besides, the English Literature lessons at two locations of research were observed to obtain data regarding the approaches to teaching literature. At the end of the courses, a printed questionnaire was delivered to 105 third-year English language majored students and its online version was sent to 30 third-year students of English Language and Literatures at

UniFe as a self-assessment tool to identify their intercultural competence. 10 of the HANU participants were recruited to write reflective journals and 5 of the UniFe participants were interviewed to explore the dimensions of intercultural competence they developed after the course. Both quantitative and qualitative results were triangulated and merged to form answers to the research questions, particularly to identify whether their intercultural competence was developed and how the teaching of English Literature influenced their development of intercultural competence.

The next chapter reports the findings of the study and provides an analysis and discussion of data gathered by quantitative and qualitative instruments, including national and institutional documents, observation of English Literature lessons, questionnaires for students, reflective journals by HANU participants and interviews with UniFe participants.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of Chapter 4 is to report, analyse and interpret the mixed data collected from HANU, Vietnam and UniFe, Italy and offer answers to the research questions of the study. It consists of three major sections: the first section presents data collected from HANU, the second section provides data gathered from UniFe, offering in-depth understanding of these two locations of research, their students' intercultural competence and the approaches to teaching English Literature. Each of these two sections is structured on the basis of the data collection procedure carried out in each location of research. Accordingly, each section analyses data from ministerial and university documents, from observations of English Literature lessons, from questionnaires delivered to the participants, as well as from reflective journals by HANU students and interviews with UniFe students. The third section provides a cross-case comparison and triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative results of the previous two sections to arrive at three key findings concerning the English Literature teaching at HANU and UniFe, the participants' levels of attitude and knowledge as constituents of intercultural competence, and the influences of English Literature courses on the students' development of intercultural competence.

4.1. Research location 1: HANU - Vietnam

4.1.1. Document analysis: The context in Vietnam

The undergraduate programs in English Studies in Vietnamese higher education have a particular focus on language and linguistics with some mixture of literature and culture, aiming at providing students with a good grasp of English language, both theoretically and in practice.

On October 25, 2004, the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training issued the Decision No. 36/2004/QĐ-BGD&ĐT issued by Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training promulgating the Curricula of Foreign Language Studies in Higher Education. Accordingly, each particular institution holds a decision regarding the specific contents of teaching, as long as they are in line with the general framework provided by the Ministry of Education and Training. Unlike English classes in general education where teaching time is often devoted to exercise of grammar and reading skill, English language majored students at university level are trained with four important language skills, including listening, speaking, reading and writing, to equip them with an ability to perform fluent

communication. They then have a chance to acquire specialized knowledge and skills that are necessary for their future career.

As stated in the Decision, the undergraduate program in English Language Studies should last four years and have the following general objective:

Đào tạo cử nhân ngành Tiếng Anh có đủ kiến thức, kỹ năng nghề nghiệp, phẩm chất chính trị, đạo đức, tác phong nghề nghiệp và sức khỏe tốt để có thể làm việc có hiệu quả trong các lĩnh vực chuyên môn có sử dụng tiếng Anh, đáp ứng được yêu cầu của xã hội và của nền kinh tế trong quá trình hội nhập quốc tế. (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, Section 1)

To provide students with sufficient knowledge, professional skills, political qualities, ethics, professional manners and good health to be able to work effectively in specialized fields where English is used, meeting the requirements of society and economy in the process of international integration. [Translation mine]

This objective demonstrates an ambition to stimulate comprehensive development of a student in response to fairly demanding needs of the modern socio-economic context for a high quality labour force of trained professionals in „specialized fields“. On this account, English Studies represents a curriculum that is more technical and vocational given the economic context of a developing country like Vietnam. The study of English language represents an endeavour to acquire more than merely language proficiency. The objective also mentions crucial aspects that are often required by employers on the basis of a competence model, namely knowledge, attitudes and skills. In addition, although intercultural competence is not explicitly addressed, „the requirements of society and economy in the process of international integration“ mentioned in the goal indicates that students should be prepared for encounters with different cultures and thus, there is also a need to develop their intercultural competence.

The Decision then states that the training program should help students achieve four main specific objectives. The first two of them address knowledge and skills of different areas:

Goal 1: Cung cấp cho sinh viên kiến thức tương đối rộng về ngôn ngữ Anh, văn hóa, xã hội, và văn học Anh-Mỹ;

Goal 2: Rèn luyện và phát triển các kỹ năng giao tiếp tiếng Anh ở mức độ tương đối thành thạo trong các tình huống giao tiếp xã hội và chuyên môn thông thường.

(Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, Section 1)

Goal 1: To provide students with a relatively broad knowledge of the English language, English-American culture, society, and literature;

Goal 2: To train and develop students' English communication skills at a relatively proficient level in common professional and social communication situation. [Translation mine]

It can be inferred from the first objective that language, culture and literature are considered to be equally important and interrelated, thus, should be taught simultaneously in the program. The second objective focuses on the training of English language as a tool of communication, both in social and professional contexts. Through these two objectives, the Decision seems to indicate that proficient use of the language does not only require the development of communication skills but also knowledge of language, culture and literature. Therefore, an equal amount of training should be devoted to attain these two objectives.

The Decision also provides a structure to help institutions develop their curricula with a list of courses to be included. Accordingly, English and American Literature courses are among those offering core knowledge, together with courses on English foundational skills, English and American cultures and linguistics. It can be clearly seen that language skills, literature and culture are taught separately as individual courses during the program. Moreover, the proportion of credits students earn from courses on English and American literature and culture accounts for merely 15% of those from courses on English foundational skills. It can thus be inferred that unless culture and literature are integrated in courses on language skills, there seems to be less attention paid to English literature and culture in the training program. A plausible explanation for this curriculum design may be that English Literature is dealt with mainly as a subject through which students can cultivate their language skills.

However, as can be found in the Decision, despite being given a similar weight in the curriculum, the module containing literature of the English Studies program is structured differently compared to that of the countries where other foreign languages are spoken. In particular, the one in the curricula of French, German and Russian Studies is divided into smaller categories with two units each, including the History of literature, the 19th century literature and the 20th century literature. In the Chinese Studies program, this module comprises the History of literature and Chinese literary texts with two and three

units, respectively. That of the Japanese program is broken into the History of literature with two units and two courses on Japanese literary texts with two units for each. Meanwhile, this module in the English Studies program includes merely courses on English literature and American literature with three units each and does not provide separate courses on the history of literature and literary texts. This difference appears to signal a study of English literature in a quite general sense.

With the aim to increase the flexibility of the curriculum and give more weight to English literature, the Decision gives authority to institutions to take into consideration the forces within them, including the focus of their training and the numbers of instructors. It notes that:

Học phần này có thể phát triển thêm khối lượng để trở thành hai học phần Văn học Anh và văn học Mỹ hoặc văn học của các nước sử dụng tiếng Anh khác, tùy tình hình mỗi trường. (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, Section 3.18)

The Literature unit can be divided into English Literature and American Literature, or Literature of other English-speaking countries, depending on the situation of each institution. [Translation mine]

Besides, the Decision states that students have to take a course on Fundamentals of Vietnamese Culture, which is considered the basis for foreign language learning. This highlights the importance of students' self-awareness of their own culture, a sub-construct of intercultural competence. Moreover, the course on Vietnamese Culture must also be a prerequisite for those on English or American literature and culture, requiring students to understand their culture before acquiring knowledge of others. This could also pave the way for the students' development of intercultural competence during the learning process.

The Decision also describes some requirements for courses on English or American Literature. It states that courses on English Foundational Skills and Fundamentals of Vietnamese Culture are prerequisites for those on English or American. In other words, the students need to acquire an intermediate level of English language before learning about English or American Literature. This requirement can be considered as an attempt to help the students avoid the challenge that Hussein and Al-Emami (2016) discussed in their study, which may be presented by students' low proficiency in English

language when reading literature. In addition, the general goal of English or American Literature courses should be:

Truyền thụ kiến thức lịch sử văn học Anh/Mỹ nhằm giúp sinh viên cảm thụ và đánh giá được cái hay cái đẹp của văn học Anh/Mỹ, giá trị văn hóa xã hội của tác phẩm và bước đầu hiểu được việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ văn học thông qua một số tác giả và tác phẩm được lựa chọn. (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, Section 3.18)

To impart knowledge of history of English/American literature to help students perceive and appreciate the beauty of English/American literature, the socio-cultural values of the work, and initially understand the use of literary language through a number of selected authors and works. [Translation mine]

This goal clearly indicates that the teaching of English or American literature should help students have positive attitudes towards, and „appreciate“, socio-cultural aspects contained in the literary works. It should also equip students with „socio-cultural values of the work“, in other words, knowledge of society and culture. The understanding of how literary language is used is also stated in this goal, which means that the course should raise the students“ linguistic awareness. Therefore, it can be inferred that without being explicitly stated, different sub-constructs of intercultural competence are addressed in this general goal and should be paid attention to during the design of the English or American Literature syllabus.

The Decision also determines some expected learning outcomes to be attained by students at the end of the English or American Literature course. These outcomes do not only take into consideration the development of language skills and literary analysis but also the acquisition of knowledge of English-American literature, society and age depicted in the literary works. In particular, the students are expected to:

- Đọc và hiểu được ngôn ngữ tác phẩm nguyên bản;
- Biết phân tích và đánh giá một tác phẩm văn học, qua đó biết đánh giá một tác giả;
- Nắm được một cách hệ thống sự phát triển của văn học Anh-Mỹ;
- Hiểu được xã hội và thời đại phản ánh trong các tác phẩm.

(Ministry of Education and Training, 2004, Section 3.18)

- Read and understand the language of the original work;
- Analyse and evaluate a literary work, thereby knowing how to evaluate an author;
- Systematically grasp the development of English-American literature;

- Understand society and times reflected in the writings. [Translation mine]

The goal concerning language used in literary works seems to be formulated on the basis of a belief that literature can make a useful contribution to the students' improvement of language skills, as proposed by Duff and Maley (1990). Besides, the fourth goal also highlights the potential of literature in equipping learners with historical and social knowledge. Intercultural competence implicitly suggested in the general goal of the course is still maintained and demonstrated among the expected learning outcomes for students.

On the basis of the curriculum promulgated in the Decision by the Ministry of Education and Training, Hanoi University developed a full-time undergraduate program in English Language Studies that lasts four years. It follows a credit-based system that requires the students to earn a total of 154 credits. The final award presented to the students is „Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies“. In this program, two curricula are provided for the students to choose after the first two academic years: Translation/Interpreting or English language pedagogy. Graduates holding a degree in English Language Studies can become translators, interpreters, instructors or researchers in English linguistics or English language teaching methodology.

In alignment with its vision and missions, Hanoi University has mediated the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Training and developed its curricula of English Language Studies. The curricula discussed in this study are the most up-to-date one, reviewed in 2019 and verified by the Ministry of Education and Training. The general objective of this undergraduate program is addressed in the curriculum as:

[...] trang bị cho người học các kiến thức cơ bản về ngôn ngữ học; giúp người học phát triển năng lực chuyên môn và kỹ năng nghề nghiệp trong hai lĩnh vực: Biên-Phiên dịch và Phương pháp giảng dạy tiếng Anh. Song song với kiến thức chuyên môn và kỹ năng nghề nghiệp, người học cũng được cung cấp các cơ hội rèn luyện phát triển bản thân ở nhiều lĩnh vực khác: [...], có thái độ và đạo đức phù hợp để làm việc trong môi trường đa ngôn ngữ, đa văn hóa; có khả năng thích ứng cao với những thay đổi nhanh chóng của thời đại khoa học công nghệ và toàn cầu hóa. (Hanoi University, 2019, Section 1.1)

[...] equip the learners with fundamental knowledge of language studies; help the learners develop professional competence and skills in two curricula: Translation/Interpreting studies and English language pedagogy. Besides, learners are also provided with opportunities to develop themselves in many other areas: [...], have attitudes and ethics

suitable to work in a multilingual, multicultural environment; attain a high level of adaptability to the rapid changes of the era of science, technology and globalization.
[Translation mine]

This general objective is clearer than the one provided in the Ministry's guidelines as it does not only specify the curricula of the program but also the context in which students could work after graduation. The training program, therefore, focuses on developing the students' professional competence, involving language proficiency, in association with others. As it aims to prepare the students for „a multilingual, multicultural environment“, intercultural competence should also be developed. Accordingly, the students are supposed to reach nine specific goals, two of which specifically address knowledge of languages and cultures:

MT1: Có thể sử dụng thành thạo tiếng Anh;

MT5: Hiểu biết cơ bản về văn hóa xã hội của một số nước nói tiếng Anh, điển hình là các nước Anh, Úc, Mỹ cũng như văn hóa xã hội của Việt Nam, góp phần phát triển khả năng thích nghi, hòa đồng nhanh với môi trường đa văn hóa; (Hanoi University, 2019, Section 1.2)

Goal 1: Be proficient in English language;

Goal 5: Have a basic understanding about the culture and society of some English-speaking countries, particularly the UK, Australia and the US, as well as the culture and society of Vietnam, developing the ability to adapt quickly to a multicultural environment;
[Translation mine]

Although these goals are developed according to the Ministry's guidelines, there are some differences between the two. Language proficiency comes first among the nine goals provided by HANU, implying that it is the focus of the curriculum at the university even though there is no notice with regards to the goals' order of importance. Its usage is intended in a broader sense than „communication skills“ in the specific goals described in the Ministry's guidelines. In addition, although the association between language and culture is still taken into consideration and demonstrated in Goal 5, it draws more attention to developing intercultural competence, particularly cultural self-awareness, by addressing the understanding of the students' own culture. Literature is no longer directly mentioned as in any specific goal, probably because it is considered as a constituent of the umbrella

term „culture“. Moreover, English is dealt with from wider national views, centred not only on the UK and the US but also Australia.

In light of the general goal and specific objectives, upon accomplishing the program, the students are expected to achieve various learning outcomes regarding attitudes, knowledge and skills. This way of categorising the outcomes helps clarify and facilitate the development of each component. In particular, the students are supposed to:

Thái độ:

TD1: [...] có lòng nhân ái, khoan dung, cảm thông, chia sẻ, cởi mở với mọi người.

TD3: Thể hiện sự cởi mở với đối tượng văn hóa và triết lý của các nền văn hóa khác nhau; tôn trọng sự khác biệt, [...], có tinh thần học hỏi cầu tiến.

Kiến thức:

KT8: Vận dụng kiến thức thực hành tiếng Anh để phục vụ cho các hoạt động giao tiếp hàng ngày cũng như trong chuyên môn; [...].

KT9: Hệ thống hóa các kiến thức cơ bản về đất nước, con người, lịch sử, chính trị, địa lý, văn hóa, xã hội, văn học của một số nước nói tiếng Anh như Anh, Úc, Mỹ để có thể giao tiếp thành công trong môi trường đa văn hóa, hỗ trợ tích cực cho công tác biên phiên dịch, giảng dạy, nghiên cứu và các công việc khác liên quan.

KT11: Áp dụng các kiến thức về ngôn ngữ, văn hóa xã hội để tác nghiệp trong các lĩnh vực ngoại giao, chính trị, kinh tế-thương mại, du lịch, môi trường và giảng dạy tiếng Anh. (Hanoi University, 2019, Section 1.3)

Attitudes:

A1: [...] show benevolence, tolerance, sympathy, sharing, and openness to everyone.

A3: Show openness to cultural practices and philosophies of different cultures, respect differences, [...], have a spirit of progressive learning.

Knowledge:

K8: Apply English foundational skills in daily life communication as well as in professional work; [...].

K9: Systemize basic knowledge of country, people, history, politics, geography, culture, society, literature of some English-speaking countries such as the UK, Australia, the US to be able to communicate successfully in a multicultural environment, facilitate translation/interpreting, teaching, research and other relevant tasks.

K11: Apply knowledge of language, culture and society in performing translation/interpreting tasks in the field of diplomacy, politics, economy-trade, tourism and environment as well as in English teaching. [Translation mine]

These learning outcomes put forth a belief that students' intercultural competence, especially cultural attitudes and cultural knowledge, are crucial to their successful work performance. In detail, several components of intercultural competence are included in these learning outcomes. They are intercultural attitudes, namely respect and openness to cultures, and cultural knowledge. These outcomes also clearly demonstrate the program's focus on the effectiveness of communication. In particular, language skills and multi-disciplinary knowledge all serve the purposes of facilitating students' communication and interaction in the contexts where English language is used. That is to say, the study of literature is viewed as an important support to the study of language. Moreover, as addressed in objective K9, literature is considered as a field separate from culture and others, probably signalling its inclusion as an individual subject in the curriculum. These outcomes also imply the premise that English literature could contribute to the learners' language performance and intercultural development, especially the acquisition of cultural knowledge.

With the aim to help students achieve the goals and learning outcomes, the BA program requires students to gain 154 credits of various courses on different subjects. They include courses on foundation knowledge, professional knowledge (containing basic knowledge of the discipline, knowledge of discipline and professional knowledge of a curriculum) and internship and graduation thesis. Vietnamese is used only for general and basic courses while English is used as a means of instructions in the rest of the program. Following the Ministry's Decision, culture and literature are taught in separate courses, apart from those on foundation skills and linguistics. Students can attend the English Literature course after finishing courses on general knowledge, basic knowledge of the discipline and language skills. According to Vera (1991), it makes sense to include literature at this stage when students have acquired sufficient linguistic competence. There is one compulsory course on English Literature in the whole program and it weighs 4 credits, one tenth of the total credits given to knowledge of the discipline. The course is delivered in 13 lessons with 3.5 hours each lesson including lectures, presentation, discussion and tutorials, where students can use English language as a means of communication. Since the objectives in the curricula mention literature of English speaking countries, American literature is taught in a selective course but weighs only 2 credits and consists of 7 lessons despite similar objectives. This demonstrates the Department's priority for English literature, probably because English literature emerged much earlier than American literature, thus, the English style is considered richer.

Accordingly, the course descriptions states that the English Literature course aims to provide students with basic understanding of English literature, including an overview of the history of English literature with relevant socio-cultural and historical backgrounds. Another aim of the course is to refine the students' skills in reading, perceiving and analysing a literary work, thereby deepening their insights into the ideological contents, values and artistic characteristics of the work. The course description also emphasizes the link between English literature and English foundational skills and other modules, particularly its contribution to more comprehensive attitudes and knowledge. To achieve these aims, the objectives are clarified as follow:

MT1: Cung cấp kiến thức cơ bản về các giai đoạn và trào lưu văn học tiêu biểu của nền văn học Anh từ thời kỳ cổ đại đến hiện đại;

MT2: Giới thiệu về bối cảnh lịch sử, xã hội, các đặc điểm văn học, tác giả và tác phẩm tiêu biểu gắn chặt với các giai đoạn lịch sử, các đặc điểm văn hóa thể chế của Anh;

MT3: Giải thích nội dung tư tưởng và đặc điểm nghệ thuật của tác phẩm đồng thời có thể phân tích các giá trị nội dung và nghệ thuật của một tác phẩm văn học được viết bằng tiếng Anh. (Hanoi University, 2019, Section 4)

MT1: Provide basic knowledge about typical literary trends and periods of English and American literature from ancient to modern times;

MT2: Introduce historical and social contexts, literary characteristics, authors and typical works closely associated with historical periods, cultural and institutional characteristics of the UK;

MT3: Explain the ideological contents and artistic characteristics of the work and analyse the contents and artistic values of a literary work written in English. [Translation mine]

It can be seen that the course objectives are mainly devoted to equipping the students with cultural knowledge and perspectives, which could facilitate the development of intercultural competence. On this basis, the students may also be exposed to various sets of values and ideologies, thus, their attitudes towards different cultures could be challenged and developed. Moreover, on the completion of the course, students are expected to achieve a series of learning outcomes. They must:

Thái độ:

TĐ1: Ý thức được tầm quan trọng của việc học học phần Văn học Anh;

Kiến thức:

KT1: Nhận dạng chính xác và đầy đủ các thời kỳ của lịch sử văn học Anh từ cổ đại đến hiện đại;

KT2: Mô tả rõ ràng các thể loại văn học tương ứng với từng thời kỳ;

KT3: Tóm tắt được nội dung của các tác phẩm tiêu biểu và có thể trình diễn lại lưu loát bằng tiếng Anh;

KT4: Nhận diện được các biện pháp nghệ thuật và giải thích tác dụng của các biện pháp đó trong việc truyền tải thông điệp nội dung của tác phẩm;

KT5: Vận dụng được kiến thức lịch sử văn học vào các hoạt động ngôn ngữ thực tiễn.

(Hanoi University, 2019, Section 5)

Attitudes:

A1: Be aware of the importance of the English Literature course;

Knowledge:

K1: Have accurate and sufficient knowledge of the history of English literature from ancient to modern times;

K2: Clearly describe literary genres corresponding to each period;

K3: Summarize the content of typical works and perform them fluently in English;

K4: Identify stylistic devices and explain their effects in conveying the message of the work;

K5: Apply knowledge of literary history to practical language activities. [Translation mine]

These outcomes seem to highlight the potential of learning English literature as a bridge to more successful encounters with foreign people using English as a means of communication. In particular, English literature is believed to make contributions to different aspects of a proficient use of English as a foreign language, including not only English language skills (as mentioned in the learning outcome 3 and 4) but also background knowledge of history and culture (as mentioned in the learning outcome 1, 2 and 5). The third outcome focuses on equipping students with the ability to use English language in a particular context and for a literary purpose with stylistic devices. Meanwhile, the fifth outcome emphasises the importance of cultural knowledge in intercultural interaction. Moreover, although cultural knowledge is specifically addressed, components of intercultural attitudes are not included. The outcome regarding attitude only takes into consideration the awareness of the importance of English literature. These outcomes can be considered as a guideline for instructors to make decisions on the

approaches they would adopt throughout the course, which are not clearly stated in the curriculum.

On the basis of the course objectives and learning outcomes, the indicative teaching schedule is developed on the basis of literary periods. The teaching is thus devoted to Old and Medieval English literature (Lesson 1 and 2), Renaissance period (Lesson 3 and 4), Enlightenment period (Lesson 5), Romanticism (Lesson 6 and 7), Victorian Age or Realism (Lesson 8), the 20th century literature or Modernism (Lesson 9 and 10), Gothic literature (Lesson 11). During the lessons on each period, particular authors and literary works are also introduced to students, allowing them to learn to be exposed to different literary genres, namely poem, short story and novel extract. In the last two lessons of the course, students are introduced to some common writing techniques, literary concepts and devices, plot organisation, characters and characterisations. Although the instructors have to follow the indicative teaching schedule, they are offered a lot of flexibility about which texts they would like the students to work with in each lesson (ranging from canonical works by Shakespeare to more contemporary texts such as 1984 by George Orwell as observed in the researched courses). Since the minor proportion of the course is spent on the analysis of literary works, it is likely that the course gives more focus to the history of English literature to help students explore the historical, social and cultural contexts. This design is in line with the aims of the course, providing opportunities for the students to experience attitudes towards various cultural elements and expand their cultural knowledge.

Regarding the teaching approaches, it is stated in the curriculum (in Section 6) that both instructors and students play crucial roles in the carrying out activities in the class. In particular, both instructor-centred and student-centred approaches should be adopted and combined through different activities such as lecture, discussion, project, problem-solving tasks and self-study. This requirement sets a basis for the students to have more autonomy and interaction during their learning process, thus, their critical thinking could be improved.

To conclude, the English Department, Hanoi University has developed a curriculum that acts a mediator between the demands of the society, including employers, government agencies, and the „culture“ of the institution. It can be seen from the curriculum required by the Vietnamese Government and the one provided at the Hanoi University that although intercultural competence is not implicitly addressed, it is interwoven in the general objective and specific goals of the program. Indeed, the

acquisition of socio-cultural knowledge and the ability to work in multicultural environments are mentioned and some sub-constructs of intercultural skills and knowledge are also described in the learning outcomes. This infers that the curriculum is built on the premise that language and culture are interlinked and that intercultural competence should also be developed apart from language competence. The program also pays attention to developing the students' knowledge of Vietnamese language and culture and considers it as the foundation for language learning, helping improve their cultural self-awareness.

In addition, English Literature is included in the program on the basis of its contributions to language education and its close link with language and culture. However, it is taught as an individual subject with less time spent compared to language skills and linguistic knowledge, suggesting that the program seems to lean more towards a linguistic approach rather than a literary one. The English Literature course is supposed to equip students with cultural knowledge while intercultural attitudes do not seem to be taken into consideration among the learning outcomes. Teaching methods to be adopted in the class are suggested in the curriculum yet the instructors still have a certain degree of autonomy in their teaching. However, language-based approach may possibly be among those used by the instructors, as the course also aims at sharpening the students' language skills besides providing them with knowledge of history and culture.

4.1.2. Observations of English Literature lessons

Two lessons of the English Literature course at HANU were observed in order to collect qualitative data on the instructor's teaching approaches. Normally, each English Literature lesson at HANU lasts over three hours and includes two sessions: the first one is devoted to the students' presentation on a particular topic in accordance with the syllabus, while the second one often expands on the knowledge provided in the students' presentations and introduces a specific literary work. Each presentation, delivered in English language, was prepared with the guidance of the instructor, who suggested the main contents to be covered, commented on the development of the outline before the presentations and further explained and re-emphasized the key information after them.

The first observation was carried out in the fourth lesson of the English Literature course. That lesson focused on the history of British Literature, particularly the Renaissance period. In the first session, different features of the period were presented by a group of students, including historical contexts, popular genres and their characteristics as well as renowned writers and their literary works. In the initial part of the presentation,

the students gave an overview of the Renaissance period and its influences on how writers produced their works. They identified socio-political contexts that writers were exposed to as well as explained the writing trend given that context. The students then informed their peers of various concepts referring to the components of a work of popular genre during this period, particularly poetry, for example, blank verse, octave or sonnet. They continued their presentation with general information about various well-known authors of different genres, namely Sir Philip Sydney, William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and an overview of their most significant literary works. The researcher noticed that most of the listeners paid full attention to the presentation and several questions were raised at the end as they need clarification and further information on certain points. These questions mainly addressed the similarities and differences between the writing styles and the sonnets by Sydney and Shakespeare. This could help draw attention to various forms and language uses in a particular literary genre, improving the students' awareness of language. However, a few students were sometimes distracted because of either their private talk with others or the presenters' delivery and language competence, which posed difficulties for them in keeping track with the contents.

It can be inferred that by allowing students to give presentations, the instructor provided them with opportunities to practice using the target language and receiving feedback on their performance, which helps improve their language competence – a crucial element in the development of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009). Moreover, in the process of preparing for the presentation, the presenter-students had to carry out massive research on the topic. Therefore, they can raise their own awareness as well as widen their knowledge of particular ways of writing in a particular period of time, reflecting socio-political situations and cultures. Not only the presenters but also the listeners can benefit from the presentations. This can be explained by the fact that students showed their interest, thus, may be more motivated to learn from their peers rather than their instructor. Such learner-centred approach can allow students to be more active in their learning process, which in turn facilitates the development of their competence.

After the presentation, the presenters provided their peers with a summary of *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe. As explained by them, they chose to discuss this tragedy because it was one of his most outstanding works before he died. They shared a belief that by being introduced to this text, the class could have a chance to explore how Christianity understands the world, and how the Middle Ages and the Renaissance formed different value systems and views of power and corruption. This belief inferred that the

students considered the literary work as the representation of knowledge and culture conveyed through English language.

The discussion of *Doctor Faustus* was in fact guided by the instructor. The students were first asked to work in groups and discuss what they know about the author and the play after their classmates' presentation in the first session. They were also given some time to use the Internet and do a quick research on Christopher Marlowe for more details about his work, life, and style of writing. After that, the instructor asked the students to explore the setting of *Doctor Faustus*, which was the 16th century in Europe, then highlighted the key facts regarding this period. It can be inferred that through this practice, the instructor adopted an approach in which background information about the text is often brought up during the teaching and learning of literature. Thanks to this activity, the students were equipped with socio-political and cultural information of the context where English language is used. According to Deardorff (2009), such exposure can make contributions to improving their (inter)cultural attitudes and knowledge.

The instructor then drew the students' attention to a number of proper names appearing in the text (for example, German Emperor Charles V, Pope Adrian, Helen of Troy). She raised questions for the students to identify the meaning and relevant background of the names, increasing their curiosity about and interest in these cultural elements. This activity could help the students extend the students' knowledge of different historic contexts and cultures. Moreover, the instructor's detailed explanations of each name involved the translation into Vietnamese language and comparisons to similar figures in Vietnam. By doing so, the instructor did not only equip them with background information, which could facilitate their understandings of the text, but also expand their cultural knowledge by fostering their cultural self-awareness.

Once the setting and relevant background information was clear, close reading of the text was carried out. The students were asked to read the two-page detailed synopsis of the work and check the dictionary for the use of certain new words (for example, „a stable hand“) to examine the language used in specific context of the text. By this way, it seems that the linguistic content of the text was considered more substantial than aesthetic or cultural contents. The instructor did not require the students to highlight any key words that are crucial to their reading, yet it was observed that some students did that on their own. It should also be noted that the analysis of linguistic features was not used to form any judgments and interpretations of the literary text, which was in line with the findings of the questionnaire regarding the discussions of meanings of the text. Therefore, it can be

concluded that this stage of the lesson was carried out following a language-based approach rather than a stylistic one.

In the next stage of the lesson, the students had to work in pairs to match the sentences drawn from the literary text with the corresponding pictures describing its events and put the pictures into the correct order. This activity aimed to provide the students with the overview of the work and make sure they understand its main contents. All students were given opportunities to practice the target language and use critical thinking. The pair work in this activity reflected language-based approach in which students have to not only understand the meanings conveyed by the language but also use it to discuss the options. During the process, the instructor only acted as a facilitator as the focus of the class was laid in the students.

The discussion of *Doctor Faustus* mainly focused on its ending and the features of such tragic ending. During the discussion, the lesson paid more attention to the context of the text and its language rather than the writing style of the author and the meanings of the text. The instructor also asked the students to work in groups to share their own feelings and opinions on the text in general and its ending in particular. This practice demonstrated an attempt for reader-response approach which promotes the role of the reader in the reading process (Truong, 2009). However, some students only focused on the descriptions of the death of Faustus which involves limb-ripping rather than discussed specific issues addressed such as the representation of badness or Christianity's position on religion and spirituality. A student was able to bring up a comparison with Vietnamese literature regarding the writing about devils, highlighting the differences in the two cultural beliefs. This process definitely touched upon their cultural self-awareness, which is a constituent of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009).

In the second session, the instructor introduced the students to *Mid-summer Night's Dream*, a play by William Shakespeare. The instructor explained that her choice of this text stemmed from the fact that many readers only know about Shakespeare for his tragedies rather than other types of play such as comedy. Therefore, she was motivated to broaden the students' knowledge about this most famous writer of Elizabethan Renaissance and his literary canon, which also represents a crucial part of the English culture. To simply put it, she wished to introduce a work of Shakespeare that is not as well-known as *Romeo and Juliet*. It can be inferred that this selection of text did not take into consideration such factors as the students' language level or difficulty of the text but

instead rely on mainly its significance and potential contributions to the students' knowledge of literature.

The instructor started by introducing the key terms often used in plays with the aim to equip the students with knowledge about the components of this literary genre. The instructor also encouraged the students to compare the way a message is conveyed in plays and other genres. This can help the students be aware of the development of the whole idea in different kinds of text. After that, the instructor provided the context and setting of the play *Mid-summer Night's Dream*. She expanded the background information of the play with some relevant historical issues, social values and spiritual beliefs so that the students can better understand the materials used to draw characters. The instructor revealed with the researcher that she aimed towards helping the students heighten their awareness of social aspects; however, this aim was not clearly communicated to the students.

The instructor then provided a diagram describing the main events of the play and including gaps to be filled with names of the characters and their relationships. After introducing the diagram, she asked the students to read a detailed summary of the work and put the names of the characters in the diagram. This helped to check the students' understandings of the text and its plot. During the reading, the students were encouraged to check the new words that appear in the summary, implying a wish to expand their vocabulary and sharpen their language foundational skills. After that, the students were required to identify the main components of the play by referring to the terms introduced to them before the reading of the text. It should be highlighted that the discussion on the play did not involve any analysis of a specific excerpt of the play. In this sense, the students were likely to lack an opportunity to discover how a comedy was developed, how the writer expressed and elicited sentiments and feelings of the characters or how happenings in the society were depicted in this kind of literary work. The teaching of comedy, that is to say, did not seem to make the most of it.

The second observation found that other English Literature lessons tended to follow a similar pattern. The second observed lesson took place in the second half of the English Literature course in which novel as a literary genre was introduced and an analysis of a certain work was performed. In the first session of the lesson, a group of students delivered a presentation on an overview of different genres and subgenres and focused on discussing the components of a novel. Follow-up activities including a short quiz were performed to check the students' understanding of this genre.

In the second session, the instructor introduced the novel *1984* by George Orwell. In explaining this choice of literary work, the instructor said that it is a typical example of dystopian novel and conveyed a meaningful message that is pretty contemporary throughout decades. She believed that the topics of the novel could benefit the students in various ways, one of which is to raise their awareness of social and political aspects. This inferred the instructor's wish to enhance the students' attitudes towards and knowledge of issues portrayed in the literary work.

The lesson started by the instructor's short overview of utopian and dystopian literature to provide the students with proper understanding of the genre before reading the text. It also seemed to arouse the students' curiosity about the novel. A detailed summary of the novel was then provided and the students were asked to work in groups to identify the plot of the novel. During their reading, the students were required to mark proper names and important phrases from the text that is significant to the comprehension of the plot, which drew their attention to the language use in the text. The instructor also assisted the students in exploring the meanings of some terms and phrases that appear in the novel, explaining that they are also commonly used by English speakers in real life, for example, „Big Brother“, „thoughtcrime“, „newspeak“, „telescreen“, „doublethink“ and so on. It was clear that the discussion on these words demonstrated a language-based approach as the students could widen their lexical resource. However, the discussion on these terms remained at a language-focused level rather than involving any social or cultural factors that can help the students better understand their origins and uses in the novel.

After reading the detailed summary of the novel, the students were encouraged to discuss the concept of totalitarianism and reflect upon whether it existed and exerted effects anywhere around the world. This practice allowed the students to make comparisons between the systems of their own country and others, contributing to the improvement of cultural self-awareness. In addition, the instructor also let the students express their personal feelings and opinions towards the idea of totalitarianism portrayed in the work, implying the adoption of reader-response approach. It was witnessed that the students held various ideas about totalitarianism and some advantages and disadvantages of the totalitarian states were brought up. This seemed to be a relatively brave practice of the instructor as political issues are always considered to be sensitive within the classroom. Nevertheless, during the time constraint, the students did not have an opportunity to analyse any specific part of the novel, which reduced their practice of literary criticism and more in-depth discussion on the values of the text.

To sum up, the instructor seemed to adopt various teaching approaches in the English Literature lessons. The students were encouraged to play an active role in the class while the instructor tended to maintain the role of a facilitator, putting the students and their language competence development at the centre. Most focus was laid in helping the students expand their background knowledge and master their language skills. In this sense, there was possibility that the students could acquire specific knowledge of other cultures. However, it can also be concluded that due to time limit, the instructor did not teach literature and its analysis in depth but simply introduced literature to the students. Thus, potential benefits of literature with regards to raising cultural awareness and fostering intercultural attitudes did not seem to be cultivated and maximized. This was indeed understandable as developing the students' intercultural competence was not clearly mentioned in the aims of the English Literature course.

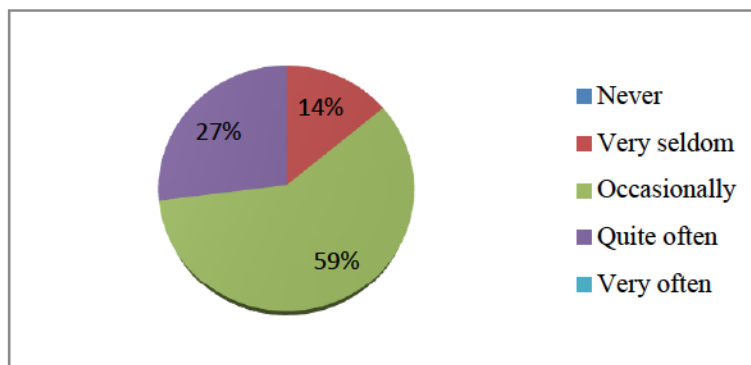
4.1.3. Questionnaire results

4.1.3.1. Background information of HANU students

Despite the fact that they all major in English language as a foreign language at tertiary level, the frequency of interactions with a person of different nationality varies among them. In particular, the majority of the participants reported that they were not often involved in encounters with foreigners, with nearly two thirds of them occasionally had a chance to use English as a means of communication. Over one fourth of them revealed that they had more frequent conversations with foreigners in which they can use English. These were indeed often those who have part-time jobs involving much use of English, for example, tour guide or teaching assistant at English centres. Surprisingly, the findings showed that over one tenth of the respondents had quite limited chances to meet foreign acquaintances and communicate in English. Such low frequency of English use may hinder their development of intercultural competence due to the lack of real-life encounters in practice where the students can experience their cultural attitudes as well as test their cultural knowledge. Figure 4.1 demonstrates in details the frequency of the students' encounters with foreign people in daily life.

Figure 4.1

HANU students' frequency of interaction with a person of different nationality



HANU students' common problems in intercultural interactions

Common problems that the participants often encounter when interacting with foreign users of English language were identified thanks to the open-ended question in the pre-questionnaire. The response rate to this item was 76%, meaning that 24% of the students did not seem to confront any problem. The responses suggested that the problems impeding students' effective communication in English can be categorized into four main groups: language barriers, limited background knowledge, cultural differences and psychological factors. It is obvious that these difficulties are closely inter-related.

Most of the participants admitted that when communicating with people of other nationalities, they often confronted with challenges related to their English language ability, including insufficient lexical resource and listening skills. These difficulties stem from both students themselves and external features of the communicative situations. In explaining the prior problem, a participant revealed that s/he often "have blank minds" during the communicative process either because s/he failed to comprehend the other interlocutor or s/he "could not find proper words to express themselves properly". This is indeed a relatively common problem among students of English as a foreign language, as it has also been reported in many previous studies in Vietnam (Le, 2011; Vo, Pham & Ho, 2018) and around the world (Dil, 2009; Al-Jamal, 2014; Izadi, 2015). In particular, about one fifth of the participants emphasized the lack of a particular type of informal language that is frequently used in communication, for example, non-standard language and idioms. Such problem was also demonstrated in some other responses:

"I think my vocabulary has not been enough to explain what I want to other people to understand. I often have difficulty describing something because I do not know how this certain thing is described in English."

“I am always afraid that I lack vocabulary to fully understand what the foreign speakers mean when discussing a specific topic. Actually there are a lot of slangs and idioms they use that I do not know.”

Notably, one participant even admitted that the lack of English words sometimes hindered the cognitive processing flow, resulting in slower output during interactions:

“Sometimes I do not have enough vocabulary to talk so it makes me not think fast enough to transfer the ideas I have in my mind into English. In that case it tends to take me more time to come up with something to say or respond.”

The lack of vocabulary is also an indirect contributor to the students’ difficulties related to listening skills. There is no doubt that their comprehension is reduced due to the failure to understand the interlocutor’s vocabularies used in the dialogues. Moreover, the speakers’ accents and speed of speaking also pose listening difficulties to the students, both those who are confident in their proficiency and those who are not. In fact, a conversation made with fast speed and in an unfamiliar accent is more likely to trigger incomprehension or misunderstanding (Mezrigui, 2011).

“It’s very difficult to understand and listen to their accents. Catching up with their speed is also a problem although I may understand everything if they speak at normal speed”.

“Sometimes when I interact with foreigners, I get confused with understanding what they are saying because of their dialects. It’s quite difficult to recognize different English accents.”

“To be honest, my listening skill isn’t good. If they speak too fast I can’t understand what they are saying.”

The findings also showed that the students’ limited background knowledge was another major factor posing difficulties to their communication with English speakers, which signalled a low level of intercultural competence as knowledge of cultures is its constituent. According to Marzano (2004), background knowledge is often referred to as “what a person already knows about a topic” (p. 1) and can be learnt either formally in the classroom or informally through life experiences. The majority of participants acknowledged the lack of background knowledge as an obstacle to either starting or developing the conversations with English speaking foreigners. They even admitted

having made inappropriate questions, suggesting a need to develop knowledge of different communicating styles in other cultures, a constituent of intercultural competence. Besides, the lack of background knowledge may also exert negative effects on the students' listening comprehension, making it more difficult for them to understand the speakers (Mezrigui, 2011).

"I sometimes have difficulties in interactions with foreigners because of my superficial understanding of their cultures. I cannot dig deep into certain fields such as history, policies, economy...[...] It's also hard to extend the conversation related to cultures or famous features from where they live."

"I did not know much about Westerners' culture earlier, so I often felt that we rarely have anything in common to discuss. [...] I even asked them inappropriate questions (for example, about age, marital status...)."

Another factor leading to problems in the participants' communication with foreigners was reported to be cultural differences, which may partly result from the lack of cultural awareness and knowledge. Ali, Kazemian and Mahar (2015) asserted that people commonly experience this difficulty when adjusting themselves to the cultural patterns of a particular society. In particular, the data showed that some participants struggled seeking proper ways to express their opinions when discussing a specific topic in more formal situations. One of them explained that the difficulty lies in the way ideas are put together to develop arguments. Although no student mentioned the reason, this difficulty can be explained by the fact that the Western and Eastern people have different means of expression, for example, the Western has direct thinking; meanwhile, that of Eastern citizens is indirect. Another student revealed that they were a bit worried about how to create a comfortable atmosphere as well as avoid "acting or talking about things that may be interpreted as stereotypical or discriminating". The reason is that each culture has various perspectives with regards to stereotypes.

The findings also found out that psychological factors could reduce the effectiveness of the students' communication with foreigners. In details, five participants mentioned shyness as a problem they experience during interactions with other English speakers. For one participant, it was because of their own nature or personality factor as they are always reluctant to communicate with others, even in their native language. Other students attributed their shyness to the lack of vocabulary and the lack of background knowledge, which significantly reduces their confidence. According to Mezrigui (2011),

this psychological state may also be triggered by many other factors, including the fear of being judged or criticized and the low-level exposure to the English speaking environment and foreigners. The prior may result from the Vietnamese culture of sensitivity to „loosing face“ or, as Nguyen (2002) stated, the collectivist feature of not feeling comfortable to use the „I“ identity. The latter can be confirmed by the reported low frequency of interacting with people of other nationalities, which was found in the first question of the questionnaire“s Section 1. One participant provided a more striking reason for their shyness, explaining that they feel inferior to the English natives as some of them demonstrate “very strong characters” during interactions. In fact, Jiménez (2015) affirmed that a person“s speaking performance can be greatly influenced by the feeling of inferiority to others. Such feeling may stem from the fear of being dominated by more proficient English users and, to a larger extent, the lack of proper cultural awareness and knowledge (Croucher, 2017).

On a final note, language barriers, limited background knowledge, cultural differences and psychological factors were reported to be common problems that the third-year English language majored students run into during their interactions with foreign English speakers. Among these four difficulties, a lack of background knowledge and disparities between cultures are the most frequently mentioned issue among the participants“ responses, followed by language obstacles and shyness. These findings highlight the crucial role of the understandings of target culture, as it “not only develops competence in communication but also raises awareness regarding the use of language in intercultural communication” (Ali, Kazemian & Mahar, 2015, p. 3). It can be inferred from these findings that the students“ confidence in communicating with foreigners seems not high and they perceived their cultural knowledge as not profound enough. In fact, the lack of cultural knowledge may seriously hinder their ability to have effective and appropriate communication in intercultural situations (Deardorff, 2006). However, it is positive that the students were able to identify their problems themselves, which means they were aware of cultural diversity and the importance of cultural understandings in intercultural interactions. They also showed no signs of holding judgment towards cultural diversity in their responses, demonstrating a good level of openness to different cultures in particular and intercultural attitudes in general.

4.1.3.2. HANU students’ self-assessment of intercultural competence

This section aims to provide an answer to the second major research question of the study: “*What are the third-year English language majored students’ levels of intercultural competence?*” which investigates the students’ intercultural attitudes and intercultural knowledge at the time of the study. It adopts descriptive analysis to report the quantitative findings generated from the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the first section of the questionnaires includes a total of thirty three items with five responses in a Likert-styled scale. In the analysis, the items were put in groups according to the appropriate sub-constructs in the Attitude and Knowledge dimension of intercultural competence. The tables illustrated in this section reveal the results of the items on a scale from 1 to 5 (in mean scores), where 1 referred to “strongly disagree” and 5 referred to “strongly agree”. The following model of explaining means was applied to interpret the level of means, which was summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Score category breakdown and interpretation

Means	Related level
1.0 – 1.80	Very low
1.81 – 2.60	Relatively low
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
3.41 – 4.20	Relatively high
4.21 – 5.0	Very high

Combined means of each dimension were calculated to identify the students’ levels of intercultural attitudes and intercultural knowledge, which constitute their intercultural competence. As can be seen from Table 4.2, at the time of the study, the participants’ attitudes was rated a higher level than their knowledge dimension with higher combined means. On the basis of Deardorff’s (2009) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, these findings indicated a possibility to produce external outcomes that result in appropriate and effective communication in intercultural situations.

Table 4.2

Descriptive statistics of intercultural competence

Dimension	Attitudes	Knowledge
Combined means	4.02	4.14

HANU students' self-assessment of attitudes as a constituent of intercultural competence

Table 4.3 reveals HANU third-year English language majored students' overall level of attitude towards cultures and cultural diversity, which is a fundamental attribute of intercultural competence. From the theoretical framework adopted in the study, intercultural attitudes comprise of one's respect to other cultures, openness to suspending judgment and curiosity and discovery to seek out cultural interactions and tolerate ambiguity. On the whole, the results from the descriptive analysis show that the students had positive attitudes towards (inter)cultures as the mean scores of three sub-constructs were all at relatively high levels. Among them, openness to other cultures was rated at the highest mean scores while the level of curiosity and discovery was the lowest.

Table 4.3

Descriptive statistics of Attitude dimension

Descriptive statistics	Respect	Openness	Curiosity & discovery
Mean	4.13	4.16	3.76
Min	3.49	3.41	3.20
Max	4.60	4.62	4.56

Respect

In the questionnaires, six items were used to measure HANU third-year English language majored students' respect to other cultures. On the basis of the theoretical framework adopted in this study, this sub-construct involves the appreciation to cultural diversity and the willingness to bridge cultural differences. All measuring items for respect with their means and standard deviations are shown and the frequencies of the responses are presented in Table 4.4. It is worth mentioning that the means of the negative items, signalled with * in the tables, were calculated after reversing the responses to positive scores. In general, the students perceived that they had relatively high level of respect towards cultural diversity as the means of all items were above average level.

Table 4.4

Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Respect“ sub-construct

Item	Statements	M	SD
R1	I approve rather than disapprove of cultural differences.	4.60	0.98
R2	I appreciate similarities between different cultures.	4.56	0.92

R3*	Complexities in other cultural perspectives seem frustrating to me.	4.39	1.01
R4	I am open to modifying my own values, beliefs and behaviours.	3.80	1.11
R5	When talking to people from other cultures, I am willing to discuss the cultural differences in their ways of thinking.	3.49	1.17
R6	I am willing to adapt to the social manners (for example with respect to greeting, clothing, etc.) of the country I am visiting, although I might not agree with these.	3.93	1.05

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
R1	0	2	7	19.6	71.4
R2	0	0	11.4	21	67.6
R3*	61.9	19	15.3	3.8	0
R4	0	7.6	20.9	55.3	16.2
R5	0	20.9	27.6	33.3	18.2
R6	0	5.7	15.2	60	19.1

In the item R1, the participants are asked about the degree to which they approve cultural differences rather than disapprove them. Table 4.4 shows that the majority of participants agreed (91%), while 7% of them were neutral and only 2% disagreed. As can be seen from Table 4.4, the mean of 4.58 (SD=0.98) was the highest among the items in the sub-construct, indicating that the students expressed a high degree of approval to cultural differences.

The item R3, which identifies the participants' attitudes towards the complexities other cultural perspectives offer, followed a similar pattern. The results show that most of the participants did not find complexities in other cultural perspectives frustrating (80.9%); in contrast, far fewer participants were neutral (15.3%) and admitted their frustration (3.8%). The high mean score of 4.39 (SD=1.01) of the negative item R3 indicates that the participants did not tend to feel annoyed with the complicated situations resulting from different cultural perspectives.

In terms of cultural similarities, the students' attitudes are investigated through item R2. Table 4.4 demonstrates that most participants appreciated similarities among various cultures (88.6%) and only a tenth of them were unsure (11.4%). The results also show that the participants also had a high degree of appreciation to cultural similarities with the mean of 4.56 (SD=0.92).

The item R4 asks about the students' willingness to modify their values, beliefs and behaviours. As can be seen from Table 4.4, most of the participants were eager to

change (71.5%) while one fifth of them were uncertain and 7.6% of them were not. Despite being lower than the first three items, the relatively high mean score of 3.80 (SD=1.21) in the table indicates that most students did not feel strongly about their values and beliefs, inferring much agreement to bridge cultural differences.

The students' willingness to adapt to social manners in the country they visit is questioned in the item R6. The findings reveal that the majority of participants accepted the idea (79.1%) while over a tenth of them stayed neutral (15.2%). It can also be inferred from the mean score of 3.93 (SD=1.05) demonstrated in Table 4.4 that the students were quite ready to adjust their behaviours in order to be more appropriate with the social manners of the country they visit.

It can be seen from Table 4.4 that compared to other items, more participants disagreed with the item R5 (20.9%), which investigated the students' eagerness to discuss the cultural differences in others' ways of thinking. While about half of the participants agreed to do so (51.5%), nearly one third of them felt neutral. The slightly over moderate mean score of 3.49 (SD=1.17) illustrates that the participants were somewhat prepared for discussions about the cultural differences from others' perspectives.

Openness

The next seven items in the questionnaires aim to measure how open HANU third-year English language majored students were to other cultures. This „Openness“ sub-construct involves the willingness to interact with culturally different others and withhold judgment during cultural interactions. Table 4.5 provides the descriptions of items along with their means and standard deviations as well as demonstrates the frequencies of the participants' responses. It can be seen that the means of all items in this sub-construct are at relatively high levels, inferring that the students perceived themselves to be quite open to cultural interactions.

Table 4.5

Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Openness“ sub-construct

Items	Statements	M	SD
O7*	While working in groups I prefer to work with people of my own culture, because cultural differences provoke problems.	4.62	0.98
O8	When I am with people from other cultures, I am keen to discuss each other's cultural habits.	3.68	1.28
O9	I am open to interactions with people from different cultures.	4.61	1.08

O10	I am aware that I hold assumptions about people of different cultures.	3.41	1.05
O11*	I judge other people when they behave in a way that I do not understand.	4.09	0.92
O12*	I assume that my own values, beliefs and behaviours are the only naturally correct ones.	4.54	0.89

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
O7*	78	8.6	10.5	2.9	0
O8	5.7	15.2	21.9	20.1	37.1
O9	0	0	7.6	23.8	68.6
O10	2.9	18.1	30.5	32.4	16.1
O11*	43.8	30.4	16.3	9.5	0
O12*	62.9	28.5	8.6	0	0

Responses to item O9 illustrate the students' levels of openness to interactions with people from different cultures. It can be seen from Table 4.5 that in this item, the participants displayed the largest percentage of agreement in the sub-construct (92.4%). It was also the only item that did not receive disagreement by the participants. With the high mean score of 4.61 (SD=1.08), it is fair to assert that the students were very open to interactions with culturally different others.

Similarly, the negative item O7 aims to identify the students' opinions about working with people from various cultures. Table 4.5 reveals that a majority of the participants (86.6%) disagreed with having group work with merely people of their own culture. A tenth of them stayed neutral (10.5%) and a very small portion of 2.9% were not willing to work with culturally different others. Table 4.5 also shows that the students were quite willing to be involved in group work with culturally different others as the mean score was 4.62 (SD=0.86), representing a high level.

In item O8, the students are asked to demonstrate their eagerness to discuss cultural habits with people from cultures different from their own. The results illustrated in Table 4.5 follow a similar pattern with other items, with most participants agreeing (57.2%). Those disagreeing with the item accounted for half of the rest (21.9%). The mean score of 3.68 (SD=1.28) reveals that the students were willing to have intercultural discussions on cultural habits.

Item O10 asks the students whether they were aware that they had assumptions about people of different cultures. Over half of the participants agreed, while one third of them stayed neutral. It is notable that the number of participants disagreeing with this item (21%) was highest among the items in this sub-construct, accounting for nearly one fourth of the participants. Table 4.5 shows that the mean score of the item was only slightly above moderate level ($M=3.41$, $SD=1.05$), indicating that the students seemed a bit unsure of their assumptions.

Whether the students judge other people when their behaviours are unfamiliar is questioned in the negative item O11. Over 70% the participants expressed disagreement with the item while nearly one tenth of them admitted that they could not withhold their judgment (9.5%). The mean score of 4.09 ($SD=0.92$) of this negative item also indicates that the students were relatively open to the way other people behave even if they find it difficult to understand.

The negative item O12, the last item in this sub-construct, identifies whether the students considered their own values, beliefs and behaviours as the only naturally correct ones. The results from Table 4.5 affirm a substantial proportion of participants disagreeing with the item (91.4%). Only a small number of them expressed agreement with the item, accounting for 8.6%. It seems fair to infer that the students had quite open-minded attitude towards other cultures' values, beliefs and behaviours since the mean score of this item is 4.54 ($SD=0.89$).

Curiosity and discovery

Items 13 to item 19 in the questionnaires investigate HANU students' levels of curiosity and discovery, which is also a sub-construct of the intercultural attitude. In particular, these items measure how interested the participants were in seeking out cultural interactions as learning opportunities and how willing they were to tolerate ambiguity. The mean scores, standard deviations and frequencies of the items are illustrated in Table 4. It can be seen that the means of these items seem lower than those of the two previous sub-constructs, with some means at moderate levels.

Table 4.6

Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Curiosity and discovery“ sub-construct

Item	Statements	M	SD
C13	I am willing to create opportunities to build cultural relationships.	3.62	1.26

C14	I am interested in learning as much as possible about other cultures.	4.56	0.83
C15	I ask myself questions about other cultures and cultural perspectives.	3.38	1.17
C16	I see uncertainty in ambiguous intercultural encounters as an interesting challenge.	3.20	1.22
C17*	I feel anxious when I am in a country where people solve problems totally differently than I am used to.	3.40	1.28
C18	I accept that there can be discomfort in cross-cultural situations.	4.10	1.02
C19	I accept that people from other cultures can experience problems with values /and norms of my own culture.	4.08	1.06

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
C13	0	10.5	39	28.6	21.9
C14	0	0	4.7	34.4	60.9
C15	4.8	11.4	40.9	26.7	16.2
C16	5.7	22.8	32.4	24.8	14.3
C17*	15.4	30.4	37.1	13.3	3.8
C18	0	3.8	21	38.1	37.1
C19	0	4.7	19.2	39.9	36.2

Students' interest in learning about other cultures is measured in item C14. As shown from Table 4.6, all of the participants would like to expand their cultural knowledge as none of them disagreed with the item. Moreover, a significant proportion of participants (%) agreed with this item. With the mean score of 4.56 (SD=0.83), highest among the items in the sub-construct, it seems that the students had a relatively strong desire to expand their cultural knowledge.

Item C13 aims at examining the students' willingness to create opportunities to establish cultural relationships. The findings show that only over half of the participants agreed with this item while the majority of the rest remained neutral (39%) despite being keen to learn about other culture (as reported previously). Table 4.6 also reveals an average mean score of this item (M=3.62, SD=1.26), indicating that the students were not very active in building relationships with cultural different others.

In item C15, the students were asked whether they make questions for themselves about other cultures and cultural perspectives. It should be noted that the number of participants agreeing with this item was the lowest in the sub-construct. Less than half of the participants admitted questioning about cultures, while a similar proportion felt unsure

(40.9%) and over one tenth refused doing so. The mean score of 3.38 (SD=1.17) implies that the students were moderately active in exploring cultures.

The students' levels of ambiguity tolerance are investigated in items C16, C17, C18 and C19. The first two items investigated whether they considered cultural uncertainty as positive learning experience. The findings show that a fair proportion of participants (%) had relaxing attitudes towards uncertainty, seeing it as an interesting challenge (Item C16). However, a similar number of participants also admitted in item C17 that they felt anxious when people of other cultures had totally different problem-solving methods (%). The mean scores of the items were both at average levels of 3.20 (SD=1.22) and 3.40 (SD=1.28), respectively, signalling an average level of ambiguity tolerance.

Responses to item C18 provide evidence for the students' attitudes towards anxiety in cross-cultural situations. As presented in Table 4.6, around two thirds of the participants could accept the feeling of anxiety, while only a small minority of the other one third rejected it (3.8%). The item's mean score of 4.10 (SD=1.02) seems to suggest that the students had relatively great tolerance of cultural discomfort.

Item C19 identifies how tolerant the students were with regards to the fact that values or norms of their own culture may cause problems for culturally different others. The findings reveal that a large majority of the participants found it acceptable while the portions of the participants who were neutral and intolerant of it were much lower, only 19.2% and 4.7%, respectively. The relatively high mean score of 4.08 (SD=1.06) indicates that the students seemed pretty tolerant of the unpleasantness brought by cultural differences during interactions with other people.

HANU students' self-assessment of knowledge as a constituent of intercultural competence

With the aim to identify the third-year English language majored students' levels of intercultural competence, the current study also attempted to measure their knowledge of cultures, of which results are presented in Table 4.7. This dimension involves one's cultural self-awareness and deep cultural knowledge. In particular, the study investigated the participants' understandings of how culture influences the self, including their insights into forces contributing to their upbringing, rules and bias forming as well as worldview shaping. Besides, the students' knowledge of other cultures was also assessed to examine how much they know about cultures and the links between cultures and practices. In

general, the descriptive analysis of the findings reveals that the mean scores of the two sub-constructs were merely above the average level, implying that the students had basic intercultural knowledge. Moreover, the participants seemed to perceive that they had better understandings of cultures than the impacts that culture exerts on them.

Table 4.7

Descriptive statistics of Knowledge dimension

Descriptive statistics	Cultural self-awareness	Deep cultural knowledge
Mean	4.09	4.19
Min	3.79	3.73
Max	4.50	4.54

HANU students' cultural self-awareness

HANU third-year English language majored students' cultural self-awareness was examined from item 20 to item 25 in the questionnaires. Cultural self-awareness refers to the understanding of how culture shapes one's identity and worldviews (Deardorff, 2016). The results of the descriptive analysis of the items are provided in Table 4.8, including means, standard deviations and frequencies. In general, most students were aware of the influences of culture on themselves.

Table 4.8

Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Cultural self-awareness“ sub-construct

Item	Statements	M	SD
S20	I am aware that colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity are important elements of individual identity.	4.05	0.86
S21	I am aware that colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity generate multiple identities.	3.79	0.84
S22	I am aware of cultural differences generated by colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity.	3.88	0.93
S23	I am aware of national and cultural stereotypes and their potential danger.	4.22	1.02
S24	I am aware that my own culture should not be regarded as a point of reference to assess in/appropriate behaviours.	4.50	1.14

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
S20	0	0	25.7	43.8	30.5

S21	0	8.6	29.5	36.2	25.7
S22	0	0	34.3	43.8	21.9
S23	0	1.9	13.3	45.7	39.1
S24	0	0	5.8	38	56.2

Item S20 and item S21 investigate the students' awareness of constituent elements of an individual identity. The findings in Figure 4.4 show that three quarters of the participants agreed with these items, implying good understandings of the cultural components of identity among the students. Item S20 receives stronger agreement than item S21, meaning that more students were aware of components of identity than the existence of multiple identities. About one fourth of them stayed neutral in responding these two items while less than 10% of them disagreed with item S21, indicating that they were unsure of how identity is shaped. Yet the mean scores of the two items were at relatively high levels, which were 4.05 (SD=0.86) and 3.79 (SD=0.84) respectively.

The students' awareness of the cultural differences resulting from different factors is assessed in item S22. The responses to this item follow the same pattern with the previous two, with over 60% of the participants agreeing with the item. None of the students showed disagreement, which proves that all of them were somewhat aware that colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity can generate cultural discrepancies. The mean score of this item is 3.88 (SD=0.93), lying at relatively high level.

The students' awareness of national and cultural stereotypes as well as their potential danger is addressed in item S23. The findings show that the majority of the participants had good understandings of stereotypes within and beyond their country, while only a very small portion of them were unsure of stereotyping (1.9%). The mean score of 4.22 (SD=1.02) indicates a high level of awareness among the participants.

Item S24 aims to identify the degree to which the students understand that they should not rely on their own culture to assess behaviours of others. The results show that over half of the participants strongly agreed with the item, indicating that they were well aware that people's viewpoints and behaviours are influenced by their own culture. Only a small proportion of the participants were unsure of the issue (5.8%). As can be seen from Table 4.8, the mean score of the item is 4.50 (SD=1.14), highest among the items addressing this sub-construct.

HANU students' cultural knowledge

The next ten items of the questionnaires, from item 25 to item 33, aim to address the students' deep cultural knowledge, which involves their understandings of culture in a broad sense, a particular country's history and society, links between beliefs, practices and history as well as comparison and contrast between cultures (Deardorff, 2016). Table 4.9 presents the descriptions of items along with their means and standard deviations, while Figure 4.5 illustrates the frequencies of their responses.

Table 4.9

Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Deep cultural knowledge“ sub-construct

Item	Statements	M	SD
D25	I believe that culture is expressed through communication and interaction.	4.30	0.97
D26	I recognize that cultures change over time.	4.27	0.89
D27	I am aware that my cultural perspective may influence my behaviours, values, and modes of communication.	4.34	0.83
D28	My understanding of cultural norms can help me interact with people from other cultures.	3.93	1.08
D29	My socio-cultural knowledge of other cultures allows me to act appropriately when interacting with foreigners.	3.87	1.14
D30	I am aware that history, politics, economy, beliefs and modes of communication are interconnected.	4.33	0.95
D31	I am aware that beliefs and practices are closely linked to historical contexts.	4.41	1.03
D32	When encountering another culture, I find both similarities and differences with my culture.	4.54	1.09
D33	I try to understand other people's perspectives when trying to solve work issues caused by cultural differences.	3.73	1.22

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
D25	0	0	9.5	50.5	40
D26	0	0	11.4	49.6	39
D27	0	0	8.6	48.5	42.9
D28	0	13.4	17.1	32.4	37.1
D29	0	14.3	18.1	33.3	34.3
D30	0	0	12.4	41.9	45.7
D31	0	0	7.6	43.8	48.6
D32	0	0	4.7	36.2	59.1
D33	0	12.4	24.7	40	22.9

Item D25, D26 and D27 aim to investigate the degree to which the students understand the concept „culture“ and its influences on people. Regarding how culture is defined, a great majority of the participants believed that culture is expressed through communication and interaction while only less than a tenth of them were unsure (9.5%). Similarly, item D26 reveals that nearly 90% of the participants thought that cultures change over time while the rest neither agreed nor disagreed. The students were also aware that their behaviours, values, and modes of communication can be affected by their cultural perspectives. There was slightly stronger consensus among the participants with regards to the awareness of how cultural perspectives affect behaviours, values and modes of communication (Item D27) as fewer of them stayed neutral (8.6%) and the item“s SD is smaller. The mean scores of the three items are all at high level, which are 4.30 (SD=0.97), 4.27 (SD=0.89), 4.34 (SD=0.83), indicating good understandings of culture in a broad sense.

The students“ understanding of history, society and culture is examined in item D28 and item D29. As illustrated in Table 4.9, the participants who agreed that their understanding of cultural norms and socio-cultural aspects can facilitate their interaction with culturally different others were among the majority (69.5% for item D28 and 67.6% for item D29). However, there was still over one third of them staying neutral and disagreeing with the items, suggesting that they were not confident with their knowledge. Table 4.9 shows that the mean scores of the items were 3.93 (SD=1.08) and 3.87 (SD=1.14), indicating a relatively high level of knowledge in general. It should be noted that the means of these two items are lower than others in this sub-construct.

Item D30 and item D31 provide evidence for the students“ understanding of the links between beliefs, practices and history. The findings show that a great majority of the participants were aware that there exists an interconnection between history, politics, economy, beliefs and modes of communication (87.6%) and that beliefs and practices are closely linked to historical context (92.4%). Meanwhile, about only one tenth of the participants were not sure of such links. As presented in Table 4.9, the mean scores of both items are at high levels, which are 4.33 (SD=0.95) and 4.41 (SD=1.03).

Item D32 aims at identifying the students“ awareness of the similarities and differences between other cultures and their own. Item D32 reveals that almost all participants made cultural comparison and contrast during exposure to another culture (95.3%), which yields the highest proportion among the items of the sub-construct. This

item also has the lowest number of participants unsure of the assessed aspect. Its mean score of 4.54 (SD=1.09) suggests the students' high level of cultural knowledge.

Item D33 questions whether the students put themselves in the place of people from other cultures to have various perspectives of a work problem. Despite the awareness of cultural similarities and differences, fewer participants agreed with the item, accounting for about 70%, while over one tenth of them hardly looked at a problem from other cultural perspectives. It should also be highlighted that item D33 has the highest proportion of participants staying neutral (24.7%). Its mean score of 3.73 is at a relatively high level, suggesting that the students were quite aware of having other cultural perspectives.

In short, on the basis of the quantitative findings gathered from the questionnaire, the interpretations of HANU third-year English language majored students' self-assessed intercultural competence can be summarised in Table 4.10 as follows:

Table 4.10

Summary of HANU students' intercultural competence

Dimension	Sub-construct	Mean score	Interpretation
Attitudes		4.02	Relatively high
	Respect	4.13	Relatively high
	Openness	4.16	Relatively high
	Curiosity and discovery	3.76	Relatively high
Knowledge		4.14	Relatively high
	Cultural self-awareness	4.09	Relatively high
	Deep cultural knowledge	4.19	Relatively high

4.1.3.3. Approaches to teaching English Literature at HANU

Table 4.1 demonstrates how English Literature was taught at HANU. The items are placed in descending order of their mean scores. In general, the teachers seemed to integrate different approaches in their teaching of English Literature as most of the activities were reported to be carried out in the classes despite different frequencies of occurrence. However, the quantitative findings found that the activities that aimed at exploring elements beyond the text and eliciting the students' responses were performed most frequently, while those having a language focus and seeking values of the text were less popular.

Table 4. 11

Quantitative results on the approaches to teaching literature at HANU

Item	Statement	Mean	SD
16	The teacher encourages us to explore social, political and historical contexts of the literary text.	4.57	0.564
9	The teacher activates our background knowledge before we read a literary text.	4.45	0.887
7	I work with my classmates in the process of understanding the literary text.	4.34	0.625
8	The teacher lets us actively participate in the process of understanding the meaning of the text.	4.26	0.827
2	The teacher guides us to interpret the literary text by exploring the language used by the author.	4.24	0.894
15	The teacher encourages us to discuss beyond the surface meaning of the literary text.	4.20	0.779
12	The teacher stimulates our personal responses to the literary text.	4.16	0.824
6	The teacher generates the language practice using the literary text.	4.02	1.01
5	The teacher explains literary terms to help us in the reading process.	3.87	0.918
10	The teacher encourages us to use our feelings and opinions in our interpretation of literary text.	3.76	0.907
11	The teacher encourages us to relate the themes of the literary text to our personal experiences.	3.74	0.857
13	The teacher provokes our responses towards the issues in the literary text.	3.29	0.935
1	The teacher gets us to mark any linguistic features (e.g. vocabulary / grammar / choices of word) from the text that are significant to our reading.	2.63	0.968
14	The teacher gets us to search for inter/cultural values from a literary text.	2.59	0.877
4	We compare the ways language is used in a literary work with that of non-literary texts.	2.17	0.725
3	The teacher encourages us to use our linguistic knowledge to form aesthetic judgment of the literary text.	1.84	0.675

The results show that in the lessons on English Literature, the teachers seemed to pay significant attention to the elements that helped form the production of a literary text as item 16 has the highest mean scores among all items. In particular, most of the students revealed that they were frequently encouraged to explore social, political and historical contexts of the literary text (with a low SD of 0.564). This approach to the text can enable

the students to become more familiar with the culture in which the text was written and understand the text better (Source). Nevertheless, the relatively low mean score of Item 14 (M=2.63) reveals that the teacher did not often get the students to search for inter/cultural values from the text. This signals a slight tendency towards raising students' awareness of values derived from the text and may limit the opportunities for the students to improve their intercultural attitudes and knowledge.

As demonstrated in the table, the students revealed an active role during the interpretation of the literary work as the mean scores of item 7, item 8 and item 12 were at a relatively high level. They often had chances to regularly participate in the process of understanding the meaning of the text (Item 8) and were often motivated to offer their personal responses to the literary text (Item 12). This means that they could voice their understandings and analyses of the text and that the teachers tended to perform a role of a facilitator or instructor. Group work was also carried out quite often (Item 7). This practice could allow the students to use the target language to interact and collaborate when interpreting literature as well as negotiate the meaning for themselves, implying a view of literature as discourse. Besides, the students were also often motivated to discuss beyond the surface meaning of the literary text (Item 15). As a result, they can have regular chances to collaborate with the author in the creation of meaning and expose to multiple points of view regarding what a text means.

The quantitative results also show that taking into consideration the students' role of readers during the interpretation of the literary text was another popular approach by the teachers in the English Literature lessons, which demonstrates an aspect of the student-centred approach in the class. In particular, recalling what the students have already known before reading the text (Item 9) was also a frequent practice during the course, which could generate motivation and increase student participation in the learning process (Truong, 2009). Moreover, the students were often motivated to make use of their feelings and opinions to comprehend the text (Item 10) and relate its themes to their personal experience (Item 11) as the mean scores of the two items were at a relatively high level. These activities could allow more personal interaction with the text and the interpretations of it could involve more diverse cultural perspectives. The students' responses towards the particular issues raised in the literary text were sometimes stimulated (Item 13). Although it was not as frequently practiced as the previous ones, whenever it was carried out, this activity could help the students expand their background knowledge and expose to issues that may not be familiar to their cultures.

The findings reveal that the analysis of the literary text was carried out relatively often with a focus on improving the students' language skills. It was clear that language practice was often generated in the lessons on English Literature (Item 6). This could be explained by various activities observed in the classes, for example, delivering a presentation on literary periods or historical contexts, participating in discussions and group work tasks (also proved through the high mean score of Item 8) or providing translations of the text. The students also reported that the teacher provided explanations of literary terms at times during the course to facilitate their reading process (Item 5). This was probably because although there is a specific lesson on literary devices in the syllabus, the aim is merely to introduce the students with various typical structures employed by writers in their texts.

However, it is likely that much less attention was paid to the features of literary language as well as the aesthetic values of the literary work. In detail, even though the students were sometimes asked to mark the linguistic features from the text that are significant to their reading (Item 1), this activity was not as popular as others. It should also be highlighted that little effort was made to distinguish between the literary and the non-literary. This is shown by the relatively low mean score of Item 4 ($M=2.17$), meaning that the students were rarely encouraged to make comparisons between the language used in a literary work and in a non-literary text. Although the students were guided quite often to examine the language used by the author during the interpretation of the text (Item 2), using linguistic knowledge to form aesthetic judgments of the text was not frequently carried out, as demonstrated by the lowest mean score of Item 3 ($M=1.84$). Thus, it was likely that the students tended to be encouraged to explore the style and form of the text to identify its meaning or significance rather than to form sensory contemplation or appreciation of it.

To summarise, the quantitative findings generated from the questionnaire reveal that at HANU, various approaches were adopted and integrated in the teaching of English Literature. In a broad sense, it can be said that these approaches were formed mainly by the concern with contexts and the diffusion of boundaries between the literary and the non-literary as well as the focus on students and their roles as readers (Truong, 2009). The English Literature lessons also provide the students with many opportunities to practice the target language. As a result, there seems to be a reasonable possibility for developing certain aspects of the students' intercultural competence, particularly knowledge of different cultures and countries using the target language.

4.1.4. HANU students' reflective journals

The qualitative data gathered from the HANU participants' reflective journals were analysed with a deductive application of the theoretical framework with the aim to find an answer to the second and third research question of the study. In particular, the analysis aims to explore the students' levels of their intercultural attitudes and knowledge after the English Literature course as well as their perceptions of the influences of English Literature study on their intercultural competence development.

The analysis of the direct qualitative data from the journals finds that most students believed they held highly positive attitudes towards cultures and the discrepancies between cultures. In particular, all of them expressed their respect and openness to cultural diversity in their journals. One student considered cultural diversity as "a basis for a broader and more innovative mind, driving thinking out of a box" (S2). In their opinions, the culturally diverse world offers "valuable contributions such as new ways of thinking and different experiences" (S10). Another student claimed that "culturally diverse situations can expose people to things outside their comfort zones, thus, bolster their confidence in dealing with unfamiliarity" (S4). Some participants also clarified specific ways in which they valued cultural diversity:

"Personally, I believe it is necessary to understand and accept the differences of other cultures to expand knowledge. When I come to another country, I need to adapt to the culture in this country instead of maintaining the behaviours I often have in my country because if I do not do so maybe it will lead to misunderstandings or I will find it hard to integrate into the community there." (S5)

"I don't really have a parameter for the intangible value. I think all of the cultures should be known, be understood and be embraced. For that reason, I highly respect the differences of each culture and at the same time embrace my culture." (S9)

As can be seen from these excerpts, the students were well aware that there exist differences among cultures and they highly respected both other cultures and their own. Most of the students also expressed their willingness to bridge cultural differences to build understanding and respect in intercultural communication. They revealed their willingness to adjust their behaviours in order to act appropriately in the culture they visit as they were aware of the misunderstandings that might be caused due to cultural discrepancies. Instead of ignoring the differences, most of the participants believed that compared to cultural

similarities, cultural differences are more crucial and should be paid more attention to in order to facilitate intercultural dialogues. They explained that:

“Cultural differences should be put into consideration more due to the fact that it has an indispensable approach to a lot of human’s problems. [...] Being aware of the differences therefore can help avoid misunderstandings and discomfort.” (S2)

“Both similarities and differences should be paid attention to. However, I think the differences are a little bit more important than the similarities. Once the cultural differences are understood and sympathized, we have chances to experience new things and be more positive about the world around us.” (S4)

The students believed that knowledge of cultural diversity can help them avoid conflicts, misunderstanding and embarrassment and even shocks when interacting with people from other cultures. According to Blair (2017), such belief can boost their interest in having cultural encounters, allowing them to be more open to other cultures. Moreover, some students also claimed that knowledge of the differences also helps them understand their own culture better. Therefore, the students admitted that they had quite positive reactions when confronting cultural discrepancies in intercultural interactions. One of them described that:

“I often try to understand it to avoid awkward situations or even being rude to others while not knowing about their culture. Sometimes I might be surprised a little bit at first. But then I would get interested in it soon because I love to learn new things.” (S7)

It can be seen from this excerpt that the ways the students reacted to cultural differences changed during the interaction; however, they were able to maintain themselves in an active state and avoid causing uncomfortable atmosphere during the interaction. Additionally, they were relatively curious about “finding out how the cultural differences exist” as they found some of these differences fairly interesting. This attitude may allow more possibility for the students’ willingness to confront barriers and get involved in intercultural situations.

The qualitative data also suggest that the students were at various levels of openness to other cultures. While the majority of them were confident that they did not often hold judgment towards people from other cultures, some participants admitted that they were occasionally influenced by these sets of beliefs.

“[...] theoretically the answer will be “No”. But in reality, I realize that it’s quite hard to change our stereotype towards a certain culture because those stereotypes have been imprinted on my mind since I was a child. Everybody around me often say the same thing about a group of people so it’s so hard to erase all of that impressions. [...] so I keep holding that judgment even though I genuinely respect them.” (S7)

In fact, people are likely to judge those from different cultural backgrounds due to presumed stereotype, prejudice or unspoken expectation resulting from their fear or insecurity of irregular situations (Corder, 2017). It can be seen that even if the students did not deliberately judge people from other cultures, they were “sometimes affected by the prejudice made by others”. This indicates that in these cases the students used their own culture as a reference to evaluate other cultures, which means they looked at other cultures from their own cultural perspectives. One of the participants also admitted that the judgments they held were often formed by their own experience with the people they had met in real life. However, all students were aware of their attitudes and expressed eagerness to make attempts to suspend judgments and understand other worldviews. The ability to suspend negative reactions to the lack of commonality can help the students avoid discriminatory remarks and behaviours, increasing the appropriateness and effectiveness in communication.

The participants were also curious to have interactions with other cultures as they tried to take in unbiased information and prepare themselves with specific knowledge of a culture before having interactions with people from that culture.

“Because I study language so I always bear in mind to value other cultures, no matter how it is. Getting rid of all stereotypes and judgment is what I always try to do (it is quite hard, though). When I read or listen to information and news relating to other cultures on the Internet or some media, I make sure that those are unbiased.” (S6)

“I value their beauty and I consider every difference sensible. I don't make judgment to people from different cultures. I'm active to figure out some rules relating to a certain culture before interacting with people from that culture.” (S7)

The students’ levels of interest in cultural interactions and tolerance of ambiguity were also revealed in their journals. The majority of them were eager to be involved in cultural interactions as they believed these situations bring many benefits. From their perspectives, it was through interaction with people from different cultures that they could broaden their horizon and learn about things that are different from what they are familiar

with. The findings also show that some students did not seem to welcome discomfort during interaction but regarded it as a part of the learning process only after the experience. One of them provided some details:

“[...] Interaction is probably one of the most effective ways to remove our stereotype towards other people and learn more about them. I was in the same class with 2 overseas students coming from Saudi Arabia and Spain. They appeared to be very confident and active, which is totally different from a Vietnamese student like me. Therefore, I kind of judged them at the very beginning of the course. But gradually I learned that they are not as arrogant as I thought; they turned out to be really hospitable. It’s just because of their culture that they express themselves in a very confident way. And now I become more sympathetic to their behaviours and that’s totally a learning experience.” (S7)

However, one student was concerned that “judgments and biased views would be created during the interaction” if people involved are not open to unfamiliar situations. This finding implied that the participant was aware of the risk of feeling threatened by ambiguity and the importance of staying open to intercultural experience, yet they had not reached the level in which she could comfortably accept uncertainty and avoid holding opinions towards different behaviours during interactions with people from other cultures.

Moreover, all of the participants also acknowledged that their attitudes and knowledge towards cultures had changed during the years, especially during their tertiary education. The consensus among them was that the university provides them with a multicultural learning environment that exposes them to people from various regions and cultures, both within and beyond Vietnam. It can be inferred that from the students’ perspectives, different cultures do not necessarily come from another country as people from the same country may also have various cultural identities.

“Since freshman year, I have the chances to meet and build relationships with many friends coming from other cities and provinces. It’s jamming to know how they carry their own “uniqueness” with them.” (S2)

“Since I have studied in an international learning environment like HANU, I have been offered so many opportunities to interact with people from different cultures. For that reason, my attitudes towards cultures and culture differences changed a lot.” (S6)

Apart from exposure to multicultural environment, some participants also believed that the changes in their attitudes towards culture resulted from the expansion of their cultural knowledge. In this sense, they seemed to suppose that intercultural attitudes can be enhanced through learning. One participant clarified this point:

“I’ve been taught about different cultures around the world or of some specific countries. Those topics help me appreciate and value diverse views. None of the perspectives that differ from mine are wrong. All I need to do is to accept that they are different and even try to understand other points of view.” (S4)

This finding highlights the students’ proper awareness of the importance of cultural knowledge, which plays a crucial role in their development of intercultural competence. Additionally, in their journals, the participants also addressed specific changes that they had experienced during university, mostly regarding attitudes. In detail, most of them became more aware of cultural differences and respectful towards other cultures. They also revealed more attempts to accept the fact that people may behave differently from them and from each other as well as to look at things from other worldviews.

“I learned how to respect other cultures and the way they behave. At first, it was a bit difficult to adapt to the differences; however gradually I develop a sense of understanding. I put myself into the shoes of other people and try to sympathize with them.” (S6)

Regarding their knowledge of culture, the students perceived that they had a proper level of insights into the culture they studied about, yet they were aware that they needed to continue learning. In details, when reflecting on what culture is, all participants highlighted the importance of culture as a key to the uniqueness of each country and identity of its people. They were aware that culture exerts influences on people’s ways of thinking and behaviours, for instance, “their views, values, humour, hopes, loyalties as well as worries and fears”.

They students also asserted that much of their current cultural knowledge was developed through the study of foreign languages, which involves the study of the cultures where the language is spoken. From their perspectives, speaking a language allows people to expose to a culture and see things from other cultural points of views. Moreover, some students mentioned their own culture when addressing cultural similarities and

differences. In particular, they mentioned collective culture of Vietnamese people and individualistic culture of Western countries, indicating that they were aware of their „self“.

With regards to the influences of English Literature, the data analysis identifies some common themes related to intercultural attitudes and knowledge. To begin with, the findings show that the students believed they gained more appreciation of cultural diversity throughout the English Literature course. In particular, they claimed that the more lessons they had, the more they would like to discover and learn about other cultures in general and British culture in particular. This is because for them, cultivating cultural differences is of significance as a way to embrace the uniqueness of each culture and prepare them for unexpected surprises in intercultural encounters.

“As a result of this learning, I have motivation and interest in upgrading my mind with more knowledge about British and Western cultures. Learning and exploring diverse aspects of culture made me curious to know more.” (S8)

“After learning about some famous works of Shakespeare, I am keen to know more about the society of people during the Renaissance in Western countries. It was in the past but still important to better understand culture and society”. (S9)

The students also agreed that reading literary works made them become more eager to learn about cultures in order to find out “whether there is any interesting similarity between the two cultures seeming to be completely different” (S5). They seemed to acknowledge that their interest in literature in particular was reinforced. This is because they believed reading English literary texts provides them with opportunities to “dig deeper into features of foreign lands I’ve never been before and the people I’ve never met” (S3). They were inspired to “discover the meanings behind the authors’ use of euphemism or wordplay because it denotes the authors’ viewpoints and visions from a different culture” rather than ignore it due to its difficulty (S4).

One of the most dominant themes drawn from the participants’ reflective journals regarding the contributions of English Literature was the expansion of their vocabulary, indicating a growth in language competence. The participants shared that as a result, they felt more ready for interaction with people from different cultures. In other words, most of them acknowledged their growing confidence in talking with people from other countries after the English Literature course. They also agreed that the English Literature course

equipped them with more topics and ideas to start and maintain conversations with people from other countries, particularly English speakers.

“I think I feel more willing to interact with people from other countries when I reached the end of the course as I no longer fear of lacking topic in conversations, because after those classes, I acquired a lot of useful information about English Literature.” (S3)

“After the course, I am very willing to share what I acquire with people of other cultures, especially Western countries. They will be interesting topics to talk about and our conversations can be longer and more exciting”. (S9)

“I now have other things to talk about rather than just the weather or last night’s television shows as there is nothing better than exchanging comments and discussing passionately about literature, particularly a novel, with a foreigner who also read it.” (S10)

The analysis of the students’ reflective journals also finds a little evidence regarding curiosity and discover in the attitude dimension of intercultural competence. One of them revealed that they expected more opportunities to interact with people from other countries as they could “exchange knowledge of other cultures and know more about how they think and act to become more open-minded” (S3), indicating their view of cultural interactions as learning opportunities. Another participant addressed a similar point, regarding situations with cultural differences as “gentle lessons” in case they do not turn them into “a weirdo or an offender” during communication (S4). These findings suggest that only a small number of students seemed to display much interest in seeking out cultural interactions. Besides, the journals also show that only a few participants made questions about cultures and people, mostly to find out the reasons underlying an opinion, behaviour, or custom. For example, one of them shared:

“I recently had a conversation with an English friend of mine in the English centre and he was surprised when I complained about my ugly name. We did not talk about why he reacted like that but I was very curious about the reason. In the lesson today we learnt about *1984* and I found out that in British culture, names can hold a great deal of importance [...]”. (S2)

It should also be noted that in the journals, none of the participants expressed whether during the course they considered cultural ambiguity as positive learning experience or welcomed discomfort as a part of the learning process. Therefore, it can be

inferred that the tolerance for the lack of clarity did not seem to be touched upon throughout the English Literature course.

Cultural knowledge was asserted to be the aspect the students gained the most from the English Literature course. Some students revealed a change in the way they perceived culture, mentioning the link between culture and literature in their reflections. One of them explained:

“I used to think that there was no relation between culture and literary works, but after four weeks of studying and researching, I realized that there is an inseparable link between them”. (S10)

Some students also clarified that “I realize that I can approach English culture through English Literature because literature is about culture” (S2), “culture influences the minds and writing styles of authors” (S4) and “when I read a literary writing in English, I am exposed to the history and people of English speaking countries, thus, I can gain an insight into their cultures” (S5). Other participants also addressed the relation between culture and language when reflecting on the influences of culture, explaining that “people who learn English language have to know about its culture to talk with other English users”. They believed that the understanding of culture and its impacts could facilitate interactions and communication.

“[...] my mind is greatly expanded, helping me a lot in communicating with foreigners. In addition to being good at language, cultural knowledge is always significant in international communication.” (S9)

This finding indicates that the students became more aware of multiple aspects of a culture and realized that the exploration of authors, historical contexts and their literary works contributed to improving their cultural understanding throughout the course. This is a positive change because literature as merely literary texts could not provide “a master key for understanding a foreign culture” (Delanoy, 1993, as cited in Hall, 2005, p. 157). It is therefore fair to say that the English Literature course had helped the students better understand literature as a part of culture, which contributes to the knowledge dimension of intercultural competence.

The reflective journals also show that after the English Literature course, most of the participants admitted a change in their perceptions of the role of English literature. They claimed that they were able to broaden their knowledge of British history, politics and society. All students affirmed obtaining fresh information in almost all classes of English Literature about not only the history of English literature in specific periods but also general knowledge about Britain. In details, they gained knowledge about “what happened in a historical era and how it affected literary works”, from Old Age, Middle Age and Renaissance to the 19th and 20th century. Some participants even emphasized the role of literature in general and English Literature in particular as “always reflects historical contexts”, “expresses the most general sense of the actual society”, “portrays a mini England society” and more specifically, “a mirror reflecting the reality life, through which we can have a glimpse of historical background of the period”. In this sense, literature “is born of the lives of its maker and its civilization” (Corey and Motoyama, 1990, p. 77) and represents a living or a historical document. Notably, half of the participants attempted to point out the changes and differences between different periods, which showed a sign of critical thinking being promoted. By making comparisons among literature periods, the students can not only become more aware of the history of literature but also better understand the changes in cultural perspectives over time, improving their cultural knowledge.

The findings also show that all participants had a tendency to provide more specific details about what they had acquired in the lessons with more focus on the history of English Literature or the contexts of the texts. Meanwhile, regarding the lessons aiming at analysing specific literary works, some participants seemed to have less to reflect and only draw a quite general picture of what they gained, yet confirmed the acquisition of knowledge, for instance:

“I learnt more about the features of the period, particularly about the people and their beliefs as they are clearly reflected in literature. An example is that in the class about Victorian era and the context of Jane Eyre, we learnt that the Parliament made many legislative changes and more values were given to public education. But there were big differences in education among social classes and genders [...]” (S8)

“I could acquire a huge amount of knowledge during two lessons, especially historical backgrounds. I could also know more about the society during the 19th century.” (S10)

In this sense, it can be inferred that the participants seemed to gain more cultural knowledge from the exploration of English Literature history and analysis beyond a text itself than from the literary analyses.

Moreover, the English Literature course also encouraged the comparison and contrast between British and Vietnamese cultures, which was another theme drawn from the students' reflective journals. The students clarified that such comparison and contrast between cultures were made as a response to the instructors' requests during the classes. Almost all of them addressed the similarities and differences between the two cultures. It should be noted that the students made such comparison and contrast with positive attitudes (for example, "I definitely feel excited [...]", "I find it very interesting [...]", "It is amazing that [...]"), inferring the wish to gain better insights into both cultures rather than to make any judgment of the cultures different from their own.

During the English Literature course, most of the participants made attempts to compare and contrast different aspects of culture, from customs (three participants), ideologies (four participants) and attitudes (six participants) to religions (two participants), politics (three participants) and society as a whole (all participants). It can be inferred that they perceived culture mostly by identifying its components and literature as a part of culture. This practice also fostered the awareness and understandings of their own culture. Student S2 highlighted the change in their perception:

"I realize the differences among areas in the same continent, and even some similarities between European culture and Asian culture, which I did not really think of before. In general, the most important thing I get from this course is that it helped me change my attitude towards Western and Eastern cultures. They actually have something in common."

Other participants also seemed more interested in seeking similarities between Western culture and their own rather than pointing out the differences. This may be explained by the fact that cultural similarities allow them to feel „closer“ to other cultures, thus, reducing the feelings of ambiguity and anxiety when exposing to the culture (Corder, 2017). Indeed, the students reveal that before the course, they used to assume that there is hardly any similarity between Western culture and Vietnamese culture, which made them surprised and excited comparing the two. They also admitted that doing so made it easier for them to memorise the background knowledge of other cultures. One of them was confident that what they gained throughout the course would help them “partly avoid

unexpected misunderstandings in communication” (S5). This signals an improvement in cultural knowledge because as revealed from Section 1 of the questionnaire, apart from limited experience of being involved in real-life intercultural encounters, many respondents were concerned that cultural differences and other factors often pose difficulties to them.

All in all, the analysis of the reflective journals suggests that HANU third-year English language majored students were quite respectful and open towards other cultures and cultural diversity. Although they were relatively curious to learn about other cultures, they were not fully able to tolerate ambiguity and discomfort in intercultural encounters. The students were quite confident with their understanding of culture in a general sense and with their self-awareness of their own culture, acknowledging a need to further expand their cultural knowledge. Moreover, the findings also indicate that English Literature course exerted some positive effects on the students’ intercultural competence, helping the students have more positive attitudes towards other cultures and improve their general knowledge of cultures.

4.2. Research location 2: UniFe - Italy

4.2.1. Document analysis: The context in Italy

In Italy, language study is a branch of Human Sciences that studies the language and literature of the countries where the language is spoken and generally the linguistic, cultural and literary phenomena associated with individuals and communities speaking the language.

In 2000, the Ministry of University and Research (Ministero dell’Università e della Ricerca) issued a Decree determining the classes of university degrees. The overall objective of undergraduate program in any class is to equip students with an adequate mastery of general scientific methods and contents and the acquisition of specific professional knowledge. English Studies in higher education belongs to a broad class named „Modern Languages and Cultures“, in which students can choose to major in at least two foreign languages. As can be clearly seen from this definition, the study of language and the study of cultures are always associated. Each university can make their own decision on developing and characterizing their curriculum. Whatever direction the curriculum is, it should prepare students for:

[...] attività professionali nei settori dei servizi culturali, del giornalismo, dell'editoria e nelle istituzioni culturali, in imprese e attività commerciali, nelle rappresentanze diplomatiche e consolari, nel turismo culturale e nell'intermediazione tra le culture dell'Europa [...] nonché nella formazione degli operatori allo sviluppo in contesti multi-etnici e multiculturali. (Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2000)

[...] professional activities in the sectors of cultural services, journalism, publishing and cultural institutions, in businesses and commercial activities, in diplomatic and consular representations, in cultural tourism and in the intermediation between the cultures of Europe [...] as well as in the training of development operators in multi-ethnic and multicultural contexts. [Translation mine]

This aim demonstrates that students earning a degree in foreign languages and cultures have a wide variety of career opportunities. However, since these career choices are culture-related and the working contexts are „multi-ethnic and „multicultural“, a need to develop intercultural competence seems to be implied. In particular, students pursuing education in this major are supposed to:

- possedere una solida formazione di base in linguistica teorica e in lingua e letteratura italiana;
- possedere la completa padronanza scritta e orale di almeno due lingue straniere (di cui una dell'Unione Europea, oltre l'italiano), nonché del patrimonio culturale delle civiltà di cui sono espressione e una discreta competenza scritta e orale in una terza lingua; (Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2000)
- possess a solid basic training in theoretical linguistics and in Italian language and literature;
- have a complete written and oral command of at least two foreign languages (one of which is from the European Union, in addition to Italian), as well as the cultural heritage of the civilizations they express and an adequate written and oral competence in a third language. [Translation mine]

The first objective highlights the importance of acquiring knowledge of the students' native language and literature prior to learning foreign languages, suggesting the need to develop their cultural self-awareness. The second objective identifies the crucial components of the program, including language skills and knowledge of culture. It also demonstrates the equal roles of language and culture and they should be both featured in

the program. It can be inferred from this objective that English is conceived primarily as „the cultural heritage“ or even the property of specific people located in or identified with Britain, signalling a higher degree of nationality in defining „English“. It should also be noted that these objectives do not seem to mention the application of the outcomes, including the acquisition of language and cultural knowledge, in practice, for example, working contexts.

Accordingly, the Decree lists the courses that should be included in universities“ curricula. As can be seen from the Decree, courses on Italian literature are considered as the basis of the program, along with those on the disciplines relating to linguistics, semiotics and language teaching. English Literature appears among the core courses on foreign literatures, apart from those on language and translation as well as philosophies. It should be noted that there is no separate course specifically on British culture, which seems to imply that culture is associated with literature.

At the University of Ferrara, students majoring in English Studies pursue an undergraduate program named „Modern Languages and Literatures“, which was built in accordance to the Government“s Decree. The normal duration of the program is three years and requires the acquisition of 180 credits. The aim of the program is similar to the one stated in the Government“s Decree. In particular, during the program, the students will have an opportunity to deepen the study and knowledge (also extended to the field of translation) of at least two of the four foreign languages offered (English, French, Spanish and German) as well as their respective foreign literatures. Thus, it can be said that English language does not stand as an individual major but is associated with literature and that the program adopts literary approaches to English language. Besides, if students choose English Language and Literature as their major, they also have to study another language and the literatures of the countries where it is spoken.

Accordingly, as stated in the university“s official website, graduates of the program are expected to:

[...] essere in grado di utilizzare correttamente almeno due delle principali lingue europee; padroneggiare i fondamenti della conoscenza teorica del linguaggio; conoscere testi e contesto storico-culturale di due delle principali letterature straniere europee [...].

(Source: <http://www.unife.it/stum/lingue/scegliere/corso-in-breve>, Paragraph 2)

[...] be able to correctly use at least two of the main European languages; master the fundamentals of theoretical knowledge of language; understand texts and historical-cultural context of two of the main European foreign literatures [...]. [Translation mine]

These expected learning outcomes include both the acquisition of language skills and knowledge as well as the understandings of literature in cultural context. As inferred from its name, the program pays equal attention to language education and literature education and treats them separately as no sign of one supporting the other is stated. Literature, thus, is not viewed as an aspect contributing to students' language performance and linguistic competence but instead as a competence itself. The third learning outcome also points out some possibilities for intercultural competence to be developed as it aims to develop knowledge of other cultures.

On that basis, the students of this major have to take courses on languages and literatures in each academic year. However, courses on languages are supposed to be taken before those on literatures, implying that a certain level of language is required for the study of literature and that literature can help refine the language skills. The total credits given to the module of English literature is 21, with 9 credits for English Literature I, 6 credits for English Literature II and 6 credits for English Literature III. It should be noted that courses on literature have the same weight with those on the language, proving that at the university, the study of language goes along with the study of literature.

Since the curriculum does not provide a fixed guideline regarding the contents of the English Literature course, instructors hold a flexible choice regarding what to teach and learn within the classes. Therefore, courses in different academic years may have different objectives and contents, as long as they are in line with the expected learning outcomes of the program. That is to say, there is a high level of discretionality in a choice of the topics to be taught in literature. The course studied in this research was the English Literature III in the 2020 - 2021 academic year for third-year students who had been at the B1+/B2 level of English and had finished the courses on English Literature I and II. It weighs 6 credits and was run in 20 lessons with 40 teaching hours in total.

The course contents were briefed under the title „British Poetry and Society from the Early Modern to the Contemporary Age“. It focused on poets from the seventeenth century to the contemporary age and explored how to question the historical, social and cultural contexts in which they lived. As a result, students would learn how poetry expresses the authors' creativity, generates aesthetic values and at the same time interacts

with society. This course content emphasized the demonstration of cultural elements through a specific literary genre, thus, students could learn something about English people, past and present, actual and imagined. Also, the teaching schedule did not remain anchored in the literary canon, implying a more contemporary approach to teaching literature.

The objectives of this course were stated in the syllabus as follows:

Students will widen their knowledge of British literature and culture from a theoretical, methodological, diachronic and synchronic perspective.

Discussion of theoretical and methodological topics will highlight the metaliterary dimension. The study of specific authors and texts is aimed at: presenting the historical and cultural contexts in Great Britain and Europe; applying critical tools to literary texts and interpreting their aesthetic, ethical and ideological value.

(Source: <http://www.unife.it/stum/lingue/insegnamenti/letteratura-inglese-iii>, Section 1)

The objectives of the course were mediated within and specified from the one concerning literature in the curriculum. It can be seen from the excerpt that a learning outcome was included in the objectives. It implies multiple approaches to studying literature, involving not only „theoretical“ concepts and „methodological“ ways of studying but also how and why literary works are examined. From these perspectives, the students will look into literature as a phenomenon that happens at the certain point of time and generates effects throughout times, both at the present and in the future. This learning outcome implies a perception of literature as discourse, which goes beyond language and linguistic elements. Moreover, the course objectives also directly address the knowledge of British culture with a focus on „historical and cultural contexts“, implying that poetry as a literary genre is seen as dealing with history, politics and even science rather than things merely related to emotions and feelings. An emphasis is also placed on literary criticism in order to interpret and become aware of their „aesthetic, ethical and ideological value“. Literature, in this sense, is understood as not only about the text, a novel or theatre, but also about the message, values, ideas and ideology that comes with the text. This perception seems to demonstrate a link between literature and culture, inferring a belief that literature can equip students with cultural knowledge and that literature can be treated as a source of cultural artefact. It is also noted that the lessons are devoted to the study of

specific authors and texts while the history of British literature is not covered but instead should be read and self-studied by the students.

The syllabus also clearly mentions the teaching approaches to be adopted during the lessons. In detail, to facilitate interaction, the instructor would expose specific contexts and texts and students would be encouraged to participate with comments and interventions. It was, thus, expected that the students would have a chance to play an active role during the learning process, sharpen their language skills as well as interact with texts. Literature lessons, in this sense, seem to take an extrinsic approach, in which social and historical contexts are taken into consideration in the analysis and interpretation of a literary text (Wellek & Warren, 1984). In other words, the study of literature would go beyond the texts.

To summarise, the University of Ferrara has developed a program that considers the study of language to be closely associated with the study of literature. This means that there is no study of language without the study of literature and vice versa, demonstrating a crucial role of literature as a major that is relevant to language. The English Literature course also seemed to be developed on the basis of the premise that literature demonstrates culture and culture influences the writing of literary texts. Besides, approaches that go beyond literary texts were expected to be adopted during the course with particular attention to the social and historical contexts of their origins and authors. Therefore, although intercultural competence is not directly mentioned in the syllabus, it is possible that the study of English Literature in this sense can make a meaningful contribution to its development, especially the knowledge dimension. In other words, similar to what was proposed by Hall (2005), literature can bring about cultural benefits to the students by exerting positive effects on their cultural knowledge and intercultural experience.

4.2.2. Observations of English Literature lessons

The English Literature III course at UniFe was entitled „British Poetry and Society from the Early Modern to the Contemporary Age“. The researcher’s observation started from the second lesson in the English Literature course, which was taught online in compliance with the Covid-19 health and safety protocols. The main aim of this lesson was to equip the students with an overview of the 17th century, including historical and cultural events that took place during the period. At the beginning of the lesson, the instructor emphasized the importance of interaction between students during the online classes, either by sending messages in chat box or turning on their microphone to speak.

Indeed, the lesson started with the question regarding the first historical period in which poetry would be examined during the course. By doing this, the instructor provoked the students to recall their background knowledge of the 17th century. As some students raised their voices to make contributions, it was clear that they were motivated to play an active role and have autonomy in the learning process. The whole lesson was devoted to the instructor's provision of historical, social and scientific information and facts relevant to the context to elaborate on what the students contributed. In particular, major social and scientific phenomena of the period were analysed, allowing the students to have an overview of the context in which literary works were produced and influenced and understand its characteristics. People's perceptions and ways of thinking at the time were also discussed, implying a glimpse at cultural perspectives. By doing this, the instructor aimed at providing the students with knowledge of a context that combines literature and cultural and scientific events. This oriented the students towards perceiving literature as an interdisciplinary work of art as discoveries in the field of science and geography can be transformed into poetry. It can be inferred that this approach can allow the students to identify a clearer link between literature and social and cultural aspects. Although the session was more instructor-centred, the students still had opportunities to actively make contributions.

The second observed lesson focused on the analysis of literary works by John Donne. Before examining the texts, the instructor guided the students to further expand on the complicated context of the 17th century to highlight its impacts on literature, addressing people's contemporary views of the world and religious beliefs at the time. The instructor then performed the reading of a specific text named *The Flea* with the students. Before going into a detailed analysis of the poem, the instructor asked the students to provide their first impression of it as well as the understanding of its title. Elaborating on the students' contributions, the instructor offered an explanation of the word „flea“ from a linguistic perspective and pointed out the surface meaning of the poem. The instructor then encouraged the students to examine the figurative meaning of the word in the context of the poem. In doing so, the students were encouraged to use the background knowledge acquired in the previous lesson in the process of understanding the meanings of the texts.

In the detailed analysis of the poem, the instructor drew the students' attention to specific words used by the author and raised questions to guide them to interpret the meanings of the words in the context of the poem, implying the adoption of the language-based activity. The instructor then encouraged the students to analyse each stanza of the

poem. During the analysis, the students were guided to express opinions towards the text based on their own interpretations. It can be seen from this session that different students presented different interpretations of the text, allowing them to expose to various viewpoints and ways of understandings. This activity demonstrated a reader-response approach, in which the students' personal responses to a text are stimulated.

In addition, the instructor also pointed out social aspects derived from the poem, for example, love, religions and crimes, as well as more abstract and existential aspects such as life and death, aiming at raising the students' awareness of these issues in the period. The students were also guided to pay attention to different tones used to address various issues in the poem, from simple basic things such as physical love to more innovative components in a poem such as science, religion, culture. By doing this, the instructor emphasized the relationship between poetry and society. The lesson ended with the students' personal comments on the text itself and the themes mentioned in it, allowing the students to relate it to their background knowledge and make comparisons with contemporary conventions. From these activities, it could be inferred that the instructor adopted critical literacy approach during the in-depth analysis of the poem. What was interesting was that at the end of the lesson, some students were able to draw conclusions on the society and culture of the period, including various components such as religious beliefs and behaviours. This showed that they became more aware of cultural elements and acquired more cultural knowledge.

The third observed lesson focused on Margaret Cavendish and her works. The lesson started with a comparison between the dates relevant to John Donne, the author discussed in the previous lesson, and Margaret Cavendish. The purpose of this was to point out that poems represent different ways of responding to and interacting with society within the span of fifty years. In order to do so, the instructor spent much time providing background information on Cavendish's characteristics, personal and work life to help the students have an overview of their influences on her writings. The discussion on the typical features of her writing styles took into consideration the context of the 17th century to examine her motivation to write poems on scientific concepts. It was apparent that this activity was carried out as a result of an extrinsic approach to teaching literature that goes beyond the text itself. During the discussion, the students also had opportunities to make contributions and shared their personal opinions and understandings of the context. It should be noted that the instructor also made an attempt to correct the students'

pronunciation and remind them of the importance of improving their language proficiency, highlighting a link between language and literature.

The lesson continued with some further background knowledge of the society in the 17th century provided by the instructor with the aim to reemphasize the social context in which Cavendish produced her works. The instructor also mentioned important social issues such as races and feminism and the need to contextualize their meanings in the 17th century. By doing so, the students became more conscious when adopting contemporary lenses to review historical phenomena. This could help them be able to look at an issue with various perspectives and avoid a judgmental mind set. The instructor then asked some students to take turn performing the reading of *The Dutchess to her Readers*, allowing them to practice the language and play an active role in the lesson. After the reading, the students were encouraged to express their first impressions and feelings of the poem. It could be seen that the students paid much attention to various elements derived from the text, for example, forms, metaphors and tones, and applied relevant knowledge of her life and context in interpreting the poem. The instructor then synthesized and further elaborated the students' ideas by drawing their attention to specific phrases and word use by the author. This allowed the students to be more aware of the features of literary language as well as the use of language in different contexts.

The fourth observed lesson was also devoted to the discussion on Margaret Cavendish's poems and the depiction of the 17th century. The instructor started the lesson by reviewing what the students acquired in the previous class. In particular, the students were asked a question regarding the relationship between Margaret Cavendish and the Royal Society. This activity motivated the students to reflect on their understandings and express critical thoughts of the issue, allowing them to take a central role in the class. The lesson then continued with a close reading of *Man's Short Life and Foolish Ambition*. The students were provoked to identify the main topic addressed in the poem. It could be seen from their answers that some of them made a reference to the works discussed in the previous lessons and courses when attempting to reach the core of the poem. Moreover, it was clear that the students had relatively different approaches to interpret the key message of the poem. While some of them deciphered the main theme on the basis of some linguistic elements such as metaphors, others relied on their background knowledge of the context.

After the theme of the poem was identified, the instructor guided the students to explore the relationship between literature and society, which was the core of the course.

In particular, the instructor encouraged the students to discuss the influences of the historical context on the motivation for the author to write the poem, particularly the social perspectives in 17th century. During the discussion, the instructor introduced the students with „vanitas“, a genre of art and literature popular at the time. It was apparent that the students were provided with background knowledge and improve their awareness of cultural aspects. Interestingly, some students raised questions regarding the meanings of different terms related to „vanitas“ and the instructor offered explanations from linguistic and etymological perspectives to help them better understand the concept. The instructor then continued to elaborate on this theme to help the students better understand the systems of values at the time and explore how these cultural and historical contexts shaped the author’s poems. The discussion also involved fast reading of some articles regarding the connection between poetry and culture and society, highlighting the role of literature and an extrinsic approach to teaching literature that goes beyond a text.

The poem *Of Many Worlds in This World* was also read in this lesson as an example to illustrate how cultural and scientific components are filtered in poetry in the 17th century. The instructors also motivated the students to read various comments on the poem to see how the audience from various fields reacted to the poem. This activity exposed the students to more diverse interpretations of the poem and helped them negotiate its meanings by themselves. The students were also encouraged to draw conclusions on the implications and values derived from the poems. In doing so, some of them were able to compare the literary works by John Donne and Cavendish, demonstrating their critical thinking. They also made a comparison between the social values and viewpoints between the 17th century and the 21st century with which they were more familiar, thus, acquired a more critical insight into history and culture.

To conclude, the observation of four lessons on English Literature at the UniFe showed that various teaching approaches were adopted. There did not seem to be a variety of activities during the classes, which was probably because the teaching and learning was carried out on virtual platforms. However, almost all observed classes followed a similar sequence in which the historical period was examined, the text was analysed and the issues derived from it was discussed. It was clear that the instructor prioritized explaining about the text, referring to the author’s biography and purposes for writing the text. The instructor also applied an approach in which the historical and cultural contexts of the works were explored, contributing to the students’ expansion of cultural knowledge. The students were also encouraged to take an active role during the classes. In particular, they

had a chance to read aloud the text, which allowed them to not only recognise how to pronounce unfamiliar words and refine their language skill but also become more engaged with the text. They were also motivated to express their thoughts on and reactions to the meanings of the text as well as the issues involved. This helped expose them to various cultural perspectives and interpretations of the text, thus, their attitudes towards differences could be revealed and improved.

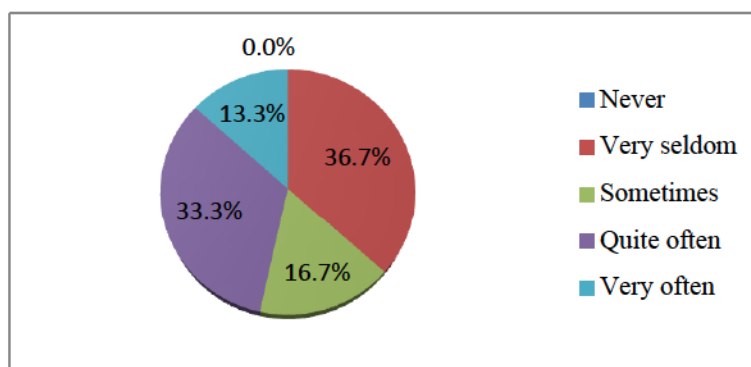
4.2.3. Questionnaire results

4.2.3.1. Background information of UniFe students

The third-year UniFe students' frequency of using English to interact with a person of different nationality was revealed through their responses to the multiple-choice item in Section 1 of the questionnaire. The findings reveal that the participants had various experiences in having intercultural interactions with foreign users of English. The detail results are illustrated in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2

UniFe students' frequency of interaction with a person of different nationality



As can be seen from Figure 4.2, nearly half of the total participants revealed that they have a lot of opportunities to use English to communicate with people from other countries, with 13.3% of them very often and 33.3% of them quite often involved in such interaction. Meanwhile, the findings also show that over a third of the respondents (36.7%) rarely had chances to use English to interact with people of different nationality. The rest of the students reported that they sometimes used English in encounters with people from other countries, accounting for 16.7%. These results demonstrate a certain

amount of diversity among the participants regarding the experience in having intercultural interactions.

UniFe students' common problems in intercultural interactions

The open-ended question in Section 1 of the questionnaire provides data on the problems commonly confronted by the third-year UniFe students when they interact with people from other countries. 81% of the initial cohort responded to this item, meaning that 12% of the students did not seem to face any particular problem. In general, the findings show that most of the participants came across obstacles related to language skills and psychological factors which are indeed interrelated to each other.

Regarding language performance, the respondents revealed that the problems stemmed from both themselves and the other interlocutors. In particular, 15% of them reported that the lack of vocabulary tended to prevent them to express themselves during the interaction with people from other countries. They described the problem in detail: “The precise words to answer the questions of others do not often come to my mind” and “I often struggle to find a proper word to explain what I want to say”. However, this problem may signal a habit of thinking on their own cultural perspectives when they are lost for words and confronted with the unknown, which can be considered as a low ability to tolerate ambiguity (Habiňáková, 2015). Limited lexical resource also clearly affected their fluency, making their conversations interrupted and slow. Interestingly, one participant specifically mentioned the insufficient cultural vocabulary as a problem occurring during their intercultural interaction. S/he explained that it was the lack of equivalence for culture-bound concepts that made it difficult for them to talk about cultural phenomena.

A relatively same proportion of students mentioned their unnatural English pronunciation as a problem that often reduced the quality of the conversations and affected the comprehension of messages conveyed. One of them clearly explained the consequence of this problem, claiming that it “increased the feeling of insecurity” and “weakened their confidence when they communicated with foreigners”. The interlocutors’ dialects or accents also pose difficulties for a few students during their communication. This may be because processing accented speech demands much cognitive and emotional effort (Croucher, 2017). However, they perceived their lack of practice as the subjective cause that makes them find these dialects or accents unfamiliar, explaining that:

“The only problem I've ever encountered in such a situation has been my inability to comprehend thoroughly what was being said to me, due to my lack of exercise in understanding a wide variety of accents.”

The good sign is that some of the students also provided their own solutions to the discussed problems. They all agreed that these difficulties could be overcome by frequent practice over time. This demonstrated their full awareness of the problems and a certain degree of maturity as language learners. Moreover, since culture-related issues were not addressed in the students' response, it was expected that the students had acquired a certain level of cultural knowledge in order to minimise cultural misunderstandings and confusion.

4.2.3.2. UniFe students' self-assessment of their intercultural competence

An online questionnaire was delivered to the third-year students majoring in English Language and Literature at UniFe with the aim to gather quantitative data on their self-assessment of intercultural competence, particularly the attitude and knowledge dimensions. In general, the students perceived their intercultural attitudes and knowledge to be at relatively high levels, which are shown in Table 4.11. The findings reveal that the students' intercultural knowledge was perceived to be at a slightly higher level than intercultural attitudes.

Table 4.12

Descriptive statistics of intercultural competence

Dimension	Attitudes	Knowledge
Combined means	4.11	4.24

UniFe students' self-assessment of attitudes as a constituent of intercultural competence

Items 1 to 19 in Section 2 of the questionnaire aim at identifying the students' self-assessment of their intercultural attitudes. It can be seen from Table 4.12 that the students tended to perceive their level of respect to other cultures as the highest among the three sub-constructs; meanwhile, they were less likely to be curious about cultures and interculturality. While the students evaluated all aspects in the sub-construct of Respect to be at a relatively high level, there was a great difference in the students' evaluations of

various aspects of Openness and those of Curiosity and discovery, ranging from average to very high levels.

Table 4.13

Descriptive statistics of Attitude dimension

Descriptive statistics	Respect	Openness	Curiosity & discovery
Mean	4.24	4.09	4.00
Min	3.50	3.03	3.17
Max	4.70	4.80	4.60

Table 4.13 shows the central tendencies and variations in the students' responses to different ways of expressing their respect to other cultures. In general, most participants perceived that they had a fairly high level of respect to other cultures as demonstrated in the items' mean scores and the proportion of participants agreeing with the first six items.

Table 4.14

Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Respect“ sub-construct

Item	Statements	M	SD
R1	I approve rather than disapprove of cultural differences.	4.70	0.54
R2	I appreciate similarities between different cultures.	4.17	0.91
R3*	Complexities in other cultural perspectives seem frustrating to me.	4.40	0.86
R4	I am willing to modify my own values, beliefs and behaviours.	3.50	0.94
R5	When talking to people from other cultures, I am willing to discuss the cultural differences in their ways of thinking.	4.27	0.94
R6	I am willing to adapt to the social manners (for example with respect to greeting, clothing, etc.) of the country I am visiting, although I might not agree with these.	4.40	0.97

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
R1	0	0	3.3	23.3	73.3
R2	0	0	33.3	16.7	50
R3*	63.3	23.3	13.3	0	0
R4	0	13.3	40	30	16.7
R5	0	6.7	13.3	26.7	53.3
R6	0	3.3	13.3	20	63.3

Items R1, R2 and R3 identify the level to which the students value and appreciate cultural diversity. It can be seen from Table 4.13 that no disagreement were found in the

students' responses to these three items, implying a high degree of consensus among them. In particular, a substantial majority of the students strongly agreed that they approve rather than disapprove of cultural differences while merely less than one tenth of them stayed neutral. The mean score of item R1 is 4.70, indicating the highest level among the items. Besides, item R2 aims at determining the students' attitudes towards the similarities between different cultures. It has a mean score of 4.17, showing a relatively high level of appreciation. Fewer students agreed with this item compared to the previous one, accounting for two thirds of the participants while the other third remained neutral about this issue. The negative item R3 investigates how the students perceived their attitudes towards the complexities offered by other cultural perspectives. Its high average score of 4.40 shows that generally, the students did not find it frustrating when encountering cultural complexities. Indeed, while one fourth of the students stayed neutral and none of them agreed with the item, most of the others revealed that they did not feel frustrated at all (63.3%).

The participants demonstrated relatively high levels of willingness to bridge cultural differences in Item R5 and R6 with the mean scores of 3.50 and 4.27, respectively. However, the results show a marked variation among the students' responses. In detail, three fourths of them revealed that they were willing to discuss the cultural differences in the ways people from other cultures think and a similar number of respondents were willing to adapt to the social manners of the country they visit even if they might not agree with these. Meanwhile, over one tenth of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with both items. It should be noted that a same number of them (13.3%) were slightly unwilling to join discussions on cultural differences from other people's perspectives and only one participant slightly disagreed with the idea of adapting to culturally different social manners.

Besides, the participants also expressed a lower level of willingness to modify their own values, beliefs and behaviours despite the relatively high level of willingness to adapt to another country's social manners. As can be seen from Table 4.13, item R4 has the lowest mean score in this sub-construct and represents an average level in the evaluation scale. Responses to this item also varied among the students. A larger number of respondents remained neutral about changing their values, beliefs and behaviours, accounting for 40%, while most of them agreed with the item but with a slight degree. Moreover, over a tenth of the participants were relatively unwilling to adjust their values, beliefs and behaviours.

Openness

The next six items in Section 2 of the questionnaire aim at identifying how open the students were in their interactions with people from other cultures. Generally, the students had a relatively high level of openness, yet there was significant variations among different aspects of this sub-construct portrayed in the items, as can be seen in Table 4.14.

Table 4.15

Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Openness“ sub-construct

Item	Statements	M	SD
O7*	While working in groups I prefer to work with people of my own culture, because cultural differences provoke problems.	4.67	0.71
O8	When I am with people from other cultures, I am keen to discuss each other's cultural habits.	3.83	1.37
O9	I am open to interactions with people from different cultures.	4.80	0.55
O10	I am aware that I hold assumptions about people of different cultures.	3.03	1.25
O11*	I judge other people when they behave in a way that I do not understand.	3.60	1.07
O12*	I assume that my own values, beliefs and behaviours are the only naturally correct ones.	4.63	0.56

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
O7*	76.7	16.7	3.3	3.3	0
O8	10	10	10	26.7	43.4
O9	0	0	6.7	6.7	86.7
O10	13.3	20	30	23.3	13.3
O11*	23.3	33.3	23.3	20	0
O12*	66.7	30	3.3	0	0

Table 4.14 shows that the participants were very willing to interact with culturally different others as demonstrated through the high mean scores of Item O7 and O9 and the relatively high mean score of Item O8. In details, over three thirds of the students strongly disagreed that they preferred to work in groups only with people of the same culture while merely one participant remained neutral and another one slightly agreed with the idea, accounting for 3.3%. Moreover, the vast majority of students revealed that they were very open to interactions with people from different cultures as there was a high degree of agreement with Item O9. The results show that the students are less open to discussion on

cultural habits with people from other cultures as the mean score of Item O8 was significantly lower despite remaining at a relatively high level. The students' responses to this item varied among the degree of agreement although most of them strongly agreed with the item. One tenth of the participants were not at all keen to discuss their own and others' cultural habits, while the same number stayed neutral.

Item O10 aims at determining the students' awareness of their assumptions about people of different cultures, which seem unavoidable during intercultural interactions. As can be seen from Table 4.14, the mean score of this item is the lowest in the sub-construct and at an average level, implying that the participants were somewhat aware of the assumptions they hold about culturally different others. Over one third of the participants revealed that they were conscious of their assumptions, but an almost equal smaller number of them remained neutral and another was not aware. The lack of awareness about what they assume of others seems likely to result in judgments of behaviours.

However, the results of Item O11 show that the students did not perceive themselves as often making judgment of other people's behaviours that are not familiar to them. Although the mean score of Item O11 is at a fairly high level ($M=3.60$), it is not as high as those of other items in the sub-construct. Over 50% of the students revealed that they did not judge people when they behave in a way that they do not understand, but only nearly half of this number (23.3%) could completely suspend their judgment. There were still one fifth of the participants who slightly agreed with the item, meaning that they judge others' behaviours at times.

Item O12 addresses the students' assumption of their own values, beliefs and behaviours. The results finds that a vast majority of the participants did not assume their own values, beliefs and behaviours to be naturally correct ones, with over 60% strongly disagreed with the item. Merely one participant stayed neutral while none of them agreed that they have such assumptions. The mean score of the item was 4.63, implying a particularly high level of openness to other cultures.

Curiosity and discovery

The students' levels of curiosity and discovery are determined in seven items, from item C13 to item C19, as demonstrated in Table 4.15. In general, it can be seen that the participants were very curious to learn about cultures, yet they seemed less willing to tolerate uncertainty during intercultural interactions. The mean scores of the items in this sub-construct vary from average to very high level.

Table 4.16*Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Curiosity and discovery“ sub-construct*

Item	Statements	M	SD
C13	I am willing to create opportunities to build cultural relationships.	4.60	0.62
C14	I am interested in learning as much as possible about other cultures.	4.53	0.73
C15	I ask myself questions about other cultures and cultural perspectives.	4.43	0.73
C16	I see uncertainty in ambiguous intercultural encounters as an interesting challenge.	3.77	1.14
C17*	I feel anxious when I am in a country where people solve problems totally differently than I am used to.	3.17	1.02
C18	I accept that there can be discomfort in cross-cultural situations.	3.60	1.13
C19	I accept that people from other cultures can experience problems with values /and norms of my own culture.	3.93	1.13

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
C13	0	0	6.7	26.7	66.7
C14	0	3.3	3.3	30	63.3
C15	0	0	13.3	30	56.7
C16	3.3	10	26.7	26.7	33.3
C17*	6.7	36.7	26.7	26.7	3.3
C18	3.3	16.7	20	36.7	23.3
C19	0	6.9	24.1	31	37.9

The findings show that generally, most students were very interested in seeking out cultural interactions. In particular, it can be seen from Table 4.15 that no students were unwilling to create opportunities to build cultural relationships (Item C13). Meanwhile, the majority of them revealed their willingness to do so with 66.7% strongly agreed with the item, more than double that with a slighter degree of agreement. Moreover, the students also revealed much interest in learning as much as possible about other cultures in item C14. The frequency of this item's responses saw a similar pattern with the previous one, but one student admitted that s/he was reluctant to learn about other cultures. The mean scores of these two items were 4.60 and 4.53, respectively, which indicate a very high level of curiosity and are the highest among the items in the sub-construct.

Item C15 also has a relatively high mean score of 4.43, in which most of the students revealed that they questioned themselves about other cultures and cultural perspectives. The findings show that this practice was performed by all participants as no disagreement with the item was reported. However, over one tenth of the students

remained neutral, which could be inferred that they were not sure whether they ask themselves complex culture-related questions.

The students' tolerance of ambiguity is determined in item C16 and item C17. As demonstrated in Table 4.15, the participants had various responses in these two items. It can be inferred from their mean scores that although 60% of the students considered uncertainty in ambiguous intercultural encounters as an interesting challenge (Item C16), one third of them still experienced anxiety in a country where people solve problems totally differently (Item C17). Meanwhile, the same number of over one fourth remained neutral about both aspects. The mean score of item C17 is at a moderate level, lower than that of the previous one.

The students' ability to tolerate ambiguity was also identified in item C18 and item C19. The results reveal that the students seemed to find it easier to accept that people from other cultures can experience problems with the values and norms of their own culture (Item C19) than to accept that there can be discomfort in cross-cultural situations (Item C18) as the prior has higher mean score than the latter (M=3.93 and M=3.60, respectively). Indeed, one fifth of the participants disagreed to accept the discomfort that may occur in cross-cultural situations, while three times fewer did not acknowledge the problems faced by people from other cultures regarding their own culture. However, the mean scores of these two items are still at a relatively high level.

UniFe students' self-assessment of knowledge as a constituent of intercultural competence

Table 4.16 demonstrates how the participants assessed their intercultural knowledge. The findings show that the students generally acquired a quite high level of intercultural knowledge. It can be seen that the score for their cultural self-awareness was perceived to be approximately similar to that of their deep cultural knowledge. Besides, it seems that there was a greater variation in the students' evaluation of different aspects of the second sub-construct, as the lowest score among the items is averagely high while the highest score is at very high level.

Table 4.17

Descriptive statistics of Knowledge dimension

Descriptive statistics	Cultural self-awareness	Deep cultural knowledge
Mean	4.21	4.27

Min	3.97	3.67
Max	4.53	4.63

UniFe students' cultural self-awareness

The students' level of cultural self-awareness was assessed in five items, from item S20 to item S24. In general, the participants perceived that they were relatively aware of culture and its effects, with the mean scores of most items at a relatively high level. The results of the descriptive analysis of these items are illustrated in Table 4.17 below.

Table 4.18

Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Cultural self-awareness“ sub-construct

Item	Statements	M	SD
S20	I am aware that colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity are important elements of individual identity.	4.30	0.92
S21	I am aware that colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity generate multiple identities.	4.53	0.68
S22	I am aware of cultural differences generated by colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity.	4.03	0.89
S23	I am aware of national and cultural stereotypes and their potential danger.	4.23	1.04
S24	I am aware that my own culture should not be regarded as a point of reference to assess in/appropriate behaviours.	3.97	0.85

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
S20	0	6.7	10	30	53.3
S21	0	0	10	26.7	63.3
S22	0	3.3	26.7	33.3	36.7
S23	3.3	6.7	3.3	36.7	50
S24	0	3.3	26.7	40	30

As can be seen from Table 4.17, the students had relatively high self-awareness of culture and how it shapes identity. In detail, most participants were acutely conscious of elements forming individual identity, including colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity as the mean score of item S20 is at very high level (M=4.30). Over half of the respondents agreed with the item with a strong degree while only two of them were not aware of the constituents of individual identity and one tenth seemed unsure.

Similarly, the students were even more well aware that these elements can form multiple identities in each person as the mean score of item S21 is the highest in the sub-construct and at a very high level (M=4.53). 90% of the participants revealed that they were aware of multiple identities with those strongly agreeing with the item doubled those expressing slight agreement. It should be noted that no disagreement was found and only one tenth of the students stayed neutral about the issue.

The results show that item S22 has the second lowest mean score among the items in this sub-construct (M=4.03), yet it is still at a relatively high level, inferring that most participants had strong awareness of cultural differences generated by colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity. As can be seen from Table 4.17, 70% of the participants agreed with the item, while over one fourth remained neutral and only one student did not really notice the cultural differences caused by those elements.

Table 4.17 shows that there was a subtle variation among the students' responses to item S23 which aims at identifying their awareness of national and cultural stereotypes as well as their potential danger. Half of the respondents were well aware that stereotypes are possibly dangerous, meanwhile one student was unsure and one tenth of them did not have keen awareness of the issue. Overall, the mean score of 4.23 of the item is at a very high level, inferring very high awareness of how culture shapes one's worldviews.

As can be seen from Table 4.17, the students were quite aware that their own culture should not be regarded as a point of reference to assess in/appropriate behaviours as the mean score of item S24 is at a relatively high level despite being lowest in the sub-construct (M=3.97). The descriptive analysis shows that 70% of the students agreed with the item, yet mostly with a slighter degree compared to other items. Meanwhile, over one fourth of the participants remained neutral and only one of them slightly disagreed with not using their own culture as a point of reference to examine others' behaviours.

UniFe students' cultural knowledge

Table 4.18 illustrates the data generated from item 25 to item 33, which aim at identifying how the students perceived their deep cultural knowledge. It can be said that generally the students acquired a relatively high level of deep cultural knowledge as the mean scores of all items in this sub-construct were above average level with the majority of them at the merge of the very high level.

Table 4.19*Descriptive statistics of items measuring „Deep cultural knowledge“ sub-construct*

Item	Statements	M	SD
D25	I believe that culture is expressed through communication and interaction.	4.43	0.68
D26	I recognize that cultures change over time.	4.20	0.66
D27	I am aware that my cultural perspective may influence my behaviours, values, and modes of communication.	4.63	0.62
D28	My understanding of cultural norms can help me interact with people from other cultures.	4.33	0.84
D29	My socio-cultural knowledge of other cultures allows me to act appropriately when interacting with foreigners.	3.87	0.90
D30	I am aware that history, politics, economy, beliefs and modes of communication are interconnected.	4.57	0.63
D31	I am aware that beliefs and practices are closely linked to historical contexts.	4.47	0.57
D32	When encountering another culture, I find both similarities and differences with my culture.	4.30	0.75
D33	I try to understand other people’s perspectives when trying to solve work issues caused by cultural differences.	3.67	1.09

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
D25	0	0	10	36.7	53.3
D26	0	0	13.3	53.3	33.3
D27	0	0	6.7	23.3	70
D28	0	3.3	13.3	30	53.3
D29	0	10	16.7	50	23.3
D30	0	0	6.7	30	63.3
D31	0	0	3.3	46.7	50
D32	0	0	16.7	36.7	46.7
D33	0	20	20	33.3	26.7

Item D25, D26 and D27 aim at determining the students’ understanding of culture. As shown in Table 4.18, the participants were acutely aware that culture is expressed through communication and interaction as the mean score of item D25 was at very high level (M=4.43). A great majority of the students agreed with the item, with over half of them expressing strongly agreement (53.3%) while only one tenth of the respondents remained neutral about what culture is. The findings also show that fewer students had been aware that cultures change over time, demonstrated through the slightly

lower mean score of 4.20 of item D26. Indeed, Table 4.18 shows that over half of the students agreed with the item to a slight degree while only one third of them agreeing to a strong degree. Moreover, the students had proper awareness regarding the influences of their cultural perspective on their behaviours, values, and modes of communication. The mean score of item D26 was 4.63, at a very high level. Most of the students agreed with the item, with 70% to a strong degree, while only two respondents stayed neutral about the issue. It should be noted that no disagreement with these three items were identified, inferring that the students were conscious of what culture is and how it affects people.

The students' current levels of specific cultural knowledge were identified in item D28 and item D29. While the participants were very confident that their understanding of cultural norms can help them interact with people from other cultures (Item D28), they were less sure whether their socio-cultural knowledge of other cultures can allow them to act appropriately during interactions with foreigners (Item D29). These findings were demonstrated through the mean scores of the two items, which were 4.33 at a very high level and 3.87 at a lower level. In detail, over half of the respondents strongly agreed with item D28, yet the same number agreed with item D29 to a slighter degree. While most students expressed agreement to both items, more students remained neutral about the level of their socio-cultural knowledge than their understanding of cultural norms. Also, the number of students who was not confident about their socio-cultural knowledge tripled those who perceived that they did not have thorough understanding of cultural norms.

The findings show that the students were well aware of the links between beliefs, practice and history as item D30 and item D31 had relatively similar mean scores at a very high level, which were 4.57 and 4.47, respectively. In particular, although the majority of students were aware that history politics, economy, beliefs and modes of communication are interconnected, the proportion agreeing with item D30 to a strong degree was twice more than that to a slighter degree. Meanwhile, the numbers of students who were aware that beliefs and practices are closely linked to historical contexts in two degrees of agreement were approximately equal. As can be seen in Table 4.18, 6.6% of the students remained neutral about the interrelation between history politics, economy, beliefs and modes of communication, while only half of them were unsure about the link between beliefs, practices and historical contexts.

The results also found that the students were quite aware of the similarities and differences between cultures. Indeed, they were very willing to seek both similarities and differences between their own culture and another one, demonstrated in the mean score at

a very high level of item D32 (M=4.30). A majority of students revealed this practice, accounting for over 80% with more students admitting a strong degree of agreement. This proportion was five times higher than those remained neutral. However, the students were less aware of other people's perspectives when trying to solve work issues caused by cultural differences as the mean score of item D33 is 3.67 (SD=1.09), lowest among the items in this sub-construct. In detail, one fifth of the participants revealed that they did not try to understand other people's perspectives while seeking solutions to work issues resulted from cultural differences and another one fifth remained neutral. Although the rest of them admitted this practice, the proportion agreeing with the item to a slight degree was more than that to a strong degree.

All in all, the interpretations of UniFe students' intercultural competence on the basis of the quantitative findings gathered from the questionnaire can be summarised in Table 4.19 as follows:

Table 4.20

Summary of UniFe students' intercultural competence

Dimension	Sub-construct	Mean score	Interpretation
Attitudes		4.11	Relatively high
	Respect	4.24	Very high
	Openness	4.09	Relatively high
	Curiosity and discovery	4.00	Relatively high
Knowledge		4.24	Very high
	Cultural self-awareness	4.21	Very high
	Deep cultural knowledge	4.27	Very high

4.2.3.3. Approaches to teaching English Literature at UniFe

Table 4.21 illustrates the frequency of the activities carried out during the English Literature course at UniFe, which imply the approaches that the teacher adopted in teaching this subject. The mean scores and standard deviations of the items were calculated to identify the central tendency and the variability of the responses, respectively. Table 4.2 presents the items in a descending order of their mean scores. In general, with the mean scores ranging from 3.25 to 4.81, it is fair to say that most activities were carried out quite often, implying an integrated approach to the teaching of literature. However, as shown in Table 4.2, the activities stimulating the readers' responses to the literary texts and participation seemed to be adopted more frequently than those focusing on language and forms of the text.

Table 4.21*Quantitative results on the approaches to teaching literature at UniFe*

Item	Statement	Mean	SD
15	The teacher encourages us to discuss beyond the surface meaning of the literary text.	4.81	0.40
10	The teacher encourages us to use our feelings and opinions in our interpretation of literary text.	4.75	0.45
12	The teacher stimulates our personal responses to a literary text.	4.69	0.51
8	The teacher lets us actively participate in the process of understanding the meaning of the text.	4.63	0.64
5	The teacher explains literary terms to help us in the reading process.	4.56	0.70
9	The teacher activates our background knowledge before we read a literary text.	4.38	0.82
14	The teacher gets us to search for inter/cultural values from a literary text.	4.32	0.79
16	The teacher encourages us to explore social, political and historical contexts of the literary text.	4.32	0.87
3	The teacher encourages us to use our linguistic knowledge to form aesthetic judgment of the literary text.	4.31	0.86
13	The teacher provokes our responses towards the issues in the literary text.	4.25	0.88
11	The teacher encourages us to relate the themes of the literary text to our personal experiences.	4.25	0.98
1	The teacher gets us to mark any linguistic features (e.g. vocabulary / grammar / choices of word) from the text that are significant to our reading.	4.19	0.91
2	The teacher guides us to interpret a literary text by looking at the language used by the author.	4.17	1.05
6	The teacher generates the language practice using the literary text.	3.94	0.93
7	I work with my classmates in the process of understanding the literary text.	3.38	1.13
4	We compare the ways language is used in a literary work with that of non-literary texts.	3.25	0.62

The quantitative findings showed that the discussion beyond the surface meaning of the literary text was carried out in almost all English Literature lessons as Item 15 had the highest mean score of 4.81 with a small degree of variation among the students' responses (SD=0.40). Such deep reading can allow the students to better understand a

work of literature as they can examine information that makes the text richer and more insightful (Truong, 2009).

It is worth pointing out from the findings that the use of group work in the process of understanding the literary text (Item 7) was not often adopted in the English Literature lessons. This may be explained by the fact that at the time of this study, the course was offered online through a virtual learning platform, limiting the interaction among the students. However, referring to Table 4.2, we can see that to facilitate the students' reading of the literary work, the teacher regularly provided explanation of literary terms (Item 5), which was among the most frequently performed activities during the course.

As can be seen from Table 4.2, the teacher regularly made attempts to promote the students' role as readers during the reading and interpretation of literary works. In detail, the students revealed that the second most frequently performed activity in the course was to encourage them to use their feelings and opinions during the interpretation of the text (Item 10). Moreover, the teachers almost always stimulated the students' personal responses to the literary texts (Item 12) and allowed them to actively participate in the process of seeking out the meaning of the texts (Item 8). However, it can be seen that although the students' responses towards specific issues raised in the literary text were provoked in many lessons (Item 13), it was less frequently encouraged than those towards the meaning or contents of the text. In addition, although the students were also motivated to relate the themes of the literary text to their personal experiences (Item 11), Table 4.2 shows that this activity was much less popular during the course.

Table 4.2 also indicates that the approaches concerning the values of the literary text and elements beyond it were regularly adopted in the English Literature course even though they were less frequently used than those promoting readers' responses to the contents of the literary text. In particular, inter/cultural values from a work of literature were examined in a lot of lessons, illustrated by the relatively high mean score of item 14 (M=4.32). Meanwhile, the aesthetic values of the text seemed to receive less focus as the teachers promoted the use of linguistic knowledge to form aesthetic judgment of the literary text (Item 3) fewer times during the course. Significantly, the lessons drew more frequent attention to prepare the students for the reading process by activating their background knowledge (Item 9). In addition, the marginally lower mean score of Item 16 (M=4.32) shows that the students were also often encouraged to explore social, political and historical contexts of the literary text.

The quantitative findings also suggest that the language of the text was sometimes taken into consideration and the language-based activities were the least popular practice in the English Literature lessons. In particular, during the reading of the literary work, the teacher occasionally guided the students to pay attention to the language used by the author (Item 2). The students were also sometimes required to mark any linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar or choices of word that are important to their reading (Item 1), implying that literary styles tended to be regularly examined at times. Besides, although the students responded quite differently to Item 6, which concerns the language practice using the literary text, the use of this activity was merely sometimes undertaken. The comparison between the language uses of a literary work and of a non-literary one (Item 4) took place even much less frequently.

To sum up, the quantitative findings generated from the questionnaire reveal that deep reading that goes beyond the surface meaning of the literary text is considered top priority in the English Literature course. Although various approaches were taken to teaching literature, the reader-response seemed to be more prominent among them. During the course, the analysis and interpretation of the literary work also often enabled the exploration of inter/cultural values as well as other cultural aspects related to the text. Meanwhile, a smaller amount of effort was put in carrying out language-based activities and improving learners' language skills.

4.2.4. Interviews with UniFe students

The interviews with five UniFe third-year English language majored students aim at exploring some aspects of their intercultural attitudes and knowledge. They provide direct evidence to help answer the research question regarding the students' intercultural competence after the English Literature course. The qualitative findings reveal that in general, the students had relatively positive attitudes towards other cultures and proper understandings of cultures.

As revealed in the interviews, the notions of culture as defined by UniFe students shared some common elements. The findings show that most of the students attempted to identify the components of culture. They viewed culture as entailing features that are shared among a particular group of people or country. To them, culture involves not only cultural products such as language, literature, cuisine, costumes, music and arts but also intangible aspects that guide people's behaviours such as traditions, beliefs and habits. This perception of culture was based on its relation with its constituent elements (Lustig &

Koester, 1996). It can be inferred that the students were conscious of the influences of culture, particularly on “how a certain group of people think and behave, how we interact with others and even how we value ourselves” (SU1). Besides, most of the interviewees mentioned diversity in defining culture, claiming that each country has their own culture and thus the world is culturally diverse. One of them explained:

“To me, culture is the way of life of a particular group of people, including language, religion, cuisine, social habits and values that they accept and valued collectively. So culture shows the group's uniqueness and identity and represents the differences between groups of people in the world. For example the specialities are different from country to country, which creates their own unique images and culture”. (SU2)

Two students perceived culture in a more abstract sense as a surrounding environment in which a person was raised: “I think culture is the customs, ideas and conditions in which a person is raised. It is everything surrounding a person and involves human activities” (SU4). In this sense, it seems that culture was considered to be transmitted between generations and could be taught instead of born naturally, indicating the second approach to conceptualising culture (Lustig & Koester, 1996). Initially, the view of culture as dynamic in the link with communication and interaction was not initially mentioned. However, when the researcher raised a question about it, all of them agreed that the way a person communicates and behaves during interactions with others could reveal a lot about their culture.

The interviews also show that all students perceived themselves as having a high level of respect towards other cultures and cultural diversity. Some students mentioned specific ways in which they express appreciation towards cultures different from their own, including keeping respect for various components that demonstrate a culture and attempting to understand different perspectives:

“I respect other cultures because each of them has its own values. [...] I value the culture of another country through their history or language and even table manners of people. I also try to resist stereotypes, learn to appreciate and value diverse views”. (SU1)

“From my perspectives, every culture has its own values and virtue. For that reason, they deserve equal respect from us. I strongly oppose the idea of ethnocentrism when we look down to other cultures and put ours into the centre of things. Every person and culture needs equality.” (SU3)

“Firstly I try not to impose my own values. Because of the cultural differences, the cultural norms of other groups may make me uncomfortable. Therefore, it will be better if I make an effort to understand other perspectives instead of judging them by my one-side viewpoints. Another thing is avoiding stereotyping. There will be others outside that population that fit those thoughts, or not all the people inside the population will always be like that.” (SU5)

It can be seen that the students believed that all cultures should be equally valued and that no specific culture is more important than others. Therefore, apart from respecting cultures and cultural differences, the students also emphasized their attempts to avoid stereotypes, implying the awareness of the need suspend judgments. Trying to see things from other cultural perspectives was also one of their practices, proving that they were not only respectful towards cultural diversity but also willing to bridge cultural differences (Blair, 2017).

The students’ respect to other cultures was revealed in more details in the next questions in the interviews. The findings show that all of the interviewees agreed that cultural differences should be considered more important than cultural similarities, implying their appreciation of cultural diversity. Some students were of the opinion that cultural discrepancies represent the identity and values of each culture, making them become more important to be paid attention to:

“I think we should base on cultural differences. It will be cultural differences which differentiate one another. [...] They are more important as they help each culture have its own identity and separate from the others.” (SU1)

“In my opinion, cultural differences are more important because [...] they make each country unique with their own features which no country in the world has.” (SU5)

The students’ answers to this question provided more evidence to prove that they highly valued the diversity among cultures. Besides, two students explained the main reason for this preference as the belief that the understandings of cultural differences could help reduce misunderstandings and avoid conflicts, facilitating their communication with culturally different others:

“I suppose that cultural differences are major areas that we should invest more attention since they are major causes for conflicts and misunderstandings. There witnessed tons of

unexpected conflicts due to cultural difference; therefore, if we fully understand these discrepancies, we will be likely to avoid arguments and unexpected situations.” (SU2)

“I think cultural differences are more important because we need to be aware of them to avoid cultural misunderstandings. Therefore knowing about the difference helps people communicate with people from other country more successfully.” (SU3)

This belief seems to imply that the students considered knowledge of the differences between cultures a crucial factor that contributes to the success of intercultural interactions. To put it another way, one student also strongly believed that proper understanding of cultural differences could bridge the gap between people from other cultures:

“I think that it is cultural differences that people should focus on, because I feel that people don't understand and value other foreign culture. It seems like there are so many judgment, stereotypes and biased opinion on another cultures. Knowing how to value the differences of other culture and understanding them is definitely the key to bring people together.” (SU4)

While the students often took notice of differences between cultures, the awareness of their own culture was not mentioned. Despite the belief that cultural discrepancies are more important than cultural similarities, the students revealed various reactions when encountering a thing culturally different from what they were familiar with. Student S1 found it quite evident that at first she used to feel surprised and a bit confused, even shocked, as well as lose confidence to communicate with people in that culture. However, they gradually became more curious towards that experience:

“I want to dig deep into the “why”, why they have that way of thinking, for example. So I often ask myself questions like “Why do they behave or think so differently from us?” [...] Obviously if I can answer this question, I can learn the differences between their culture and mine so in the future if it happens again I will not be surprised anymore or I will find it easier to accept that they do not think or behave the way I do.” (SU1)

Other students were more positive towards the experiences and expressed their tolerance of the differences and ambiguity during intercultural interactions. It was likely that the students might consider the encounters with cultural differences and uncertainty as

opportunities for them to gain experience and expand their knowledge about other cultures. In this sense, it seems that the students had a sound level of curiosity regarding cultural interactions.

“I often feel so weird at first and then try to be more familiar with it. It often takes me some time to get used to those new experiences. [...] I think I’ve become more silent and observing to capture new details.” (SU2)

“I try not to put any stereotypes on that and I tell myself to be open-minded to embrace that. [...] I often observe and google it or ask others to understand the cultural differences.” (SU3)

One participant was very positive towards cultural differences, revealing that she was often “surprised and excited at the same time”. It can be seen that the ways the students reacted to a cultural difference they face with during intercultural interactions varied and grew after times, ranging from confusion to excitement, yet in general, all of them had positive attitudes.

With regards to whether they hold any judgment about other cultures, three of the students perceived that they did not often judge people from other cultures when communicating and interacting with them. In particular:

“Actually, I don't judge anyone, either people in the same or different cultures, because I think it isn't necessary and it can badly affect other people. I think each culture is unique, and we should show the positive attitude or respect for people from other cultures. I mean, who am I to judge?” (SU2)

“No, I don’t. Because each country has its own culture so there is no right and wrong regarding to beliefs and such. I am aware it is inappropriate to judge a person based on his or her culture.” (SU4)

“No, I don’t. Because I know everyone has their own beliefs and of course they behave in the ways that they think are appropriate. Each culture has its own value and their beliefs are their identities so I earn nothing from judging.” (SU5)

The findings imply that the students’ awareness of and respect to cultural diversity and uniqueness laid a foundation for them to avoid making judgments about others, demonstrating an interconnection between different sub-constructs of the attitude dimension. However, two other participants honestly admitted that they were still

sometimes affected by long-held beliefs about other individuals and cultures. They admitted that they found it difficult to withhold these assumptions:

“Sometimes. I was influenced by many opinions and judgments from what I've seen and experienced, via movies or social media for example. It took me quite a long time to get rid of those. It is not easy to remove completely what we used to believe.” (SU1)

“To be honest sometimes I still have judgment unconsciously towards unfamiliar behaviours and ways of thinking as I looked at them from my own perspective. But it's only in my head and I don't show it. When I recognize that I'm judging them I always try to stop doing it and remind myself to withhold it”. (SU3)

As demonstrated in the findings, although the students were not fully able to avoid judging culturally different others, they were able to acknowledge their judgment and conscious of the need for suspending it. In fact, Corder (2017) agreed that there is a natural tendency for people to judge others and look at things from their own perspectives. However, interculturally competent people are aware that they should suspend biased comments and conclusions on others.

In addition, the interviews find that all students viewed cultural interactions as opportunities for them to expand knowledge of culture, implying that they were curious and willing to learn about other cultures. They believed that interacting with people from other cultures can allow them to explore new things and be exposed to different viewpoints, thus, facilitating the comparison with their own culture and the accumulation of cultural knowledge:

“For me cultural interaction gives me a lot of chance to learn. I am always very excited when I can find out interesting and new things through cultural interaction. It is the opportunity to expand knowledge, to understand what is the similarity and difference between various cultures.” (SU3)

Cultural interaction, in this sense, provides natural and practical settings and materials for learning. It can also be inferred from the findings that the students considered cultural knowledge as a very crucial element in intercultural encounters as all of them mentioned it in their answers. They emphasized that insights of other cultures can help them avoid embarrassing situation and allow them “to be productive in international workplace and build strong and positive relationships with people from different

background” (SU4). The students seemed to believe that proper cultural knowledge would help them feel more tolerant of uncertainty during interactions, once again highlighting the crucial role of knowledge in intercultural situations. Also, it was likely that their respect towards other cultures provided a basis for them to broaden their cultural knowledge.

At the end of the interviews, the students acknowledged that there were positive changes in their attitudes towards cultures during the years, particularly at university. In particular, they became more open and willing to explore other cultures thanks to both direct and indirect exposure to various cultures and cultural issues. This happened as a result of not only an environment in which people from different regions with various identities come to pursue education, but also a study of culture integrated in the study of language and literature. The students explained that:

“Yes, it changed a lot. I become more open to cultural differences and a new culture. In general, some changes are positive. I get rid of a lot of stereotypes and become more open to embrace a new culture.” (SU1)

“I have to say yes. Since university, I've met lots of people with different identities and that's the reason why now i am more open to theirs differences. [...] acknowledging more different cultures even prompt me to learn more about them.” (SU2)

“University is undoubtedly a much more expanded environment as we have a chance to communicate, approach and connect with a great number of other cultures, therefore, my opinions and attitudes towards these two mentioned things changed positively.” (SU4)

Although frequent exposure to other cultures does not always guarantee a person’s development of intercultural competence, the findings show that it can exert some beneficial effects on their attitudes towards culture and cultural diversity. These changes were demonstrated in different components namely respect by appreciating cultural diversity, openness by suspending stereotypes and judgment, and curiosity by being interested in learning about cultures.

The analysis of the interviews indicates that although the students were confident to share about their perception of culture and discuss some popular cultural rules, they were more reluctant to discuss how culture shapes a person’s identity. Moreover, the students had a tendency to revolve around understanding other cultures and rarely mention the self-awareness of their own. They did not bring up any comparison and contrast between their culture and other cultures, probably because they did not have a habit of

such practice. However, the qualitative data provides much evidence regarding the students' insights into the effects of culture on its people's beliefs and behaviours. A participant asserted that "culture is the force behind social practices", thus, what people value and how they act are defined by culture. Interestingly, other participants also believed that behaviours also define culture, and even change other culture:

"[...] behaviours are reflections of one's culture, but behaviours influenced by other cultures can affect one's culture. For example, a behaviour that is considered improper today can be accepted next year because many people follow other cultures and start to do it and eventually accept it. In this way, culture is changed." (SU1)

In this sense, the students perceived culture as dynamic and evolving over time, indicating the third approach as proposed by Lustig and Koester (1996). It can also be inferred from this perception of the influences of culture that the students were aware of other cultural perspectives, thus, likely to be able to understand the world from other views.

The interviews also explored how the students perceived the effects that English literature study exerts on their intercultural competence development. In general, all participants asserted that the English Literature courses helped them improve not only their attitudes towards cultures but also their knowledge of different cultures, which indicates the development of intercultural component to a certain extent after the English Literature course. Moreover, although developing the students' language competence was not among the course objectives, one participant revealed that their English was significantly honed by listening to the professor, "her accent for example, the way she reads the texts" (SU2).

The participants revealed that the English Literature course helped them have more positive attitudes towards cultural diversity. One of them explained that they learnt to appreciate and accept the differences in cultures even if they did not like them. Besides, all of the participants agreed that the study of English Literature fostered their will to learn about other culture. They reported that they found the lessons full of interesting cultural information and the more they learnt, "a lot more curious" they felt to explore other cultures. Student SU5 explained the rise in their curiosity towards other cultures:

“Studying foreign literature in general gave me always the opportunity, through the texts and also thanks to students’ comments, to open my mind. It’s more like a mental travel through the history, the authors, costumes, habits. All spiced up with our comments and personal point of view as students. So, I would say yes, in my opinion English Literature courses have lighted up what I already have in my personality, which is the curiosity. I think that it has an important role.”

Student S1 attributed this influence to the fact that their instructor often shared some information related to the context or the literary work, normally about certain beliefs and values held during a historical period, indicating an effort in incorporating cultural elements in her teaching. In addition, the students also mentioned the in-depth analyses of the literary texts as an exposure to the cultural values, beliefs and ideologies that existed in the target culture when the text was produced. Such cultural exposure allowed them to critically examine, from a different cultural point of view, the existence of those values and beliefs both in the past and present and challenged them to suspend judgment. In this sense, the students learnt to be more open towards other cultures and tolerant of the differences.

On the basis of their positive attitudes towards other cultures, the students could expand their general knowledge of culture, which is indeed the most prominent theme found in the interviews. Since the course addressed literary works in different periods, the students acknowledged an increase in knowledge of cultural practices not only in the past but also in contemporary society.

“I’m sure that we studied a lot about the foreign culture in the past, like the Victorian age culture, thoughts, and the role of women at the time. I think the course also helped me expand my point of view regarding society and our role in it.” (SU4)

The English Literature course helped the students expand knowledge of various socio-cultural issues such as money and status, gender and power relationship, as well as of other interdisciplinary fields, ranging from philosophical aspects such as the meaning of life, the role of man on universe, to scientific aspects such as the greatest discoveries in science. They were also able to provide some critical comments about the gender roles and social status.

“The role of women at that time was so iconic. They only attended social events while men could travel and did business. Their utmost goal was only to get married so their rights were so limited. They were disadvantaged and had to endure inequalities within their marriages and society.” (SU1)

The students’ responses show that they could provide their personal opinions about social and cultural topics in the target language. Two participants also believed that the English Literature course helped them understand more about other worldviews. They agreed that they were exposed to the ways of thinking and writing of people at the time, thus, they had more diverse opinions and better understandings of the text in particular and social issues derived from it in general. Student SU2 addressed this influence:

“My instructor has always encouraged us to think outside the lines that define the way of thinking created by our culture. I feel that, as a consequence, I can see more clearly how people from cultures different than mine think and perceive what surrounds them.”

The participants also reported that they became more aware of cultural and political development in literature and societies in general, indicating better understanding of the link between literature, culture and society to the study of English Literature. Student SU3 highlighted this influence:

“Thanks to the instructor’s guide, during our classes we had been able to fully understand how literature reflects and mirrors society and vice versa. Notably, the texts we read gave us a wonderful picture of the culture of the time.”

Interestingly, by understanding how literature, culture and society are connected, the students also became more interested in their own literature and reflect on their own culture. In this sense, it could be inferred that the English Literature course also exerted a positive effect on the students’ awareness of their own culture.

To conclude, the analysis of the interviews suggests that UniFe third-year English majored students had relatively positive attitudes towards other cultures as well as sound cultural knowledge, indicating much possibility to communicate and behave appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations. The participants attributed their intercultural attitudes and knowledge to the study of English Literature course, which helped them become more open to cultural diversity and curious to learn about other cultures as well as

equipped them with a great amount of cultural knowledge and heightened their cultural self-awareness.

4.3. Cross-case comparison and triangulation of data

This section aims to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative data to at two locations of research to formulate answers to the research questions of the study. The discussion of major findings is categorised in accordance to each research question.

4.3.1. Research question 1: In what ways is English Literature taught to the third-year English language majored students at HANU and UniFe?

With the aim to seek an answer to the first research question regarding the teaching of English Literature at the two locations of research, both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from different instruments, including documents, observations and questionnaires. In general, the findings show that HANU and UniFe shared some similarities and differences in their approaches to English Literature teaching.

Crucial documents of the two educational institutions regulating the context of English Literature teaching and the students' development of intercultural competence were analysed. They include the decisions issued by the governments regarding the English Studies curriculum, the official curricula of the two universities and the English Literature course descriptions. The analyses of these qualitative data revealed that the two universities in two countries offer similar yet slightly different contexts for English education in general and the teaching and learning of English Literature in particular. It is not a surprise as Engler (2000) pointed out that the notion of English Studies means different things in different places around the world. Despite common interest in investigating things done in and with English language, the analysis of documents from HANU and UniFe confirms that different nations have different methodologies, objects of study and approaches to what constitutes English as a discipline, depending on their geographical context and cultural tradition. However, English Studies remains as a complex discipline that can refer to many interrelated aspects: languages, literatures and cultures (Prescott, Hewings & Seargeant, 2016). According to Pope (2014), there is a tendency for English degree programs all over the world to concentrate on language and/or literature and/or culture, communication and the media. Indeed, while the BA program at HANU in Vietnam was designed on the basis of the premise that language and culture are closely linked, the program at UniFe in Italy was also built on the

interconnection between language, culture and literature with the assumption that culture and society are filtered in literature.

In fact, in non-English speaking countries, English has been taught and learnt as a foreign language for three main purposes: to serve community by training professionals such as instructors, translators, interpreters or diplomats; to facilitate cultural exchange; and to promote critical awareness and comparative perspectives, leaving English Studies as a more practical field of study. In this sense, Engler (2000) stated that literature and linguistics are both integral parts of „English“ and applied linguistics and language learning will belong to it as well to a certain extent. Meanwhile, in European countries, a student pursuing an English language degree at higher education tends to be assumed to do English literature or culture. Students pursuing this major often read and analyse various works of literature, specifically prose, poetry, and creative nonfiction. They unpack the historical, cultural, and literary contexts of the texts they study and often specialize in a specific era or location. This may include a look at modern literature and how it applies to contemporary social and political events.

The analyses of the documents revealed that the teaching of English Literature at HANU is required to serve a practical purpose of advancing language competence and familiarising the students with literary knowledge. English Literature is considered as an individual subject that can make contributions to language development, thus, receiving less teaching and learning time compared to language skills and linguistic modules. Carter (2016) explained that such view of English Literature is common in non-Anglophone English curricula with “the study of English language prioritised and with generally more agreement about the ends of creating speakers of English as an international lingua franca” (p. 11), mostly for socio-economic values. Meanwhile, UniFe adopts a more literary approach to the teaching of English Literature and allows equal credits and teaching hours for courses on literature and language skills. Regarding what to teach, the instructors in both sites have much autonomy to choose literary texts to be examined in the courses. However, HANU instructors have to stick to an indicative teaching schedule authorised by the university and department while UniFe instructors can develop their own teaching contents. In this sense, the possibility to develop the students’ intercultural competence at HANU depends on several factors, including not only the instructors but also the curriculum developers and course designers. Meanwhile, since there is a high level of discretionality in a choice of the topics to be taught in literature and language, UniFe instructors hold more responsibility regarding the teaching contents and approaches. The

decision on whether to aim at developing the students' intercultural competence in the English Literature course, thus, depends solely on them.

The observations carried out during the courses reveal that although different methods and activities were used in the two universities, there were some similarities in their teaching of English Literature. At HANU, the teaching of English literature at HANU seemed to be more learner-centred and activity-based with much group work and language practice. Since the class was carried out in person, the instructor could adopt a variety of activities such as instructors' lecture, students' presentation, discussion and quizzes, providing a lot of opportunities for the students to communicate in the target language. The lesson was mainly spent on equipping the students' with knowledge of literature and literary history, with limited time devoted to close reading and in-depth analysis of literary texts. This practice was probably as result of the objectives of the course, which mainly address the history of English Literature and the key features of each period, and insufficient class time. Whenever a text was read, reader-response approach was adopted, which allows learners to participate in activities involving their opinions and feelings towards the text (Truong, 2009). Although the students were required to use background knowledge during the analyses of literary texts, their use merely stops at the level of comprehending the language used by the authors more often than making specific interpretations of the literary texts. The level of text analysis, thus, remained at acceptance of facts and literature seemed to be considered a source of language and contents to facilitate the use of language to interact and collaborate for comprehension. These findings are relatively in line with the quantitative data generated from Section 2 of the questionnaire delivered to the students. The questionnaire results also confirm that English Literature classes were taught with various approaches despite different frequencies. Although the students' active roles and group work were confirmed, the activities aiming to equip the students with background knowledge on the social, political and historical contexts of the literary texts were reported to be adopted more frequently than those taking the stylistic approach or addressing cultural values and issues derived from the texts.

Meanwhile, the teaching of English literature at UniFe focused on a specific literary genre to examine a working hypothesis regarding its relationship between society and culture. The observations reveal that the instructor and learners played relatively equal roles in reading-based classes. Although detailed analyses of literary texts were carried out, much time was also devoted to the exploration of elements beyond the text, including the author's biography, context and issues derived from the text. Literature in this sense

seemed to be considered more as discourse, which requires active interpretations in contexts and views language as a form of social action that calls for responses (Hall, 2005). The learners, thus, had a chance to generate their own interpretations and opinions of the text. Carter and Long (1991) argued that the development of personal opinions represents their reading as a literary experience. By letting the students actively engage in the processes of textual analysis, interpretation and evaluation, UniFe instructor successfully ensured the intelligibility and participation principles of teaching English Literature (Chambers & Gregory, 2006). It could be said that the instructor attempted to apply various approaches, among which critical literacy appeared to be the most popular one, allowing the students to discover the illustrations of social issues in the text and become more critically aware of social aspects (Truong, 2009). The quantitative data from the questionnaire produced similar findings, which revealed that language-based activities were not popular while discussions on the meanings and cultural aspects of the literary text were the top priority. Although activities with critical literacy approach were also reported to be often carried out, those with reader-response approach were fairly more frequent.

The findings from different instruments show that both locations of research adopted various approaches to teaching English Literature, which were far beyond traditional ones with language proficiency and lecture-based teaching at the core. Despite the differences in the curricula and course design as well as the preference in teaching methods, the instructors at both universities made attempts to explore historical contexts of the literary works, which involve social, political or cultural situations that influenced the events or trends during the time the works were produced. Carter and Long (1991) emphasized the importance of exploring socio-cultural background of a literary text as a secure for complete reading. The inclusion of contexts in examining a literary text not only helps the students better understand its meanings but also expands their cultural background knowledge, which are considered as the most popular purposes of teaching literature (Disvar & Tahriri, 2009). Since more in-depth analyses of literary texts were carried out at UniFe than at HANU, it was apparent that the students at UniFe had more chances to become active makers of meaning and read literature from a cultural perspective.

4.3.2. Research question 2: What are the levels of intercultural competence of HANU and UniFe third-year English language majored students after the English

Literature course?

The second research question was concerning the levels of intercultural competence, including attitudes and knowledge, amongst third-year English language majored students in HANU and UniFe. Quantitative data were collected from the Section 2 of the questionnaire and qualitative data were gathered from HANU students' reflective journals and interviews with UniFe students.

The quantitative and qualitative findings reveal that HANU and UniFe students were at slightly different levels of intercultural competence. In particular, as demonstrated in Table 4.22, the questionnaire results show that UniFe students perceived their attitudes towards other cultures and cultural diversity at relatively high level (M=4.14) and knowledge of cultures at very high level (M=4.24). Meanwhile, HANU students assessed themselves to be relatively competent yet with slightly lower mean scores for both attitudes to and knowledge of cultures (M=4.02 and 4.11, respectively).

Table 4.22

Quantitative results on HANU and UniFe students' intercultural competence

Dimension	Attitudes		Knowledge	
	HANU (N=105)	UniFe (N=30)	HANU (N=105)	UniFe (N=30)
Combined means	4.02	4.11	4.14	4.24
Interpretation	Relatively high	Relatively high	Relatively high	Very high

However, the qualitative data finds out more evidence regarding HANU students' intercultural knowledge than UniFe students. These findings are indeed not surprising due to the fact that students with different cultural orientations demonstrate intercultural development in different ways (Corder, 2017). Although the participants at the two locations of research had rather different self-assessment of various aspects of each sub-construct, they all seemed to be more confident with their cultural knowledge than attitudes. Moreover, the findings show that more HANU students seemed to be open in cultural interactions while more UniFe students expressed a strong degree of respect to other cultures. The participants in both locations had the lowest score in the sub-construct „Curiosity and discovery“. Regarding cultural knowledge, it seems that the students were more aware of culture-general knowledge than the impacts of culture on individuals.

With regards to the attitude dimension, the quantitative findings show that students in both universities highly approved cultural diversity and respected cultural similarities

and differences. These findings are also found in HANU students' journals and UniFe students' interviews, confirming a consensus between quantitative and qualitative data. Both the quantitative and qualitative data reveal that the students in both universities valued cultural differences more than similarities. The focus on cultural differences, in fact, can allow the students to make better sense of others' behaviours. However, Carlson (2016) argued that interculturally competent individuals tend to appreciate the similarities between cultures as much because they can rely on these similarities to establish intercultural connections and relationships. The questionnaire also reveals that most HANU students were willing to modify their values, beliefs and behaviours, meanwhile, many UniFe students were reluctant to do so despite their eagerness to adapt to another country's social manners during their visits. The analysis of qualitative findings comes up with more evidence to prove this difference in HANU and UniFe students' demonstrations of respect to other cultures. While most HANU students mentioned their willingness to acclimate to a foreign culture while showing respect to their own culture, UniFe students tended to display their appreciation towards components of culture.

Besides, the quantitative results reveal that many students in both locations were unsure whether they hold assumptions about people of different cultures. Some HANU students also admitted in their journals that they were occasionally affected by prejudice without realising it in the beginning. This is in fact understandable because assumptions are formed on the basis of a set of common values and shared belief systems, thus, they are inevitable outcome of interacting within one's own cultural milieu. Cultural assumptions are often invisible until one's norms and cultural identity are challenged in encounters with culturally different others (Corder, 2017). These findings, therefore, can be explained by most students' occasional interactions with a person of different nationality as revealed in the Section 1 of the questionnaire. However, both the quantitative and qualitative data find that the students were aware of the need to suspend judgments on other cultures when communicating and interacting with them and made attempts to do so. This demonstrates that the students had great cultural awareness, generating a sound basis for their positive attitudes towards other cultures. Nevertheless, they were not fully able to avoid judging other people.

The findings also suggest that both HANU and UniFe students had mild curiosity in cultural interactions. Although in the interviews, all UniFe students agreed that they viewed cultural encounters as learning opportunities, the questionnaire results show that many of them still occasionally experienced anxiety in unfamiliar situations and found it

hard to accept discomfort in intercultural contact. It can be inferred that the participants still had problems predicting or explaining others' behaviours, leading to a view of their partners as ambiguous and an increase in anxiety (Croucher, 2017). Gudykunst (2005, as cited in Croucher, 2017) argued that a moderate level of anxiety is indeed beneficial to the students because effective communication may not occur if the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety is too high or too low. In detail, high levels of anxiety may result in avoidance of communication while low levels may lead to a lack of motivation to interact with culturally different others. As for HANU students, both the results of the questionnaire and journals reveal that they were rather reluctant to consider ambiguity in intercultural interactions as positive challenges. They were more likely to consider such feelings as negative undesirable incidents resulting from the lack of cultural knowledge or the lack of experience in dealing with unexpected situations. Therefore, instead of accepting and embracing uncertainty and unpredictably, they preferred to avoid it. They claimed that they felt comfortable dealing with unfamiliarity only when they are well prepared and aware of what may happen. Given that because members of diverse cultures show various ways of behaviours and hold different viewpoints and standards (INCA, 2004) and that ambiguity and discomfort may emerge even in communication among people of the same culture or in talks about controversial issues, not being able to accept it can hinder the students' intercultural interactions. These findings demonstrate that much appreciation to other cultures and cultural diversity may not guarantee great tolerance of uncertainty. Moreover, UniFe students seemed to be more proactive in seeking cultural interactions than HANU students. Vietnamese students' reticence to develop intercultural networks may result from their shyness or lack of confidence, which was revealed in Section 1 of the questionnaire.

Regarding the knowledge dimension, the analysis of quantitative data reveals that HANU students perceived their intercultural knowledge to be relatively good while UniFe students assessed themselves at high levels. Accordingly, the participants in both locations specifically addressed how they perceived the notion of culture, indicating proper understandings of what culture is. Their discussions show slightly different ways in perceiving culture: while HANU students tended to mention constituent elements of the concept, UniFe students viewed it in a social heredity of a community and its influences on behaviours. In this sense, UniFe students seemed to have a more multi-layered and sophisticated conceptualisation of culture as a notion. However, despite both HANU and UniFe students' awareness of the dynamics of culture as demonstrated to the high mean

scores of the item 25 and 26 in the questionnaire, none of them implicitly mentioned this aspect in the qualitative data. This suggests a need to further improve their understanding of culture.

The qualitative data revealed that the students at both research locations considered cultural knowledge to be crucial to successful intercultural interaction. This is a positive sign as the proper awareness of how important it is to be equipped with cultural knowledge can encourage the students to learn more about other cultures and their own. The study of culture can help students become more sensitive to different cultures and, in certain circumstances, adjust to them (Brdarić, 2016). The quantitative results showed that UniFe students were more confident with their cultural knowledge than HANU students. The qualitative results find out that HANU students tended to compare and contrast between British culture and their own more often than UniFe students. HANU students' more self-awareness of their culture may be explained by the assumption they held before the English Literature course that English and Vietnamese culture does not have much in common. Meanwhile, the qualitative data reveal that UniFe students had more critical comments on socio-cultural issues, suggesting that they demonstrated deeper understandings of underlying cultural values and the links between political, economic, religious system and culture. This was consistent with their higher scores of the items addressing this aspect in the questionnaire.

It is important to note that the development of intercultural competence is a lifelong process and that there is no point at which one becomes fully intercultural competent. Moreover, since HANU students revealed in the questionnaire that they still encountered some problems during intercultural interactions including the lack of cultural knowledge, it is certain that these students' knowledge of cultures still needs further development. Nevertheless, with a relatively high level of requisite attitudes of respect, openness and curiosity as foundational, it is likely that both HANU and UniFe students are able to begin to see from others' perspectives and to respond to others according to the way in which the other person desires to be treated (Deardorff, 2009). There is, thus, a high possibility that the students can acquire an adequate level of appropriateness and effectiveness when communicating and behaving in intercultural situations, which represents external outcomes in the Process Model of Intercultural Competence.

4.3.3. Research question 3: To what extent does English Literature teaching and learning influence the intercultural competence development of HANU and UniFe

third-year English language majored students?

The influences of English Literature teaching and learning on the students' development of intercultural competence, particularly the attitude and knowledge constituents as suggested by Deardorff's (2009) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, were revealed through the HANU participants' reflective journals and the interviews with UniFe participants. In general, the students at both locations agreed that the study of English Literature made some significant contributions to the students' relatively high degree of intercultural competence, particularly the knowledge dimension.

It can be inferred from the findings that the students at both research locations did not seem to encounter any challenge regarding the lack of cultural issues presented in literary texts although they are non-native learners as an outsider of a culture (Duff & Maley, 1990). This was because they were equipped with social, political and historical contexts in which the text was produced before reading it. This extrinsic approach prepared the students for background knowledge, thus, partly avoided them from losing interest in the texts. In other words, the gap between the learners and the target culture was narrowed, abolishing cultural barriers during the reading of the text (Divsar & Tahriri, 2009). Indeed, the students, particularly those at UniFe, revealed that they were put in a comfortable and curious state to explore the literary texts and expand their knowledge of the target culture. In this sense, the teaching of English Literature at UniFe confirms the proposition by Lazar (1993), which highlights that literature can provide a favourable context for the acquisition of culture. It also asserts a more recent argument proposed by Hoff (2019), which claims that learners' personal engagement and intercultural understanding can be fostered by an explicit pedagogical focus on intertextual matters.

In particular, the interviews with UniFe students indicate that the participants acquired knowledge about various fields and issues, for example, the differences in social and gender roles from the poems analysed in English Literature lessons. This finding was in line with the results of the study by Rodríguez (2013), which finds that the participants were able to recognise the prejudicial treatment of individuals based on gender and socio-economic condition illustrated in literary texts. As mentioned in the previous section, UniFe students were also able to provide critical opinions regarding these socio-cultural issues discussed in class while HANU students' reflective journals did not find such evidence. This happened as a result of the close reading of the poems and critical discussions on the issues derived from them, particularly with the UniFe instructor's guided questions which encouraged the students to move to higher levels of thinking and

reader-response approach which allowed the students to voice their opinions. By cultivating the students' critical thinking and their active role in the learning process, the instructor helped improve their culture-based knowledge, particularly the understanding of how culture is reflected in social contexts and in literature (Dhanapal, 2010).

HANU students, meanwhile, showed more interest in comparing and contrasting between the target culture and their own when reflecting on the influences of English Literature study. A high mean score of the item addressing this practice in the questionnaire was in line with the theme found in the participants' reflective journals, proving that HANU students were aware of the similarities and differences between cultures. According to Hall (2005), being conscious of how they are alike as well as different others could allow people to tolerate or accommodate difference, which are vital intercultural skills. It can also be inferred that they were able to reflect on their own culture when discussing historical events and phenomena of other cultures, thus, becoming more aware of their own individual and cultural values. The students attributed this practice to the instructors' guidance, explaining that their instructor encouraged them to identify the similarities and differences in literature and social issues of the two cultures. UniFe students, however, became more interested and aware of their own literature and culture without the instructor's specific instruction but as a result of the exploration of contexts and analysis of the literary texts.

HANU students also mentioned their improvement of knowledge of socio-cultural contexts in various periods in the history of British literature. This is indeed one of the objectives of the English Literature course, which was mentioned in the course description. The teaching with much focus on literary history helped achieve this goal. The students at HANU did not have many opportunities to perform in-depth reading and literary analysis of a whole work, mostly because of the class time limit. Therefore, the instructors allowed them to read its synopsis as one of the learning outcomes that the students should acquire after the course is to be able to summarize the content of typical works. This may probably to ensure the exposure to the text while at the same time avoid making the students uneasy about reading long literary works, which Duff and Maley (1990) proved as one of the challenges in literature teaching. This practice still allowed the students to gain some knowledge of the text and facilitated discussions on some socio-cultural issues drawn out from it, of which totalitarianism in *1984* was an example. As a result, the students reported that they better understood the link between culture and literature as well as some values of British culture.

One of the most salient findings is that the teaching and learning of English Literature also made positive contributions to the students' attitudes towards culture although it was not included in the course objectives at both locations of research. Both HANU and UniFe students agreed that they had more positive attitudes towards other cultures after the English Literature course, yet more evidence was found from UniFe students. The qualitative data reveal that both HANU and UniFe students grew more eager to explore other cultures after attending the English Literature courses as they were provided with a lot of interesting cultural information, which increased their curiosity. Particularly, UniFe students highlighted the crucial role of the in-depth reading and analyses of the literary texts that guided by their instructor, claiming that they became more aware of cultural diversity and learnt to respect cultural differences, particularly in terms of ways of thinking, beliefs and values. The participants also became more open to cultures different from their own as a result of the literary analysis and discussion on elements beyond the text. They referred to this practice as an exposure to the target culture that allowed them to learn much about it, indicating a view of cultural interactions as learning opportunities (Blair, 2017). Meanwhile, HANU students tended to link their willingness to interact with people from other cultures with their honed language competence. This finding is indeed no surprise as Vietnamese students of English tend to be more concerned about their competence in English grammar and linguistic aspects rather than their intercultural competence (Nguyen, 2013). The opportunities for language practice from conducting research on literary history, authors and their works and making presentations on it slightly increased their confidence in interacting with English speakers from other cultures. This was because they increased their lexical resources and could use the knowledge they gained in the English Literature course as a conversational topic during cultural encounters.

All in all, it could be claimed that the English Literature course produced important effects on the students' development of intercultural competence, mostly on the knowledge dimension. Both HANU and UniFe students admitted an increase in cultural knowledge of the target culture thanks to much focus on the discussions on elements beyond the literary works such as historical and social contexts. However, UniFe displayed more positive attitudes towards other cultures and cultural interactions after the study of English Literature. This was proved to be the consequence of the instructor's use of the reader-response and critical literacy approach to literary analysis as well as activities that balanced between instructor-centred and learner-centred approach. The

English Literature course did not seem to exert much influence on HANU students' intercultural attitudes. They tended to merely acknowledge their increased confidence as a result of linguistic improvement as it was implied in the course objectives. This was apparent because HANU and UniFe had relatively different contexts for and methods of English Literature teaching although integrated approaches to teaching English Literature were adopted at both locations.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study was conducted as an attempt to void the research gap regarding the assessment of intercultural competence and the influences of English Literature teaching and learning on English language majored students' development of intercultural competence. It aims to identify the approaches to teaching English Literature at two locations of research, namely HANU in Vietnam and UniFe in Italy, investigate the levels of two constituents to the students' intercultural competence (attitudes and knowledge) after the English Literature courses and explore the impacts of English Literature teaching and learning on the development of different constructs of the students' intercultural competence.

Mixed methods research approach was adopted to gather data to help answer the research questions. Specifically, convergent data collection was conducted in the two locations of research. First, at the beginning of the English Literature course, national and institutional documents were gathered and analysed to describe the context of English Literature teaching and intercultural competence development at HANU and UniFe. Then some lessons in the English Literature course were observed to collect qualitative data to explore the teaching approaches adopted by the instructors. At the end of the course, questionnaires were delivered on-site to 105 HANU students and online to 30 UniFe students to obtain quantitative data from the students' perspectives of how English Literature was taught and how they evaluate their intercultural attitudes and knowledge. After that, 10 HANU students were asked to write reflective journals and 5 UniFe students were interviewed to acquire qualitative data on their levels of intercultural attitudes and knowledge as well as to discover how they perceive the influences of English Literature course on the development of intercultural competence. The two types of data were triangulated and analysed to form comparisons between the two locations of research as well as to generate answers to the research questions.

The analysis synthesizes findings from each location of research and highlights three key findings. First, there are similarities and differences in the approaches to teaching English Literature at HANU and UniFe. While in-person discussions on literary history played a prominent role to HANU, online teaching and learning time at UniFe was devoted to literary analysis and detailed exploration of historical and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, when a literary text was examined, extrinsic and reader-response approaches that facilitate the students' participation in discussion beyond the text itself were adopted in both locations of research.

The second finding was concerning the students' degree of intercultural competence after the English Literature course. In light of the quantitative and qualitative data, it can be concluded that both HANU and UniFe students perceived their intercultural attitude and knowledge to be at relatively high levels. However, their self-assessment of the constituents of these two dimensions varied in two locations of research. Although these findings indicated the students' perceived competence rather than actual one, it remains likely that the students have moved closer toward the outcomes as proposed in the Process Model of Intercultural Competence, which is the ability to communicate and behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural interaction (Deardorff, 2006).

Third, the English Literature course made contributions to the relatively high degree of intercultural competence of HANU and UniFe students, particularly their knowledge of culture. The priority given to literary history and the focus on the biography and contents of the texts provided HANU students with knowledge of the target culture. Meanwhile, an approach that examines literature in its link with society and culture, together with reader-response approach to literary analysis, not only expanded UniFe students' knowledge but also aroused more positive attitudes towards cultures and cultural diversity. Thus, the influences of the English Literature course on the students' intercultural competence can be summarised as offering opportunities for purposeful and meaningful exposure to other culture, in which knowledge of cultures can be obtained and attitudes towards cultural differences can be challenged, leaving space for positive improvements.

5.2. Implications for English language education and English Literature teaching

5.2.1. Theoretical implications of the study

This study makes a significant contribution to a growing body of literature with an attempt to assess intercultural competence and explore the influences of English Literature teaching and learning on its development. In particular, this study demonstrates the use of a framework developed on the basis of Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence in formulating statements used to assess the attitudes and knowledge dimension of intercultural competence. More importantly, the results of this study highlights the potential of English Literature in developing different sub-constructs of the attitudes and knowledge dimensions of intercultural competence. As a result, the study calls for more attention to the teaching of English Literature at tertiary level, particularly in Vietnam context. In addition, the study has also gone some way toward enhancing the

understanding of the assessment of intercultural competence and the role of English Literature in fostering intercultural competence, which has yet to receive much attention in the existing literature.

5.2.2. Practical implications of the study

The implications for assessing intercultural competence and teaching English Literature towards the students' development of intercultural competence involve concerted efforts by various stakeholders from different levels in formulating intercultural competence policies and carrying out culturally adapted practices. This is because the mere transfer of knowledge about the country and culture is obviously insufficient. In general, policy makers at national and institutional levels should provide a supportive environment for educational practitioners to acquire intercultural competence in order to develop their learners' intercultural competence (Nguyen, 2013).

To begin with, educational policy makers and pedagogical practitioners should be cautious about fostering the availability of cultural teaching and learning across different levels of language proficiency. A holistic approach that combines linguistic and cultural contents should be adopted, particularly in Vietnam context where language and culture are often taught separately. Since each country may have different cultural values and conventions, the modes of communication in English-speaking cultures may not be in harmony with those in other cultures, which prevent English learners to use English-speaking cultures as references for any intercultural interactions (Le & Chen, 2019). As a result, the teaching contents should incorporate the values and conventions of not only the target culture but also other cultures.

To facilitate the inclusion of cultural contents, intercultural competence should be included in the educational goals and expected learning outcomes of a training program and be developed together with linguistic competence. Curriculum designers should make sure the development of intercultural competence is systematic throughout all courses, including English Literature, in order to gradually equip learners with critical intercultural attitudes, knowledge and skills. The learning outcomes and teaching contents should be developed on the basis of the learning process, with a focus on awareness at initial level, then aiming toward attitudes, behaviours and internalisation of skills at the highest level. The Process Model of Intercultural Competence proposed by Deardorff (2006) can be adopted in formulating the objectives of the curriculum and component courses as it clearly identifies the components and highlights the on-going process of its development.

If a separate course on intercultural competence is provided, pedagogy and assessment should also be consistent in the designated levels to meet educational goals. Although the teaching resources may vary according to schools' available resources, instructors' qualifications, and learners' proficiency levels, the teaching contents should aim at strengthening students' relationships with peers from different cultural backgrounds, mediating and negotiating different cultural topics in communication, and developing communication skills with analytical thinking exercises.

In order to do so and to promote intercultural competence in English language education, leaders, administrators and academic staff of all divisions, including English Literature, should have proper awareness and comprehension of its necessity and objectives of cultural integration. Curriculum designers and instructors need to be aware of the interdependence of the constituents of intercultural competence to establish appropriate and measurable learning objectives or outcome statements (Deardorff, 2017). Teaching practices, teaching objectives and behaviours cannot be modified without proper comprehension of the development and assessment of intercultural competence and the interdependence of its constituents.

Professional development opportunities for academic staff are also of crucial importance as they need to improve their intercultural competence and awareness of cultures. In particular, it is crucial that instructors broaden their knowledge of their own cultures and students' cultural backgrounds. They can indeed become good examples for their students to develop intercultural competence in general. Besides, only by being interculturally competent can instructors be willing to shift away from the focus on becoming native-like speakers and generate a learning environment with diverse multicultural communicative contexts. In this sense, instructors should continuously transform their pedagogical approaches to teaching in order to allow students to position themselves in diverse communities of practice. To achieve this goal, workshops and training courses for instructors about intercultural competence and literature teaching should be provided.

In addition, it is crucial for universities to promote intercultural learning environment in which the students of foreign languages can interact with culturally different others so that they can perform intercultural skills and improve intercultural competence. As asserted by some scholars, intercultural attitudes and knowledge can increase with successful intercultural encounters as the students can compare cultural practices (Deardorff, 2009; Fantini, 2009; Sautú, 2013). Given that some students may not have a chance to go abroad and drown themselves multicultural settings, opportunities for

access to international experiences should be made available to acculturate them to the environment in which the target language is used. They may include regular interaction with international students within and beyond the institution and electronic collaboration with overseas institutions for particular courses or cultural activities via Internet resources.

Furthermore, the studies of English Literature at tertiary level at HANU and in Vietnam in general should be revised. Since English Literature is mainly considered as a meaningful contribution to the study of English language, the curriculum design and teaching methodologies should be reformulated and moved closer towards cultural studies in order to make the most of it. In this sense, a view of literature as culture and an understanding of culture as linguistic processes will offer substantial benefits to students. Therefore, even when English Literature is taught as an individual subject, the formation of its teaching objectives and learning outcomes should take into consideration those of culture-related subjects and make use of literature as a specific cultural artefact. The academic study of literature, therefore, should be carried out from a more cultural perspective and understood in terms of its contribution to our understandings of the world and of its potential to provide moral, political or social instruction through topics such as equality, migration, multiculturalism and so on. Literary analyses from an extrinsic, critical and reader-response approach should have an equal amount of class time compared to literary history. By this way, a touch on cultural values and social issues derived from the literary analysis can maximise the benefits of literature, as it not only provide them with more cultural knowledge but also improve their attitudes to help them successfully navigate cultural differences and challenges encountered during intercultural interactions.

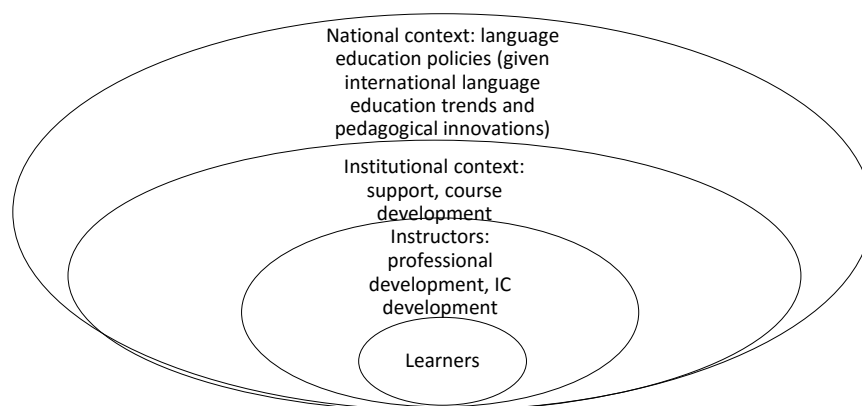
It is also important that instructors, particularly in Vietnam, shape students' attitudes towards the role that literature plays in their language learning process and intercultural competence development. This can be acquired by clearly informing students of the course objectives and highlighting the importance of cultural elements. Students' proper awareness will create motivation and foster their autonomy during the study of English Literature. Thence, many learning activities are recommended to enhance the students' perceptions and facilitate their development of intercultural competence. These activities should be task-based, content-integrated, cooperative and project-based, carried out together with formative assessment to evaluate students' competence. This means that learning tasks with social communicative purposes and an emphasis on multiple perspectives should be integrated in the classroom. A useful activity commonly adopted in literature lessons and proved to be effective in fostering different dimensions of

intercultural competence is literature circle. It is developed on the basis of reader-response approach, allowing students to play an active role in the class and provide critical responses to pieces of literature they have read. Through such collaborative learning, students could become more open-minded and tolerant of cultural differences (Imamyartha et al, 2020) as well as more aware of not only their own but also other cultures (Inree & Thongrin, 2019). Literature circles carried out to discuss specific cultural topics drawn from literary works could also strengthen students' cultural knowledge (Schwebs, 2019). In addition, since the instructors of English Literature at HANU are allowed with some autonomy regarding the choices of literary texts, not only canonical works but also more contemporary ones should be integrated in the course and introduced to the students. Such choice of texts could facilitate the exposure to and understanding of cultures as students' comprehension problems due to old-fashioned language use can be avoided.

All in all, the joint efforts among stakeholders at different levels toward developing learners' intercultural competence in higher education can be summarised in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1

Joint efforts for intercultural competence development



5.2.3. Methodological implications of the study

The present study has many implications for future research and a number of future research directions were thus recommended. For implications for further research in the future, this section takes geographical and methodological aspects into consideration.

Regarding to the geographical aspect, the present study put under the spotlight only two territorial contexts of Vietnam and Italy, meaning the remaining contexts in Asia and Europe were intentionally excluded. Therefore, it may be useful for future research to gather data from other Asian and Western countries to provide more practical and diversified perspectives of English language majored students' intercultural competence and English literature teaching at university level. Moreover, future studies may also dig deeper into each particular region, either the East or the West, to acquire better representativeness of each regional context. Research studies in this direction will pave a way for empirical scholarship in intercultural competence and tertiary English literature teaching in the future, contributing significantly to the existing body of literature concerning the assessment of intercultural competence and the influences of English literature teaching on the development of intercultural competence. In addition, while this study attempted to make comparisons across geographical space, future research can focus on comparisons over time in the same space and/or across space.

With regards to methodological aspect, future research can take into consideration some directions in terms of locations of research, research design, sample size and instruments. Since the present study shows that a multi-site case study is feasible even within reach of a single researcher, it can motivate researchers and scholars to confidently conduct in the future more and more multiple-case studies in more than one national context, together contributing to the field of intercultural competence and literature teaching dominated by single-country studies conducted by a single researcher. In addition, it was apparent that the present study made an attempt to merely assess the students' perceived intercultural competence yet did not evaluate their actual or performed competence. Therefore, it would be worthwhile for future studies to carry out the assessment of the students' actual intercultural competence by, for example, using direct performance-based methods in which it is possible for the students to demonstrate their competence in specific scenarios after the English Literature course. Furthermore, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was not feasible to conduct on-going assessment of the students' intercultural competence throughout the English Literature course. It is, thus, recommended that future studies should gather data on the students' intercultural competence throughout an English Literature course and make use of inferential analysis to identify whether there are significant differences in the students' intercultural competence before and after the course. Another solution to improve the reliability of the research findings regarding the influences of English Literature course on students'

development of intercultural competence is to expand the research participant samples and gather data from two groups of students: those who attended and those who did not attend the English Literature course, then compare the intercultural competence of the two groups. Regarding the research instruments, more thought-provoking questions can be added to allow deeper reflection and generate more evidence of intercultural competence development in participants' reflective journals. This would also help the students to make more sense of what they experienced throughout the course, thus, providing more data regarding its influences. Last but not least, further investigation in the future may involve the evaluation of other dimension of intercultural competence, for example, skills at personal level, or touch upon interpersonal level concerning internal and external outcomes.

5.3. Limitations of the study

The study has faced a number of unavoidable limitations despite the researcher's considerable effort. The first limitation is concerned with the reliability and validity of data. There was a lack of consistency in the use of research instruments. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic which prevented the researcher to be on site during the English Literature course at UniFe, two different instruments were utilised to collect qualitative data at HANU and UniFe in the last phase of the study. The number of participants in this phase was also relatively limited, which may not be sufficient to represent the whole population. Besides, as this study collected and analysed qualitative data, the problem of subjectivity of the researcher and personal bias seemed to be difficult to avoid even when the researcher had attempted to minimize these threats.

Another limitation of this study is that the students might develop intercultural competence as a result of other courses that they took at the same time with English Literature. A future study may include a pre- and post-test to collect quantitative data on the level of intercultural competence a student has before and after completing the English Literature course. As the qualitative data from journals and interviews may be influenced by subjectivity, quantitative data from such test can be used to triangulate or confirm the findings.

5.4. Concluding remarks

In the development of this study, the context of English higher education was set (Chapter 1), relevant theoretical frameworks concerning intercultural competence and the teaching

of English Literature were reviewed (Chapter 2), mixed research methods were considered (Chapter 3), findings gathered at two research locations were reported and data were triangulated and compared to form answers to the research questions (Chapter 4), implications for theories, practice and further research were proposed in light of the results (Chapter 5). The initial research questions were answered and the research aim was thus achieved.

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APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear participants,

This questionnaire is carried out in order to investigate the intercultural competence of third-year English majors after the English Literature course. Your answers will be kept confidential, therefore, please respond to the items as honestly as you can.

SECTION 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Question 1. How often do you use English to interact with a person of different nationality?

Never Very seldom Occasionally Quite often Very often

Question 2. Have you had any problems in interactions with foreigners?

Yes No

If yes, please briefly describe the problem:

.....

.....

.....

.....

SECTION 2. INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Please circle the score that best represents your agreement/disagreement with each statement.

1=Strongly disagree 2=Slightly disagree 3=Neutral 4=Slightly agree 5=Strongly agree

Attitudes	Degree				
1. I approve rather than disapprove of cultural differences.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I appreciate similarities between different cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Complexities in other cultural perspectives seem frustrating to me.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am willing to modify my own values, beliefs and behaviours.	1	2	3	4	5
5. When talking to people from other cultures, I am willing to discuss the cultural differences in their ways of thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am willing to adapt to the social manners (for example with respect to greeting, clothing, etc.) of other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I prefer to work with people of my own culture to avoid problems provoked by cultural differences.	1	2	3	4	5
8. When I am with people from other cultures, I am keen to discuss each other's cultural habits.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am open to interactions with people from different cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am aware that I hold assumptions about people of different cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I judge other people when they behave in a way that I do not understand.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I assume that my own values, beliefs and behaviours are the only naturally correct ones.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am willing to create opportunities to build cultural relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I am interested in learning as much as possible about other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5

15. I ask myself questions about other cultures and cultural perspectives.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I see uncertainty and ambiguity in intercultural encounters as an interesting challenge.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I feel anxious in a country where people solve problems in ways totally different from the ones I am used to.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I accept that there can be discomfort in cross-cultural situations.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I accept that people from other cultures can experience problems with values /and norms of my own culture.	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge	Frequency				
20. I am aware that colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity are important elements of individual identity.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I am aware that colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity generate multiple identities.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I am aware of cultural differences generated by colour, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I am aware of national and cultural stereotypes and their potential danger.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I am aware that my own culture should not be regarded as a point of reference to assess in/appropriate behaviours.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I believe that culture is expressed through communication and interaction.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I recognize that cultures change over time.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I am aware that my cultural perspective may influence my behaviours, values, and modes of communication.	1	2	3	4	5
28. My understanding of cultural norms can help me interact with people from other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
29. My socio-cultural knowledge of other cultures allows me to act appropriately when interacting with foreigners.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I am aware that history, politics, economy, beliefs and modes of communication are interconnected.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I am aware that beliefs and practices are closely linked to historical contexts.	1	2	3	4	5
32. When encountering another culture, I find both similarities and differences with my culture.	1	2	3	4	5
33. I try to understand other people's perspectives when trying to solve work issues caused by cultural differences.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 3. THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

Please circle the score that best represents each description of your English literature classes.

1=Never 2=Very seldom 3=Occasionally 4=Quite often 5=Very often

Statement of approaches	Frequency				
1. The instructor gets us to mark any linguistic features (e.g. vocabulary / grammar / choices of word) from the text that are significant to our reading.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The instructor guides us to interpret the literary text by exploring the language used by the author.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The instructor encourages us to use our linguistic knowledge to form aesthetic judgment of the literary text.	1	2	3	4	5
4. We compare the ways language is used in a literary work with that of non-literary texts.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The instructor explains literary terms to help us in the reading process.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The instructor generates the language practice using the literary text.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I work with my classmates in the process of understanding the literary text.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The instructor lets us actively participate in the process of understanding the meaning of the text.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The instructor activates our background knowledge before we read a literary text.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The instructor encourages us to use our feelings and opinions in our interpretation of literary text.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The instructor encourages us to relate the themes of the literary text to our personal experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The instructor stimulates our personal responses to the literary text.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The instructor provokes our responses towards the issues in the literary text.	1	2	3	4	5
14. The instructor gets us to search for inter/cultural values from a literary text.	1	2	3	4	5
15. The instructor encourages us to discuss beyond the surface meaning of the literary text.	1	2	3	4	5
16. The instructor encourages us to explore social, political and historical contexts of the literary text.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

APPENDIX B
JOURNAL ENTRY PROMPT QUESTIONS

Dear participants,

This prompt aims to help you brainstorm and structure your reflective journal in which you write about what you acquired from the English Literature course.

Please write at least 200 words either as an essay or free writing to reflect on using this format:

“I learned that. . . This is important because. . . As a result of this learning, I will . . .”

You can also develop your ideas on the basis of the following questions:

- What does “culture” mean to you?
- When you encounter a cultural difference, what is your first reaction?
- How do you value other cultures?
- Do you hold judgment towards people from other cultures?
- Do you think cultural interactions are learning opportunities?
- How often do you reflect on your own culture?
- Did your attitudes towards culture change after the English Literature course?

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Dang Ngan Giang

Interviewee:

[Describe here the project, telling the interviewee about (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the individuals and sources of data being collected, (c) what will be done with the data to protect the confidentiality of the interviewee, and (d) how long the interview will take.]

[Have the interviewee approve the interview.]

Questions:

- What does “culture” mean to you?
- How do you value other cultures?
- When you encounter a cultural difference, what is your first reaction?
- Do you hold judgment towards people from other cultures?
- Do you think cultural interactions are learning opportunities?
- How often do you reflect on your own culture?
- Did your attitudes toward culture change after the English Literature course?

(Thank the individuals for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and the potential for future interviews.)

APPENDIX D

HANU STUDENTS' REFLECTIVE JOURNALS (EXCERPT)

[...] I obtained a wide range of knowledge that I have never known before. In the first lesson, I learn that there are 3 "historical phases" of English, namely "Old English", "Middle English", and "Modern English". While Old English is treated as a foreign one, the "Middle English" is quite close to the "Modern English" which we used to nowadays. In the Old English phase, the first literature was oral and its authors are anonymous. The oldest poem is Beowulf with over 3000 lines. In "Middle English", with the coming of Norman, the old English literature was replaced by a good deal of religious and non-religious writing-works. The greatest poet at that time is Geoffrey Chaucer, and the most famous work of him is "Canterbury Tales". The knowledge I gained from the first lesson is important because it is the foundation, helping me to have a better understanding of English literature later on as well as make a comparison with Vietnamese literature.

In the second lesson, I have learned about the Renaissance and the literature features at that time. Renaissance began in 14th century Italy, and it ended in the 17th century. This epoch witnessed great political and social changes in England (Feudalism that had been a power in Norman times was replaced by capitalism). That epoch also marked with many geographic and scientific discoveries. And, a new human conception of the evolution of history has been established at that time as well. The English literature in the Renaissance falls into 3 periods: Early Renaissance (15th century), Renaissance Peak (16th Century), Late Renaissance (17th Century). I also learned briefly about Shakespeare, "The greatest humanist and the idol of The Renaissance Age". Besides a wide range of his literary work, Shakespeare is admirable since he is considered as the inventor of English words.

The knowledge I gained from the two first lessons is important because it is the foundation, helping me to have a better understanding of English literature later on as well as make a comparison with Vietnamese literature. I was not only taught the literature but also some remarkable historical events that had influenced it. Moreover, my reading and writing skills have improved a bit after two lessons since I had learned more new words and collocations by reading coursebooks and assigned material.

To me, the first two classes are quite interesting, they are not boring as I thought. Our teacher hasn't delivered the lesson in a traditional way. He encouraged interaction between students and teachers [...] Besides English literature, the teacher also shared with us some common knowledge related to the lesson.

APPENDIX E

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH UNIFE STUDENTS (EXCERPT)

INTERVIEW WITH STUDENT SU1

[...] Interviewer: What does “culture” mean to you?

Student 1 (SU1): I think culture means culture is factor that determines how a certain group of people think and behave, how we judge other people, how we interact with others and even how we value ourselves are all related to culture. So I think that culture is crucial in shaping people’s behaviours. People behave in a certain way because it is accepted in their culture. But culture can be formed by behaviours too. I think behaviours are reflections of one’s culture, but behaviours influenced by other cultures can affect one’s culture. For example, a behaviour that is considered improper today can be accepted next year because many people follow other cultures and start to do it and eventually accept it. In this way, culture is changed.

Interviewer: So do you mean that culture is not fixed?

SU1: Yes, I think so. It can change when it is affected by other cultures. Uhm... It can change over time too. Something considered normal years ago can be outdated today you know.

Interviewer: Okay. So how do you value other cultures?

SU1: I often respect other cultures because each of them has its own values. I think no country has better culture than others and actually I don’t think we should compare which one is better or more advanced. I value the culture of another country through their history or language and even table manners of people. I also try to resist stereotypes, learn to appreciate and value diverse views.

Interviewer: When you encounter a cultural difference, what is your first reaction?

SU1: Well normally if it’s something new to me, I’ll be confused. But I try not to judge it. I think it’s good to learn about differences. It may be confusing to understand but it is interesting. I think we should base on cultural differences. It will be cultural differences which differentiate one another. The similarities are easy to accept but the differences are more difficult. They are more important as they help each culture have its own identity and separate from the others.

Interviewer: So what do you often have in mind when you find a cultural difference during interaction with others? [...]