

如何在英語課室中提升學生的跨文化能力：學生對數

位故事看法之個案研究

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摘要

儘管過去的二十年，跨文化能力的概念在英語教學領域受到許多重視，但如何將文化教學融入英語課室中，仍舊是一個值得探討的議題。本研究主旨在探索如何透過數位故事的方法，來進行文化教學並且培養學生的跨文化能力。運用質性個案研究的方法，本研究試圖了解學生自我認知中的跨文化學習結果，以及他們對製作數位故事專題的看法。研究參與對象為 32 位臺灣的大一學生，資料來源為學生的反思報告以及半結構式的訪談紀錄。研究結果顯示，學生反映出認知、情感、以及行為上的跨文化學習結果。另外學生大多對進行數位故事專題抱持正面的態度，製作專題不僅提供同學認識其他國家人士及文化的機會，也增進了他們的溝通能力。除此之外，本研究也呈現學生在進行數位故事專題過程中，所遭遇到的一些困難與挑戰。

關鍵詞：數位故事專題、跨文化能力、英語教學中的文化教學

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Fostering Students' Intercultural Competence in an EFL Classroom: A Case Study of Students' Perceptions on Digital Storytelling

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Abstract

Although the concept of intercultural competence in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) has received considerable attention over the past two decades, the issue of how and to what extent culture should be taught in language classrooms remains unresolved. This paper presents a study exploring the effectiveness of using a digital storytelling project to promote cultural learning, in particular, to foster students' intercultural competence in an EFL classroom. By employing a qualitative case-study method, the study examined students' perceived intercultural learning outcomes as well as their perceptions toward the project. Thirty-two EFL college students in Taiwan from the same Freshman English class were recruited to participate in the study. Data were collected from two sources: students' written reflections and semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that students reported cognitive, affective and behavioral outcomes of intercultural learning from the digital storytelling project. Moreover, students also expressed their positive attitudes toward the project. They viewed that the experience offered them a chance to learn more about the people and cultures of other countries as well as improve their communication skills. In spite of these positive outcomes, students also reported several challenges associated with the project.

Key words: digital storytelling projects, intercultural competence, culture in ELT

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1. Introduction

The concept of intercultural competence in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) has received considerable attention over the past two decades. This growing interest in culture learning and teaching is due in part to economic globalization and the widespread use of the Internet. People nowadays live in an interconnected world in which contact with those who have different cultural backgrounds becomes inevitable. The use of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) has also increased the demand for English instruction that facilitates cross-cultural communications. The skill of language, in itself, is often found to be insufficient for successful interpersonal and intercultural communications. As Bennett, Bennett, and Allen (2003) stated, educators need to be aware of the new intercultural challenges our learners are facing today and recognize that “intercultural competence is as important as language competence in preparing students to live in the global village and multicultural societies” (p.238). To address the importance of intercultural competence, numerous scholars have argued for the integration of culture into the foreign/second language curriculum (Bennett et al., 2003; Dlasaka, 2000; Knuston, 2006; Kramsch, 1993; 2011; Lange, 2003; Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, & Colby, 2003).

Despite this general consensus about the incorporation of culture into foreign language instruction, the issue of how and to what extent culture should be taught in foreign language classrooms remains unresolved. As pointed out by Lange and Paige (2003), the traditional instructional formats are incapable of including the various elements or aspects of culture and the teaching of culture itself is simply too

challenging for many language teachers. As a result, a growing number of studies have been conducted over the past decade to explore effective ways of incorporating culture into the language classroom. Among the various approaches, one method that has gained increasing attention is the use of digital stories. Digital stories, according to Vinogradova, Linville, and Bickel (2011), refer to short personal narratives that combine verbal narration, visual images, and a musical background and are produced digitally using various video editing software. However, in spite of the published evidence about the benefits of using digital stories to deliver cultural lessons (Alameen, 2011; Rance-Roney, 2008; Vinogradova et al., 2011) and to explore students' cultural identities (Angay-Crowder, Choi, & Yi, 2013) in second language classrooms, little empirical research has been found concerning its cross-cultural application in a foreign language context. To fill this gap, the present study attempted to explore the effectiveness of a digital storytelling project designed to foster EFL students' intercultural competence via interviewing people from other cultures and creating digital stories about them.

2. Literature Review

To better understand the role of intercultural competence in English language teaching as well as its connection to the use of digital stories, the following literature is going to focus on two aspects of research: (a) theoretical perspectives for the concept of intercultural competence in language teaching, and (b) studies on intercultural competence and the use of technology in language classrooms.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives for the Concept of Intercultural Competence in Language Teaching

The concept of intercultural competence in language teaching has largely derived from the theories of cultural learning in the second language curriculum. In order to define culture or to describe the kind of content used to teach culture, a traditional distinction between *Big C* and *little c* was often made among language educators. *Big C*, explained by Bennett et al. (2003), refers to the formal aspects of

culture or cultural creations/artifacts including major institutions, historical events, geographical monuments, fine arts, and sciences; on the other hand, *the little c* refers to the aspects of daily living such as housing, clothing, food, tools, transportation and all the patterns of behavior that members of the culture considered important and appropriate. The traditional teaching approaches in foreign language classrooms often focused on the Big C aspect in which culture was viewed as a relatively fixed and static entity composed of accumulated, classifiable, and observable facts (Paige et al., 2003). As a result, the earlier models of culture learning tended to emphasize the transmission of factual knowledge about the target country such as information about the people, history, and arts. In contrast, the more recent approaches for teaching culture mostly proposed by interculturalists have put more emphasis on the less tangible and more subjective (i.e., *the little c*) aspects of culture in which the learning of cultural values, beliefs or communication styles becomes prominent. Instruction nowadays, unlike the traditional “culture as information” approach (Knutson, 2006), has been geared toward the development of cross-cultural awareness or intercultural competence.

One of the most influential models of intercultural competence in the field of foreign language education is Byram’s (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence or the notion of *intercultural speaker*. By drawing on theories from various disciplines, Byram (2009) explained that intercultural competence is a component placed “within a more complex model of intercultural communicative competence” (p.325). The model also comprises three other components including linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence (see Figure 18.1, p.323). More specifically, within the model, intercultural competence is composed of five elements: (1) attitudes including curiosity and openness, (2) knowledge, (3) skills of interpreting and relating, (4) skills of discovery and interaction, (5) critical cultural awareness. These elements, according to Byram (2009), can be further specified in terms of pedagogical objectives which can be used in planning teaching and assessment in language classrooms.

In addition to the work of Byram, another important framework of intercultural

competence was proposed by Paige et al. (2003). They defined culture learning as “the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures” (p. 177). Their conceptual model of culture learning consists of three components: knowledge, behavior, and attitudes. Each component is then divided into two sub-domains: the culture-specific versus culture-general domains of learning. Culture-specific learning, according to them, refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills pertaining to a particular culture group or community; cultural-general learning, on the other hand, refers to knowledge and skills that are generalizable and transferable across cultures. One thing about this model is that it not only specifies three crucial aspects of intercultural learning but also emphasizes the importance of learning across culture domains in each of the three areas.

Similar to Paige et al.’s model of cultural learning, Williams (2009) also defined intercultural competence as having three dimensions: the cognitive dimension (the knowledge about cultural issues), the affective dimension (motivation or willingness to act in intercultural situation), and the behavioral dimension (skills and abilities related to intercultural situations). Based on these dimensions, Williams developed the Reflective Model of Intercultural Competency, which consisted of a set of desired learning outcomes established for study abroad students. The model intends to measure how well students have reached the following goals: (1) increased understanding of international and cultural issues, (2) increased flexibility, (3) increased open-mindedness and curiosity, and (4) enhanced critical skills. In her study, students were made aware of these learning outcomes prior to and during the study abroad program. After the program ended, students were surveyed and asked to evaluate whether they had achieved these outcomes. It was found that the Reflective Model of Intercultural Competency approach provided rich data about student gains and was an effective tool for assessing study abroad outcomes.

A review of the theoretical frameworks for teaching culture in language classrooms reveals a shift from factual transmission of cultural knowledge toward

the development of intercultural competence. The key components or dimensions commonly used to define intercultural competence appear to be knowledge, attitudes, and behavior/skills. These components are of great importance to our understanding of teaching culture since they serve as bases for developing criteria to guide classroom practices or to gauge intercultural competence of our students.

2.2 Studies on Intercultural Competence and the Use of Technology in Language Classrooms

Over the past two decades, numerous studies have been conducted in second or foreign language contexts to explore effective ways of teaching culture or increasing students' intercultural competence. One method that promotes learners' exploration of the target culture is the use of ethnographic interviews. Bateman (2002, 2004), for instance, conducted two studies using quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the effect of ethnographic interview projects on students' attitudes and feelings toward the target culture. The participants of the studies were a group of American college students learning Spanish, who worked in pairs to conduct several ethnographic interviews with a native speaker of Spanish. Both studies revealed that the interview project positively affected students' attitudes and feelings about the study of Spanish and native Spanish speakers. Furthermore, the results of Bateman's (2004) study also indicated that students became more competent in relating to and communicating with people of other cultures as well as viewing situations from other cultural points of views. The participants also reported an increased awareness of the influence their own culture in lives. In a similar vein, Su (2008) also investigated the effect of ethnographic interviews on culture learning while focusing on a group of EFL college students in Taiwan. The results of her study indicated that the ethnographic interviews helped facilitate the development of cross-cultural awareness as well as communication skills. Most participants of the study also viewed the interview approach as an effective way of increasing intercultural as well as interpersonal understanding.

Another line of research on intercultural competence focuses on the use of

technology in language classrooms. One popular approach is the employment of cross-cultural computer-mediated communication (CMC). As one form of CMC, many cross-cultural e-mail projects have been carried out in various parts of the world over the past thirty years (Cononelos & Oliva, 1993; Jogan, et al., 2001; Liaw & Johnson, 2001; Sanaour & Lapkin, 1992; Soh & Soon, 1991; Zaid, 2011). Although these studies tended to focus on students' improvement in both linguistic and cultural competence, some placed greater emphasis on the cultural aspect of learning. For instance, Liaw and Johnson (2001) looked into the cultural dimension involved in the e-mail correspondence between 22 university EFL students in Taiwan and two classes of pre-service bilingual/ESL teachers in the USA. Based on the analysis of participants' e-mail entries and written reports, the results of the study showed that students were able to form their own images of the target culture through such experience. The study also revealed that curiosity toward the other culture was a motivating factor for on-going correspondence; additionally, while cultural presumptions were sometimes a hindrance for communication, positive interpretations of cultural differences and empathy were key factors contributing to the removal of communication obstacles. Liaw and Johnson concluded that cross-cultural e-mail correspondence was a viable approach for learners to gain better understanding toward the target culture. Similarly, Jogan, Herdia, and Aguilera (2001) also conducted a study to show the benefit of e-mail projects on students' culture learning. A culture portfolio project was designed in the study in which 15 U.S. Spanish students exchanged e-mails with 15 EFL students in Chile. The portfolios in the study included copies of the e-mail exchanges and critical commentaries in which students reflected on what they had learned about the target culture and described the extent to which their original ideas about the target culture had been confirmed or modified. The results of the study showed that the students were able to improve their knowledge about and commitment to the target culture after participating in the project. In addition to e-mail projects, Liaw (2006) also examined the effectiveness of utilizing e-forums to foster students' intercultural competence. Sixteen university students in Taiwan were grouped with a class of

thirty-two university students in the United States. An online e-learning environment was designed in the study, which offered opportunities for EFL students to exchange their views with their e-pals in the US based on the reading of articles about their native culture. It was found that despite some difficulties caused by computer problems, the collaboration between the two groups of students was successful. Through the analysis of students' e-forum entries, the study revealed four types of intercultural competences of the EFL students. They are: (1) interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own culture to others, (2) ability to change perspective, (3) knowledge about one's own and others' culture for intercultural communication, and (4) knowledge about intercultural communication processes.

It should be noted that although the CMC studies cited above have shown the benefit of promoting students' intercultural learning, several researchers (Johnson & Brine, 1999; Van Handle & Corl, 1998; Warschauer, 1995) have also pointed out issues and problems associated with the implementation of cross-cultural CMC projects in the foreign language context. For instance, Johnson and Brine (1999) in their design and development of CMC courses in Japan discussed a number of key issues emerged during the courses including problems finding partner classrooms, different timing for the academic school year, nonparticipation by partner students, and lack of purpose in written exchanges. Although some of these problems can be solved through careful curriculum arrangement, others seem far more complex and difficult to manage. Take the issue of finding partner classrooms as an example, the difficulties may also include "establishing a professional collaboration with another teacher at a distance, agreeing on academic expectations and evaluation criteria" (Johnson & Brine, p. 258). Any of these problems could pose potential threats to the success of the cross-cultural CMC programs.

Other than cross-cultural CMC projects, another approach that has recently gained increasing attention in English language teaching is the use of digital stories, which also make use of computer technology and hold great potential in facilitating students' intercultural learning in language classrooms. Digital stories, as described

earlier, are short personal narratives produced digitally and combined with visual images as well as music (Vinogradova et al., 2011). Research has shown that digital storytelling is a viable approach for teachers to deliver cultural lessons (Alameen, 2011; Rance-Roney, 2008; Vinogradova et al., 2011) and to explore students' multiple literacies as well as cultural identities (Angay-Crowder, Choi, & Yi, 2013) in the second language context. For instance, Vinogradova et al. (2011) used digital stories as final projects in their advanced-level ESL course called Cross-Cultural Communication and University Life. It was found that the use of digital stories as student-centered projects allowed students to explore the cultural content, promoted student collaboration, and fostered development of multiliteracies. This was mainly because during the process of developing and producing their stories, students not only chose topics and materials that were meaningful and of genuine interest to them but also collaborated with other students and friends and family in the United States and in their home countries. These steps created a natural environment for students to explore culture learning in a collaborative context and at the same time to incorporate multimodal elements that can be digitally broadcasted to diverse audiences. Similarly, Rance-Roney (2008) also implemented digital storytelling projects in a college-based intensive ESL culture class. The "What is an American?" digital story project was used as a teaching method for her students to explore their feelings toward U.S. culture through the retelling of a critical incident. At project completion, it was found that students not only had acquired and practiced a great deal of language but also had been provided with the opportunity to examine the target culture in a new way. Although these studies have shown positive evidence about using digital stories to teach culture, they were all conducted in ESL classrooms and the type of digital stories they described (i.e., introducing learners' home cultures to a group of international peers) was largely not applicable to an English as foreign language environment. It is therefore still not clear whether this approach can be successfully implemented in an EFL context such as Taiwan and whether it can effectively foster students' intercultural competence in such educational setting. Hence, the purpose of the present study was to examine: (1) a

group of Taiwanese college students' perceived intercultural learning outcomes from the digital storytelling project, and (2) their perceptions toward such experience.

Two research questions were formulated:

- (1) What were students' perceived intercultural learning outcomes from the digital storytelling project?
- (2) What were students' perceptions toward the digital storytelling experience?

3. The Study

The present study is a case study, or an “intrinsic case study” categorized by Stake (1995, p. 3), in which the researcher's aim is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of a particular individual case. Since the purpose of this study is to examine how digital storytelling projects can be implemented to promote cultural learning in a particular EFL setting, the employment of the case-study approach can not only allow more in-depth and multifaceted exploration of the issue but also provide valuable pedagogical insights.

3.1 Participants and Setting

The participants of this study were thirty-two college students enrolled in the same Freshman English course at a national university in northern Taiwan. Their average level of English proficiency ranged from intermediate to upper-intermediate. The Freshman English course offered by the university ran for two semesters. The overall aim of this course was to further develop students' English proficiency in all four language skills. This digital storytelling project was carried out in the second semester of that one-year course. The class met once a week for two hours over a total of 18 weeks. The project was embedded within the regular course and worth 40% of students' final grade.

3.2 The Digital Storytelling Project

The design of this project attempted to foster EFL students' intercultural competence via interviewing people from other cultures and creating digital stories

about them. Students were required to collaboratively create a digital story about a foreign resident in Taiwan as the final product of the project. The project itself consisted of three broad stages: the orientation, the interview, and the production of a digital story. In the orientation stage, students were introduced the project and informed of the project objectives and requirements. After that, a two-hour workshop was held in class in order to familiarize students with the techniques of producing digital stories, which included the demonstration of using Photo Story 3 (i.e., a free downloadable program from Microsoft), viewing of digital story examples, discussing the key elements of digital stories and producing individual mini-digital stories.

After the workshop, students began to prepare for their interviews. A training session on the interview procedures was held in class. Students were first given a brief introduction to the characteristics of ethnographic interviews, such as the use of open-ended WH-questions as suggested by Su (2008). For the purpose of enhancing students' understanding toward other cultures, they were also instructed to focus their interview on three aspects: (1) finding out the interviewee's backgrounds such as information about his/her nationality and time of living in Taiwan, (2) learning about the culture of the interviewee's home country including various aspects of cultural information such as food, transportation, lifestyles, festivals, educational systems, and entertainment, and (3) knowing the interviewee's perceptions of Taiwan based on his/her personal experiences of living in this country. Moreover, interview guidelines (see Appendix A) were provided to familiarize students with the interview procedures. Students were also asked to do practice interviews with their peers in class.

After the practice in class, students began to arrange the real interview outside the classroom. Each group, consisting of approximately 5 to 6 students, was required to conduct at least one face-to-face interview with a foreign resident in Taiwan. A total of 6 groups were formed in class. Prior to the interview, students were asked to prepare a set of questions following the interview guidelines. They were also instructed to take turns asking questions during the interview. The language of the

interview should primarily be English. However, depending on the linguistic background of the person being interviewed, students were also allowed to use Chinese or other languages to facilitate the cross-cultural communication. After the interview, each group was required to submit the recording of their group interview along with the individual written reports in English to reflect on the experience. Based on students' audio-recording data, the actual length of each interview varied between groups ranging from 40 minutes to 1 hour.

In the last stage of the project, students started to work on the production of the digital story. Students were required to collaboratively make a 15-minute digital story as the final product of their group project. To help students create their own digital stories, a digital storytelling project guide with ten clear steps, modified from Vinogradova et al.'s (2011) framework, was created for this study. These steps are described below.

1. Based on the interview results, create a story draft in which the major events or pieces of information that make up the story line should be listed.
2. Collect any information needed for the story. You may need to do further online or library research for the target culture. You may need to arrange a second or third interview in order to collect additional information if necessary.
3. Participate in the story circle as a group in which everyone takes turns telling parts of the story.
4. Write a verbal narrative.
5. Collect still image and think about the music.
6. Create the preliminary story in PowerPoint.
7. Record the narrative.
8. Select music and sound effects.
9. Produce the digital story using Photo Story 3 or other video editing software.
10. Present digital stories in class.

At the end of the semester, each group was asked to present their digital story to their

classmates. A total of 6 digital stories, about 15 minutes each, were presented in class. During the presentations, students had to fill out an evaluation form for each group based on the criteria of content, language, and creativity. After that, they had to vote for “the best digital story”. Lastly, to complete the project, each student was also required to submit another one-page written report in English to reflect on his/her digital-storytelling experience.

3.3 Data Collection

The study drew on data from two sources in order to gain an understanding of the participants’ perceived intercultural learning outcomes as well as their perceptions toward the digital storytelling project. The following sections describe each data type in detail.

Written Reflections

Each student was asked to compose two written reflections in English, one at the completion of the group interview and the other at the completion of the digital story. Guidelines for writing the two reflections (see Appendix B) were provided to help students with the reflective practice. A total of sixty-four written reflections were collected for the study.

Semi-structured Interviews

Another data source of the study was the semi-structured interviews carried out a week after students’ completion of the course. The invitations were sent to all the thirty-two participants. Two students couldn’t show up for the interview due to personal reasons. The rest of them were interviewed in groups (N=6) and each group was interviewed by the researcher for about 30 minutes. The primary reason for interviewing these participants in groups was the difficulty of recruiting every student for individual interviews at the end of the semester right before the summer break. As a consequence, all the participants were interviewed with their project teammates. Although one might argue that the views of each participant during a group interview cannot be probed to the same degree as a one-to-one interview,

some researchers (Adams & Cox, 2008) also pointed out one of the advantages of the group interview approach is that the discussions that are facilitated within the group may often result in useful data in a short period of time. All the interviews were conducted in the participants' native language, Mandarin Chinese, for the purpose of allowing them to fully express their opinions about the project. They were all audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data for this study consisted of the written reflections and semi-structured interviews. To analyze them, a qualitative approach was employed. As is typical in most qualitative research (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2009), the data analysis method of this study was also primarily inductive and comparative. It should be noted that, however, although the present study adopted an inductive approach in which themes emerge from the data, the role of the researcher, also as a teacher, might affect the process of data analysis in a number of ways. First, the researcher's knowledge of the literature on teaching culture provided her with some awareness of the issues that may arise when implementing a cultural project using computer technology. Second, the researcher's understanding toward the various theoretical models of intercultural competence also guided her when looking for evidence that may demonstrate students' intercultural learning outcomes. Third, the researcher/ teacher's understanding of the students, the educational context, and the task also helped her make meaning of the data.

To begin with, the researcher read the entire corpus and looked for segments that illustrated the participants' reactions to the project or their learning experiences from the project. The identified segments were all tagged and then each segment of the data was compared with one another. After repeated comparisons, the researcher compiled a list of 11 themes linked to students' intercultural learning outcomes and 6 themes related to their general perceptions toward the project, which were listed in Table 1. The list of initial themes was then organized into higher-order themes. First of all, the eleven initial themes pertaining to students' intercultural learning

outcomes were further combined into three categories by using Williams's (2009) three-dimension framework for Intercultural Competency: cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The reason for adopting Williams' model was because of its usefulness in analyzing the participants' intercultural learning outcomes based on themes emerged from the data. According to Williams (2009), the cognitive dimension refers to possessing knowledge about cultural norms, values, behaviors, and issues; the affective dimension focuses on one's motivation or willingness to act in intercultural situations, which often relates to one's flexibility or open-mindedness to encounter new values; the behavioral dimension deals with skills needed in intercultural communication settings such as problem-solving skills and culturally-appropriate people skills. In light of these classification criteria, a total of three themes (i.e., themes concerning knowledge, similarities and differences across cultures) were classified as *cognitive learning outcomes*, seven themes (i.e., themes concerning attitudes, stereotypes, and empathy toward other cultures; interest, attitudes, thoughts toward their own culture; willingness for more cross-cultural contact) as *affective learning outcomes*, and only one theme (i.e., enhanced communication skills) as *behavioral learning outcomes*. It should be noted that these three types of intercultural learning outcomes are interconnected and influence one another. Hence, they should not be viewed as separate components. For instance, students' knowledge about other cultures may shape their attitudes toward the people as well as their experience of cross-cultural interactions. Naturally, students' development of cross-cultural communication skills and their acquisition of cultural knowledge are also greatly determined by their attitudes toward the target culture.

As for the six themes related to students' perceptions toward the digital storytelling project, three of them were labeled as *positive feelings associated with the project*; the rest were given the label of *problems and challenges encountered during the project*. Lastly, as a final step in the data analysis procedure, a graduate assistant, also a MA student in TESL, was first given a brief training session on Williams' Reflective Model of Intercultural Competency (2009) and then asked to code the data in terms of the initial and higher-order themes that the researcher had

identified. No differences were found in the assistant's coding of the higher-order themes. There were, however, a few cases of coding differences in the initial themes under the category of affective intercultural learning outcomes. Each case was re-examined and discussed between the two parties before a final decision was made.

4. Results

Table 1

Initial and Higher Order Themes

Initial Themes	Higher Order Themes
I. Students' perceived intercultural learning outcomes	
1. Increased knowledge of other cultures	1. Cognitive learning outcomes
2. Increased awareness of similarities across cultures	
3. Increased awareness of differences across cultures	
4. Positive attitudes toward the people and cultures of other countries	2. Affective learning outcomes
5. Challenging stereotypes and misconceptions	
6. Empathy for people of other cultures	
7. Interest in knowing how other people see the students' own culture	
8. Positive attitudes toward the students' own culture	
9. Reflecting on the students' own culture	
10. Willingness to have more contact with people of other cultures	
11. Enhanced cross-cultural communication skills	3. Behavioral learning outcomes
II. Students' perceptions toward the project	
1. Positive comments about the interview	1. Positive feelings associated with the project
2. Positive comments about making the digital stories	
3. Positive comments about viewing other groups' digital stories	
4. Lack of language ability	2. Problems and challenges encountered during the project
5. Problems with recording	
6. Finding time to meet with teammates	

4.1 Students' Perceived Intercultural Learning Outcomes

This section responds to the first research question by presenting the findings in terms of the three higher-order themes identified in the study (see Table 1). The reference following each quote gives the participant a number if it was from the

written reflection data or a pseudonym if it was from the interview data.

Cognitive Learning Outcomes

The first cognitive learning outcome almost every student demonstrated after participating in the project was their increased understanding of other cultures. For instance, one student described that the most interesting fact she learned about Russian culture was that ‘during the new year, families in Russian prepare twelve dishes, symbolizing the twelve months’ (Reflective journal 0601). Another student expressed that she finally knew where Honduras was located because she searched the country on the Internet and she admitted that ‘I didn’t know people there speak Spanish’ (Judy, interview). It seems that students not only displayed the cultural knowledge they gained from the project but also showed their interests in learning about other cultures. The following two quotes further illustrate students’ learning in this area:

After the interview, I understand more about Honduras culture and festivals. For me, the most impressive part is their “Easter Week”.
(Reflective journal 2901)

I think we learn a lot from the project. For example, we know more about other country’s culture, diplomacy, economy, geography, etc. That is what we don’t expect before. (Reflective journal 1102)

Another cognitive learning outcome several students reported in the study was their awareness of similarities across cultures. These students were able to observe and express the similarities they found between cultures/countries. For instance, one student wrote about the importance of family relationships she observed in Russian culture and commented that ‘similar to Taiwan, in Russian culture, family seems to be the key element in people’s lives’ (Reflective journal 2102).

In addition to similarities, many students also showed their awareness of cultural differences. One area of differences that several students mentioned was the idea of beauty across cultures. For instance, one student wrote the following:

I was surprised that there is great difference between us. Those who are not

so attractive in Taiwan are considered charming by foreigners. We really have different beauty standards from the West. For example, David and his friends think that Elva Hsiao is the prettiest singer, but Taiwanese teenagers might have a different opinion. (Reflective journal, 3102)

Other areas of cultural differences found in the data included youth culture, family, festivals, educational systems, and the times that shops are open in different countries. For example, one student observed that youths from western countries tend to be more independent and gave the following example:

The person we interviewed, David, mentioned that he stopped getting allowance from his parents when he was sixteen. He had different kinds of part-time jobs since then. He would use his own money to buy things he wanted and pay for traveling expenses. I think that was cool. (Jack, interview)

Affective Learning Outcomes

In addition to learning about the customs, norms, and values of other cultures, students also reported their own changes in the affective domain. One persistent theme running through the data was students' development of positive attitudes toward the people and cultures of other countries. In the following quote, a student described how she began to appreciate the interviewee's country through the project:

I think our interviewee, Louise, is quite friendly. She told us a lot about Honduras. She's not proud at all, unlike some other foreigners in Taiwan. I think I learned a lot of interesting things about her country. To make our video, I googled Honduras and found many pictures about the country. I realized that I knew so little about it. It seems to be an interesting place. (Judy, interview)

Other students also showed their admiration for the people being interviewed because of their language ability. These students were very surprised to find that some foreigners could speak Chinese quite fluently. For instance, one student expressed his amazement during the interview:

David can speak Chinese very well. He can also speak English and Russian. During the interview, when he noticed we had trouble understanding him, he would speak Chinese to us. For instance, he even knew how to say “sawdust (木屑)” in Chinese. I think he’s really good at language. He could also speak a little bit Taiwanese, too. It’s really amazing! (Kevin, interview)

Aside from developing positive attitudes toward other cultures, several students reported that the project helped to correct their previous stereotypes and misconceptions about other countries. For instance, one student mentioned that she was surprised to learn that ‘many cities in Mongolia were just as modern as those in Taiwan and most Mongolians nowadays did not ride horses’ (Reflective journal, 0301). Other misconceptions some students had toward people of other cultures included statements like “people from South America all had very dark skin”, “French like to eat lots of sweets”, or “all foreigners like the night markets in Taiwan.” These students affirmed that the project helped them change the stereotypes they had previously held.

A third affective outcome that a number of students reported was an increase in empathy for people of other cultures. These students made comments that showed their attempts at understanding another person’s feelings from their perspective or trying to place themselves in that person’s shoes. For example, one student expressed her empathy for the difficulty of foreign students living in Taiwan:

Oliver said he didn’t like the rain in Taipei. It must be very difficult for him to adjust the weather here. I guess there must be lots of difficulties when you study abroad, like Oliver, the different weather, lifestyles, and barrier of language. I think we should give our foreign classmates more help when they feel helpless. (Reflective journal, 3301)

In addition to the attitudinal changes toward other cultures, some participants also showed interests in their own culture. For instance, one student wrote that she was very interested in ‘knowing about how foreigners feel about Taiwanese people and culture’ (Reflective journal, 0701). Others also reported developing a positive

attitude toward the local culture because of the project. Such experience allowed students to gain new perspectives on their own culture by seeing it through the eyes of an outsider. For example, one student discovered the convenient living environment of Taiwan in terms of the availability of shops at night after the interview:

One of the interesting information that I got from the interview is how convenient Taiwan is! According to Katherine's response, she liked that there are always night markets or convenience stores opened at midnight. In Hungary, it's totally different. The shops close before 10 or 9 p.m. (Reflective journal, 1701)

A number of students also mentioned that the project made them feel proud of their own country and learn the importance of respecting their own cultural roots. As one student put it, 'One should be proud of his country and culture and it's not the question of showing off but the identification to our origin' (Reflective journal, 0202).

Another attitudinal impact the project had on several students was their ability to reflect on their own culture. The outsider's perspectives on the local culture also allowed some students to re-examine their own beliefs or values. For example, one student wrote about his reactions to a foreign student's negative comments on the local college students. It seemed that the criticism led to the student's reflection on the local educational system and student life:

What David said really gave me a shiver because it's real. He said that Taiwanese students always talk about grades and teachers. It seemed that we have nothing in our life to talk about except for test and class. His statement may not be 100% correct but I think it has to do with our educational system. I think many students here fail to strike a balance between study and life. (Reflective journal, 1002)

A final affective learning outcome reported by the participants was their willingness to have more contact with people of other cultures. Some students stated that they regarded their interviewees as new friends and they intended to maintain

contact after the end of the project. Others also expressed an increased desire to make friends with people of other cultures. For instance, one student wrote the following:

I find lots of things which are not good enough especially my English communication ability. In the summer, I will try to make friends with foreigners. I have a friend who has lots of friends from other countries. I decide to visit him and join their activities. (Reflective journal, 2201)

Behavioral Learning Outcomes

Finally, one behavioral learning outcome emerged from the data was that the project helped to improve students' cross-cultural communication skills. Some students expressed that the interview experience helped to improve their language skills. For instance, one student wrote the following:

The interview with David gave me a chance to talk to a foreigner, which enhances my English ability. With the coming of globalization, it is more and more important to communicate with people from all over the world. (Reflective journal 0101)

Others mentioned that the interview experience helped develop their confidence in communicating with people from other countries. In the following quote, one student described how she overcame the linguistic barrier and became more confident after the interview experience:

To make sure we didn't misunderstand her and to make the interview go on, we sometimes used both English and Chinese during the interview. We tried to assure that there was no misunderstanding. After the interview, I think I've become braver talking to a foreigner. (Reflective journal 1301)

It seems that when students were given the opportunity to engage themselves in authentic cross-cultural communications, they would often strive to achieve their communication goals by making use of the linguistic and cultural resources available to them. It was through such authentic experience students' cross-cultural communication skills were enhanced. The following quote was also illustrative:

I learn a lot from this assignment including not only cultures from different countries but also communication ability. We tried our best to face the challenge of understanding an unfamiliar language. It was an excellent experience. I didn't know much about the culture of France in the past. I never talked to French before. But now I have got much more ideas about it. (Reflective journal, 1602)

4.2 Students' Perceptions toward the Project

This section responds to the second research question by presenting the findings in terms of the two higher-ordered themes identified in the study (see also Table 1).

Positive Feelings Associated with the Project

Nearly all participants gave positive comments about their interview experience. Many students expressed that they seldom had chances to talk to foreigners before and even when they did, they wouldn't be able to ask so many questions. The interview hence offered these students an opportunity to talk to people from other cultures and helped them learn more about other cultures. For instance, one student wrote the following:

I think it (the interview) was interesting. It was different from ordinary chat because you could ask more formal questions or things you wanted to know. And most people or people like me wouldn't even chat with foreigners! This was fun. (Tina, interview)

Another important theme that emerged from the data was the participants' positive comments about making the digital stories. Many of them reported that it was a valuable experience and they felt a sense of achievement after completing the project. Some mentioned that they were very proud of being able to produce their own films through the software, Photo Story 3. The following quote was illustrative:

Making the digital story is really a challenge for me because I am not good at that. However, I was so lucky that the teacher introduced the easy-doing software to us. I could find the pictures I like, select the background music that is suitable to our topic, and most interesting part of all, I could record

my voice into this video. It is an utterly fresh and funny experience for me!

I felt a sense of achievement when showing our film to the class.

(Reflective journal 0202)

Aside from having a sense of achievement, several students also reported that the process of making digital stories allowed them to re-examine many incidents from the interview. The following are representative of their comments:

Though making the digital story is kind of challenging, I really enjoy doing it because when matching the pictures and words, I can recall our interview and conversation. I find things I didn't notice when I tried to make the digital story. (Reflective journal 2702)

I think making digital story is interesting and meaningful. Making the story can remind me of many details about the interview. Sometimes I also need to listen to the recording to find what she said. After finishing it, I get a sense of achievement and like our fruitful result very much! (Reflective journal 1902)

A final interesting theme pertaining to the participants' positive feelings about the project was their interest in other students' digital stories. A number of students mentioned that they enjoyed viewing other groups' digital stories. They commented that it was interesting to learn about other cultures through watching digital stories produced by their classmates. As one student put it, 'After watching other groups' digital stories, I learn many different countries' interesting festivals and culture. Also knowing about how foreigners think of our country' (Reflective journal 1102).

Problems and Challenges Encountered during the Project

The first challenge several students encountered during the project was their lack of language ability. Some students expressed their frustrations when communicating with people of other cultures during the interviews. They reported having difficulty in understanding what the interviewees were trying to say or having trouble in expressing themselves in English:

When talking with him, I found that I lack English listening skills, I tried

very hard to listen to what he said and wanted to ask questions. However, it is a difficulty to me. (Reflective journal 3101)

Before this project, I had some experiences of talking with foreigners in English. But until now, I even couldn't communicate with foreigners fluently. This is a very important point I have to learn. (Reflective journal, 0501)

A number of students also affirmed that they had trouble understanding English spoken by people from non-English speaking countries. The following comments showed the problem:

Because she's from Honduras and I think her native language is Spanish, she speaks English very fast with a Spanish accent. Sometimes I even got confused which language she was speaking. I had trouble understanding certain words. But she was quite friendly and easy-going so I guess we were able to communicate with each other to a certain extent. (Jane, interview)

On top of accents, students' unfamiliarity with the native language of the person being interviewed could also cause problems when they tried to make the digital story. For example, one student wrote about her problem of not knowing how to pronounce certain word in Hungarian:

The day before our recording, I found that I was in total trouble. I didn't know the pronunciation of this festival in Hungary. I didn't have the chance to meet Katherine again. I could do nothing but started to search the English-Hungary dictionary on the Internet, hoping to find the page that could give me the pronunciation of that word. However, I got nothing but regret and anxiety. (Reflective journal 1202)

The second challenge several participants reported was related to the production of the digital story. They mentioned the difficulty of recording the narration. Many of them didn't expect the time they needed to do the rehearsals in order to produce a quality film with good narration. The following quote was illustrative:

When trying to make the video, we realized that our materials were less

than we expected so we had to add many other things to make the video more plentiful. And we found that our speaking speed was too fast that the total video was only about six minutes, which was a little disappointing. So we slowed down our speed to make it longer. But then another problem was that we felt that we were only reading the words very slowly and there was no emotional. So we had to try again. (Reflective journal 0602)

Besides the challenge of producing good narration to go along with the slides, another technical problem arose in the course of film-making was to find an ideal location to do the recording. A number of students stated that they couldn't find a nice quiet place on campus to record the narration together. One student wrote about the difficulty:

We discussed for a while about finding a quiet place to record. Finally, we decided International Building as the place. When we finished the recording, we realized that the noise around us was more or less recorded. During the class presentation, some parts of our video were not so clear that bothered everyone's hearing. We should next time find another quieter place instead. (Reflective journal 3202)

The final problem some participants reported was related to meeting schedules for out-of-class collaboration. For these students, the biggest challenge seemed to be finding times to meet for their project. As one student put it, 'Because we're all from different departments, sometimes it was very difficult to find a common meeting time' (Iris, interview). It seems inevitable that students often had to deal with scheduling conflicts when working on the group project after class as illustrated in the quote below:

The first difficulty we encountered when making the video was how to gather our group members. Everyone is so busy with homework from other classes and has a tight schedule. We planned to find one day and gather everyone together to complete the whole video but we failed. We had to find different periods of time and separate the work. (Reflective journal 2202)

5. Discussion

The present study set out to investigate the effectiveness of the digital storytelling project designed to foster EFL students' intercultural competence via interviewing people from other cultures and creating digital stories about them. The results of the study presented in the previous section have in general revealed a positive aspect of utilizing the digital storytelling approach to promote students' intercultural competence in the EFL classroom. Such finding is consistent with the previous research on using digital stories to teach culture in ESL classrooms (Alameen, 2011; Rance-Roney, 2008; Vinogradova et al., 2011) which revealed that the approach offered a natural environment for students to explore the target culture. Additionally, since the present study employed a two-step process of the digital story-telling project (i.e., conducting the interview prior to making the digital story), the results also lend support to the effectiveness of using ethnographic interviews to increase intercultural understanding demonstrated in Bateman's (2002, 2004) and Su's (2008) studies. It seems that the employment of such two-step design allowed the participants to benefit from the project through both the cross-cultural interview as well as the reconstruction of the experience in the digital story format. The success of such design as demonstrated in the present study seems to suggest the potential for combining the digital story-telling approach with other forms of cross-cultural interactions other than face-to-face interviews such as e-mail exchanges, e-pals or chat rooms. Due to the exploratory nature of making digital stories, it is believed that the various combinations can create a rich learning environment that will foster better cross-cultural understanding in an EFL context.

The finding that students' perceived intercultural learning in the three areas including cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions has lent support to the theoretical frameworks of intercultural competence proposed by Byram (1997), Paige et al. (2003), and Williams (2009) in the literature, in which knowledge, attitudes, and behavior/skills were the important components used to define intercultural competence. Furthermore, the participants' perceived intercultural gain in all these three dimensions is also consistent with the findings from Liaw's (2006)

study of using e-forums to promote Taiwanese college students' intercultural competence. The four types of intercultural competence identified in Liaw's study (i.e. interest in one's own culture and others', ability to change perspectives, knowledge about one's own culture and others, as well as knowledge about intercultural communication processes) also largely fall into the affective, cognitive, and skill/behavioral categories found in the present study. In addition, the participants' various attitudinal changes reported in this study including their increased positive attitudes, interest, and empathy toward the people and cultures of other countries as well as their ability to reflect on their own culture were also found to largely correspond to many of the important characteristics of intercultural competence such as curiosity, open-mindedness, and flexibility noted in Byram's (1997) and Williams's (2009) models. Liaw and Johnson's (2001) cross-cultural e-mail study also revealed that curiosity toward other culture, positive interpretations of cultural differences and empathy were key factors that helped the removal of communication obstacles and promote on-going correspondence. Besides, the reduction in stereotyping that some students reported in the study was also another important intercultural learning outcome. Byram and Morgan (1994) pointed out that in order for change to take place, learners must become aware of stereotypes they have accepted as true and actively confront them. The project offered students an opportunity to critically examine their previously held beliefs about people from other countries and make necessary revisions based on what they experienced.

While the findings of the study demonstrated the benefits of using digital stories for intercultural learning, students encountered obstacles in completing the project. Concerning the first problem, lack of language ability, similar report was also found in Su's (2008) study, which revealed that the participants had poor communication skills. Since both studies were conducted in the EFL educational setting, it is not surprising to find that most students did not have experience communicating with people from other cultures and often lacked the necessary communication skills. Therefore, the finding further demonstrates the need for the present-day curriculum to include a wide variety of cultural activities or projects, which promote both

cultural learning and linguistic development. As for the other two problems reported in this study, problems of recording and finding time to meet with teammates, they help provide a clearer picture of classroom implementation of the digital story-telling project in an EFL university setting. Future implementation of the study should take these potential obstacles into consideration and make the necessary adjustments if possible.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown a positive aspect of using the digital storytelling project to foster intercultural competence in the EFL classroom. The results showed that students reported cognitive, affective and behavioral outcomes of intercultural learning from the digital storytelling project. Moreover, students also expressed their positive attitudes toward the project. They viewed that the experience offered them a chance to learn more about the people and cultures of other countries as well as improve their communication skills. In spite of these positive outcomes, students also reported several challenges associated with the digital storytelling project including the lack of language ability, problems with recording, and finding time to meet with teammates. One pedagogical implication that can be drawn from these findings is that the digital storytelling project is a viable approach to help EFL teachers particularly at tertiary level to incorporate culture into their classrooms and to bring about positive intercultural learning outcomes from their students. However, in order for the digital storytelling project to be carried out more successfully in an EFL university context, students need to be provided with additional assistance in areas like recording arrangements and out-of-class collaboration.

While the present study has provided evidence for the use of digital stories to promote EFL students' intercultural competence, the findings reported in this article need to be interpreted with caution because the number of participants was relatively small. In addition, since this case study was situated in a Taiwanese university context, additional research carried out in different countries and educational settings is needed. Moreover, another major limitation of the current study has to do with the

dual role of the researcher/instructor. Since it is often the case that students tend to respond positively to their teachers, this arrangement may affect the results of the study. Future research can minimize this kind of impact through training and recruiting research assistants to help with the data collection procedures. Lastly, this study is also limited in terms of the type of data collected. Although student' written reflections and interviews offer a rich data source for the analysis of their intercultural learning from the project, this type of data is merely retrospective and thus inherently limited. Future studies may focus on analyzing the digital stories students created from the project in order to gain a better understanding of their actual development of intercultural competence. With considerable research effort in this area, it is believed that the EFL teachers can take full advantage of the digital storytelling approach to make language learning an authentic tool for intercultural communication.

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Appendix A

The Interview Guidelines

- I. **Begin with self-introduction and statement of purpose:** Each one of you should briefly introduce yourself to the person being interviewed. Then you should explain the reason why you are conducting this interview and estimate the time you probably need to complete it. If you would like to audio-record the interview, be sure to ask permission before doing it.
- II. **Use open-ended WH-questions during the interview:** Use WH-questions to learn more about your interviewee. You may focus your interview on the following three aspects.
 1. To find out the interviewee's backgrounds such as information about his/her nationality and time of living in Taiwan
 2. To learn about the culture of the interview's home country including various aspects of cultural information such as food, transportation, lifestyles, festivals, educational systems, and entertainment
 3. To know the interviewee's perceptions of Taiwan based on his/her personal experiences of living in this country
- III. **Close the interview with acknowledgement:** When you finish the interview, be sure to thank your interviewee for his/her time and participation. If possible, provide contact information. If you would like to take pictures, again be sure to ask permission first.

Appendix B

Guidelines for Writing the Reflections

Each student needs to compose two written reflections for the project. The following are some guidelines to help you complete the two reports.

Report #1. Briefly describe the face-to-face interview that your group has conducted. Then **write your personal reflections on the interview experience**. The following are some suggestions to help you complete the report.

1. Briefly describe the interviewee including his/her nationality, occupation, etc.
2. How did the interview go? Did you ask any questions? How did the interviewee respond?
3. Was there anything that you found interesting or frustrating during the interview? If yes, what was it?
4. Did you encounter any difficulties before or during the interview? If yes, what were they?
5. What did you learn from this experience?
6. Was there anything that you think you could have done better? If yes, what was it and how?

Report #2. Briefly describe the process of making the digital story. Then **reflect on the experience of making the digital story**. Again, the following are some suggestions to help you complete the report.

1. Briefly describe your responsibility of making the digital story. What did you do?
2. Did you encounter any difficulties while making the story?
3. Was there anything that you found interesting or frustrating when making the story? If yes, what was it?
4. What did you learn from this experience?
5. What's your opinion of making digital stories? Do you like it? Why or why not?
6. Are you happy with the final product (i.e., the story presented in class)? Why or why not?