

Interrelation between Language and Culture in English Teaching: Some Substantial Challenges and Effective Strategies for Teachers of Second Language English in Vietnam

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Abstract—Today, learning and mastering an international language like English are very important because they bring a window of opportunities for many people, especially the young ones. The goal of learning a foreign language is to develop effective communication skills. However, it is impossible to understand a language thoroughly and communicate successfully as native speakers if the target language and its culture are isolated in the process of teaching and learning. Therefore, the integration of two factors - language and culture -is extremely important because each language is strongly attached to specific characteristics of that national culture. The research question arises whether differences between language and culture of each nation can have considerable effects on teaching English as well as language culture in Vietnam. To have a clear answer to such a question, this paper firstly finds out the interrelation between language and culture in teaching English as second language, then discusses some substantial challenges and finally suggests effective strategies for Vietnamese teachers of English language.

Index Terms—Language, culture, English teaching, Vietnam, sociocultural, interrelation, integration, language policy, intercultural competence, substantial challenges, effective strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, there have been more and more scientific studies on language, culture and other relevant factors in learning and teaching. Today, in the increasing trends of globalization and international interdependency, people have chances to use many languages to communicate with many other people from different cultures. This process makes a profound impact on everyone. In fact, through language use, speakers can reveal their nationalities, ages, genders, or even cultures and identities. [1] said “Culture is a broader umbrella concept, and that language is a part of culture”. In other words, the concepts which have been developed in a language tell us much about the culture in which a particular language is used. Therefore, without language, culture is not maintained and vice versa; if a culture does not exist anymore, language used to reflect that culture will disappear at the same time. Therefore, we cannot deny that language and culture are a chain which is inseparable and has a reciprocal influence.

Previous works on language teaching explored the relationship between cognition, sociocultural history, and

teaching beliefs surrounding language and culture [2]-[4]. Additionally, some works focused on evaluating how culture is used in student textbooks or teaching materials [5]-[8]. Moreover, most articles concentrated on defining and describing culture in terms that will be meaningful to classroom teachers of foreign languages, or investigating how learners’ background influences their beliefs about the teaching of foreign language culture in its various components [9]-[12]. However, a few works examine how to recognize cultures behind language meaning and what makes difficulties in Vietnamese language teaching in terms of language and culture [13]. The answers to these questions are very important for a language teacher who plays the role as a mediator to help learners be aware of similarities and differences between language and its cultures of their own and of other countries. In reality, many teachers rarely use the term “cultural studies” in foreign language teaching [13] and Vietnamese teachers are not exception.

As a result, the primary objective of this paper is to find out some substantial challenges that prevent Vietnamese teachers from integrating language and cultures in the classroom. It begins with a review of literature which informs the readers some important viewpoints of several authorities on language and culture. Then, several examples to compare the differences between two languages and cultural systems of Vietnamese and British people are presented. After that, some major challenges that Vietnamese language teachers cope with in English teaching are discussed. Additionally, results have been collected by open-ended questions and observation methodology to support the research. More importantly, the effective strategies for language teaching and language policy are mentioned in the next part. Finally, the article concludes with confirmation of the close and inseparable relationship of language and culture in English teaching as well as learning.

II. SOME BASIC CONCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Ref. [14] defines “Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols”.

Language can be seen as the system of communication in speech and writing consisting of codes and symbols which is used by humans to store, retrieve, organize, structure and communicative knowledge and experience. With the basic instrument, language helps people show their feelings, opinions and ideas, to transmit something to other people, to maintain one’s own culture and to acquire a good knowledge of new culture.

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According to [15], “Culture includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. Mentioning the definition of culture, [16] considers culture as “everything a people does and believes, and the ways in which these are done. It is a conventional design for group living which is system-centered, rather than individual-centered. It includes the content and process of the way of life of a group, and is passed on by learning. Culture is never static, but evolving; and in this process it remains recognizably distinctive”. Obviously, cultures are transferred from generation to generation and influenced by the geographical location, history and interaction of the group over time. This is the reason why each cultural group in community has its own values, beliefs and ways of living which shape the way how people think, behave and view the world because as [17] explained “Culture is a transactional process”. Therefore, culture may change and develop because it has the ability to get new typical manners and forms. This change happens when it is transferred from one place or one generation to another.

We cannot deny that there is a close relationship between language and culture because the way in which a language is arranged and organized establishes the style of behavior which speakers of that language think about the world. On the other hand, the way how a language is used also reflects the culture of a people. [14] emphasizes that the relationship between language and culture is inseparable. However, it is not easy for one person to understand the culture if he/she does not have knowledge about language that the other speaker is saying. Additionally, [18] said “Language provides a screen to reality and determines how speakers perceive and organize the world around them, both the natural world and the social world”. Therefore, people can establish worldview thanks to the language they use.

III. SUBSTANTIAL CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL ASPECTS THAT VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE TEACHERS COPE WITH IN ENGLISH TEACHING

Besides the above-mentioned factors that account for some limitations in language teaching, other factors can be listed as follows:

A. Lack of Teachers’ Intercultural Awareness

With the limitation of time in the classroom, language teachers rarely spend time explaining cultures. In fact, exploiting the target language culture to teach is not carefully paid attention to in English classroom instead of basing on target language teaching materials they have. This makes students confused about using languages in a style appropriate to language learning.

Moreover, in teaching process, Vietnamese English teachers are afraid of analyzing and comparing similarities and differences in cultural diversity of other English speaking cultures. This can be explained that in many other countries in Southeastern Asia, teachers whose English is not their first language often face to difficulties of low English proficiency. As a result, many second language teachers lack confidence both in their own and target language cultural competence and thus, they just concentrate on grammar, vocabulary

components in teaching.

English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers are not aware of the importance of teaching English combined with teaching cultures. [19] states that “A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture”. Most of Vietnamese teachers explain the meanings of each structure but rarely do they analyze what context, how circumstances or which purposes are used through the exposure to a foreign language and its cultures.

B. Lack of Students’ Independent Critical Thinking Skills

[20] pointed out that Vietnamese students usually keep quiet in class and wait until called upon by the teacher, instead of volunteering to answer questions. He also claims that “since keeping quiet in class is to show respect to the teacher as well as to create a productive learning environment, being talkative, interrupting, bragging, or challenging the teacher are not typical of Vietnamese culture”. However, this learning style easily limits their creativity and critical thinking. This is one of the reasons that demotivates their interest in finding out cultures behind their language.

C. Lack of Cultural Educational Policy

It is considered that in Vietnamese educational system, the awareness of cultural diversity is not nurtured at all levels. Obviously, Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country, with 54 ethnic groups living together with distinctive customs, practices and festivals. However, in the era of globalization, we are required not only to respect the home culture and the home language but also to broaden the mind and exchange different cultures through the target language. So, the main aims of teaching language, especially English, include development and comprehension of one’s competence and communication skills. In other words, to communicate with foreigners successfully, language learners are required to be good at both target language and native culture. In reality, most of school regulations do not promote teachers to integrate culture in language teaching. This results in the awareness of imparting the internal cultural values that may obstruct the communication process.

IV. SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW CULTURAL DIFFERENCES CAN BE EMBEDDED AT THE LEVEL OF SEMANTICS BETWEEN VIETNAMESE AND ENGLISH

The ways how language is used such as lexicon, grammar and other rules of linguistic communication depend on the natural environment, economic systems, type of social relationships and cultures of the speakers’ community. However, understanding similarities and differences between cultures offers chances for bringing different people together.

Because of different cultures between the Vietnamese and the British, language that is used in a similar conversation has different meanings in understanding. Some common expressions, not being taught officially, may cause misunderstanding or misjudgment. Table I is based on <http://www.angmohdan.com/48-things-british-people-say-and-what-they-actually-mean/> and modified in order to make it more suitable for Vietnamese learning context.

TABLE I: DIFFERENT MEANINGS IN LANGUAGE USE

What the native speaker says	What the native speaker means	What the Vietnamese understands
I hear what you say.	I disagree and do not want to discuss it further.	He understands and doesn't need to repeat at anytime.
With the greatest respect ...	I think you are an idiot.	He is listening to me with high respect.
That's not bad.	That's good.	That's not good.
That is a very brave proposal.	You are insane.	It is courageous of him to propose that suggestion.
Quite good.	A bit disappointing.	Very excellent.
I would suggest ...	Do it or be prepared to justify yourself.	That's just a suggestion. So, he can decide to do it or not by himself.
Oh, incidentally / by the way ...	The primary purpose of our discussion is ...	He wants to give another idea.
I was a bit disappointed that ...	I am annoyed that ...	He was upset because something he hoped for has not happened or been as good, successful, etc. as he expected
Very interesting.	That is clearly nonsense.	Very happy
I'll bear it in mind.	I've forgotten it already.	He will never forget it although it never appears.
I'm sure it's my fault.	It's your fault.	The errors are made by himself.
You must come for dinner.	It's not an invitation, I'm just being polite.	I cannot refuse the invitation.
I almost agree.	I don't agree at all.	He totally agrees.
I only have a few minor comments.	Please re-write completely.	There are some things that need to be changed.
Could we consider some other options?	I don't like your idea.	The current suggestion is not good, so they want me to give other opinions.
Sorry! I would like to ...	I just want to avoid an embarrassing situation	Saying "Sorry" whenever having any mistakes.
Cheers.	Not only used when clinking glasses in a pub, but also used instead of "thank you", and signing off a phone call or an email.	It is used as a shout of joy, support or praise.

A Culture Influences Language

Cultural differences of linguistic expressions in English and Vietnamese are discussed as follows.

[21] said "Culture can be seen as the sum total of ways of living, including behavioral norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining transmitted over the course of generations". This means culture is embedded in everything people do in their society. On the basis of English, we will demonstrate how English and Vietnamese are used in terms of semantic sense and pragmatic sense.

• Culture of courtesy

In the Vietnamese culture, respect is due to hierarchy. This means that the higher you are, the higher position you have. For this reason, the youngsters need to have great respect to older person. This affects their use of language as follows:

- (1) Older person: "Con muốn uống nước không?" = "Do you want a cup of water?"
- (2) Younger person: "Dạ, con mới uống ở nhà." = "Yes, I have just drunk at home."

In this case, the younger one means he does not want to drink. However, "Yes" is considered as the attached word in front of each sentence that a subordinate responds to a

superior.

In the English culture, people cannot give you respect or look up to you until you have done something to show another one that you deserve their respect or they should give respect to you. Because of that, they will give you respect if you do something that helps them. In this context, the expression "would like" is often used as an invitation as the example below:

(3) "Would you like a cup of water?" (Formal situation)

Or

(4) "Can I get you a drink?" (Informal situation)

To give the answers, speakers are not allowed to say, "Yes, you can" or "No, you can't. One of the responses is suggested:

(5) "Thank you. That's very kind of you. I'd love to." (Accepting the invitation)

Or

(6) "Oh, I'm sorry. I'd love to drink, but I'm afraid I can't because I have an urgent meeting." (Refusing the invitation)

The direct answer "No" is an unexpected reaction because it may turn someone down and hurt their feelings.

• Culture of salutation

Greetings are very popular in daily lives, but they are not conducted in the same way in different cultures. In English, the language use of salutation is very diverse. So, careful consideration should be given to use the right level of formality for each situation. In fact, English greetings for formal situations are different from ones for informal situation.

Formal situations	Informal situations
Good morning / Good afternoon / Good evening	Hello / Hi /Hey
Hello. How do you do?	How are you? / How is it going? / How are you doing?
Nice to meet you. / Pleased to meet you.	Good to see you. / It's great to see you. / Nice to see you. / Long-time, no see.
How have you been doing? / How have you been?	What have you been up to?

Instead of saying "Good morning", "Good afternoon", "Good evening", the Vietnamese have a habit of greeting each other by asking when they meet. For example:

"Anh ăn cơm chưa?" = "Have you had dinner?"

"Anh đang làm gì vậy?" = "What are you doing?"

"Anh đang đi đâu vậy?" = "Where are you going?"

Such greetings sometimes make a native English speaker understand them as an invitation to dinner or intervention in his or her personal life.

• Culture of making acquaintance

In Western countries, it is considered impolite when someone asks an acquaintance about age, income, marital status or social position because these are all aspects of his/her privacy. Therefore, they tend to get annoyed when asked these curious questions. However, in Vietnam, it is quite normal when these questions are used to make acquaintance. This reflects the culture of showing interest in other people in Vietnam. For example:

"Anh đã lập gia đình chưa?" = "Are you married?"

"Chị làm được bao nhiêu một tháng?" = "How much can

you earn a month?”

In contrast, the English people like to start their conversation by talking about the weather, like “What a lovely sunny day!”, “A beautiful day, isn’t it?”

• **Culture of addressing in communication**

The way how to address other persons in communicating also reflects the culture of a person. In Vietnamese, there are a lot of personal pronouns used in talking. These differences depend on the feeling and hierarchy between interlocutors. This culture also has an influence on the way how people use language to communicate. Let us have a look at the examples below.

- T ấ, tao, tớ, em = I
- Ch ấng t ấ, ch ấng tao, ch ấng tớ = We
- M ấy, ch ấng m ấy, b ận m ấy, anh, chị, em = You
- H ộ, ch ấng n ộ, b ận h ận = They
- Anh ấy, c ô ấy, h ận = He, she
- N ộ = It
- Ông = Grandfather
- B ầ = Grandmother
- Ch ứ / C ậu = Uncle
- C ô / D ì = Aunt

In day-to-day communications, the native speakers usually use some subject pronouns like “I, we, you, they, he, she, it” in their conversation. Besides that, they are usually addressed according to the gender such as Mr. (for adult males), Mrs. (for married women), Miss (for unmarried women), Ms. (for women whose marital status is unknown) with surname, or academic titles “Prof. and Dr.”

B Language Mirrors Culture

Obviously, culture shapes languages and vice versa the language reflects and “plays a mediatory role in the social construction of culture, contributing to its formation and change” [22]. In other words, different linguistic uses have a strong influence on cultures as well as the world visions. The concepts which have been developed in a language tell us more about the culture in which a particular language is used. This means understanding a language cannot exclude understanding a culture within which it is used [23] because “language and culture are not separate, but are acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other” [24].

That cultural features are reflected by its linguistics use is recognized sharply between some English and Vietnamese idioms. According to [25], it is obvious that images of human beings in societies and communities, images related to geography, weather, climate, habitat, customs characteristic of each people are shown through a selection of idiomatic uses.

The human activity in community is one of the cultural characteristics, appeared in idioms of both English and Vietnamese, as the following examples:

- (1) As busy as a grand central station (English idiom)
- (2) As poor as a church mouse (English idiom)
- (3) “Đông như tr ấy h ộ” (Vietnamese idiom)
(It means “As crowded as a visit to Huong pagoda”)
- (4) “L ớ th ớ như ch ộ chi ều” (Vietnamese idiom)
(It means “As sparse as a scene of market in the afternoon”)

The most popular community activity in Vietnam and other English speaking countries is the stations, churches,

pagodas, market, etc., so these images become inherent in the subconscious of people and in the uses of idiomatic equal comparisons in the daily life of the English and the Vietnamese.

Another example is about the word “rice”. “Rice”, the main food in Vietnam, plays a very important role in Vietnamese people’s life because it feeds millions of people and is the large revenue of Vietnam. Therefore, people always consider it as a spiritual value in their life. What they believe is reflected in their daily language use. For example:

(5) “Đ ồì b ấ m ộ h ấ l ấ b ấ com”

(It means “To have a bowl of rice, a peasant must spend a lot of time and make a great effort”)

This idiom associates spiritual meaning with specific culture because it reminds people to treasure the rice and farmers.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Aim

The main objective of the research is to investigate the attitudes of Vietnamese language teachers towards integrating language and culture in English teaching.

B Participants

There were two groups who took in charge of participants in the study.

The first group: The research was conducted on a group of 100 teachers aged 30-50 from the Department of Foreign Languages in HoChiMinh University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology, Nguyen Tat Thanh University and Faculty of Linguistics and International Cultures in University of Economics and Finance. There were 65 females and 37 males who have at least five-year experience in language teaching. A survey, performed by one-page questionnaire in English, is focused on two purposes: teachers’ opinions in combining teaching language and culture, and their background knowledge of the target culture.

The second group: The study was also carried out on 55 teacher trainees, aged 20–22, who have been attending teacher training program (junior students of English Language Department, HoChiMinh City University of Pedagogy). There were 35 females and 20 males. The main purpose is to observe what cross-curricular activities are attached language and culture to learning and teaching process.

C Method, Instrumentation and Analysis

The questionnaire for the first group included 10 questions, including some Likert scale items with the answers were graded from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 5 “Strongly agree”.

These 10 statements were concerning their background, their cultural identities, their own views on teaching the intended culture behind the target language and their motivation of language teaching aims.

The observation for learners or pre-service teachers were administered during the four-week period, the researcher sat at the back of the rooms, tried to observe their English teaching practice and made an effort to record their teaching skills. Through this real observation, the researcher focused

on the ways pre-service teachers taught in practice to see how they integrate language and culture while teaching. This stage helps the writer draw out some real experiences of classroom simulation in Vietnam.

D Results and Discussion

• **Results from questionnaires**

The first question: Is English predominant and very important in learning and teaching?	
Answer	Rate
a. Strongly disagree	0%
b. Disagree	2.4%
c. Neither agree nor disagree	0%
d. Agree	17.6%
e. Strongly agree	80%

The data shows that 80% of the teachers strongly agreed that English plays a very important role in learning; 17.6% of the respondents said they agreed on this idea; whereas, only 2.4% disagreed and no one disagreed strongly the decisive factor of English. As emphasized above, being fluent in one foreign language, especially English as a lingua franca in many parts of the world, is indispensable. It is considered as our main source of communication that helps people share their ideas and thoughts with others.

The second question: What factors are you experienced in English teaching? (More than two answers are acceptable)		
Answer	Rate	
a. Grammar		15.1%
b. Cultures		
c. Vocabulary	19.6%	
d. Reading – Writing	65.3%	

As said in the results, 65.3% of them approved strongly that teachers devote most of the time in the classroom helping students to acquire reading and writing competencies; 19.6% considered that vocabulary is crucial to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. [26] wrote that “. . . while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”; only 15.1% realized the importance of combining grammar, vocabulary and cultures while teaching target language. According to the small number of these teachers, learners should improve their understanding of the culture so that they can acquire foreign language effectively. This can be explained that language perception requires a learner to understand the literal meanings, context meanings and even cultural meanings. In other words, a person who masters rules of grammar, has a wide vocabulary, but lacks native culture can express the ideas clumsily and even causes “cultural conflict” or “cultural shock”.

The third question: What is the most significant requirement that a language teacher needs?	
Answer	Rate
a. having knowledge of the language and culture of the two countries (Vietnamese and English)	2.1%
b. making communication in foreign languages more frequently	2.5%
c. understanding students’ psychology and aspirations	1.8%
d. Capturing and updating new knowledge of language and culture regularly	2.4%
e. All of them	91.2%

According to the third question, most of the teachers (more than 90%), on the whole, believed that having knowledge of the language and culture of the two countries, making communication in foreign languages more frequently, understanding students’ psychology and aspirations and capturing as well as updating new knowledge of language and culture regularly are equally important. There is a truth that language and culture are inextricably interwoven. It means teaching and learning a language are inseparable from teaching and learning its cultures. In the challenges of the twenty first century, language and culture teaching are indispensable because this teaching method brings students a chance to expose culture in foreign language context. To perform this duty, language teachers need to constantly innovate teaching methods as well as up-to-date cultural knowledge to develop their language teaching skills. More importantly, language teachers need to create an environment of willingness to communicate in second language to engage students’ interests because in order to overcome the obstacle between languages and cultures, “interlocutors need a powerful communicative target, which is defined as willingness to communicate [27]”.

The fourth question: Which of the following training courses have you attended? (More than two answers are acceptable)	
Answer	Rate
a. How to use new English textbooks	45.5%
b. Ability to organize activities in foreign language classes	
c. Methods of organizing foreign language activities in the community	
d. Methods of exploiting materials and professional development	
e. How to integrate language and culture in English teaching	22.3%

The fifth question: Can a good understanding of the language and culture of the two countries facilitate and help learners develop their intercultural awareness?	
Answer	Rate
a. Strongly disagree	15.5%
b. Disagree	17.1%
c. Neither agree nor disagree	0%
d. Agree	41.4%
e. Strongly agree	26%

From the result of the survey, an obvious outcome is that most of the teachers have attended in some training courses like “How to use new English textbooks”, “How to organize activities in foreign language classes and in community” and “How to exploit materials and professional development”. An evidence for this is approximately 45.5% of teachers agreeing that these courses are important and necessary for the development of teaching career. However, another important course that only 22.3% of them have taken part in is the course of “How to integrate language and culture in English teaching”, and the rest of the teachers (32.2%) disclaimed. We also absolutely agree that it is unpopular to open this kind of training course in Vietnam. The limitation can be explained by the following reasons: there are 54 ethnic groups who live in the same territory and use Vietnamese as national language of the country and the official language in education. Regardless of how globalizing English is, language policy is difficult to enforce English as a unique language because beside English, there are many other

foreign languages used. For this reason, the training course for “How to integrate language and culture in English teaching” is not popular in schools.

The largest number (41.4%) revealed that a good understanding of the language and culture of the two countries can facilitate and help learners develop their intercultural awareness. However, the problem is that, in real teaching context, rarely do language teachers analyze the intended culture beneath for their lack of teaching time and language competence and self-confidence. Moreover, another reason is that English level of students in each class is heterogeneous. [28] said “Students’ levels are usually composed from elementary to upper-intermediate in a class. Most of the Vietnamese students whose English is not their first language often attribute their study difficulties to their low English proficiency”. [29]-[31] considered “a variety of academic, linguistic, cultural and individual factors affects students’ success”. Therefore, such large differences will make it difficult for English teachers to impart and broaden cultural knowledge to various students, thereby preventing them from teaching and learning foreign languages.

The sixth question: What are your opinions on the following teaching activities in the language classroom?	
Answer	Rate
a. Teaching and learning activities help learners develop language communication skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing).	30%
b. Teaching and learning activities help learners actively access knowledge about culture, country and people of foreign languages.	16.1%
c. Teaching and learning activities are organized flexibly and combined in many different forms.	30%
d. Teaching activities focus on developing students' logical expressions and critical thinking skills.	8.3%

With the sixth question, over 60% of teachers admitted that teaching and learning activities are organized flexibly and combined in many different forms and help learners develop language communication skills like listening, speaking, reading, writing; 16.1% teachers said teaching and learning activities help learners actively access knowledge about culture, country and people of foreign languages; by while, only 8.3% teachers found that teaching activities focus on developing students’ logical expressions and critical thinking skills. This result is quite reasonable because intercultural teaching will bring important changes in language learning. To teach more effectively, the diverse extra curricular activities are also encouraged as they lead to the proficiency in not only English communication skill but also intercultural foreign language understanding to one’s own and other cultures.

The seventh question: Understanding similarities and differences of one nation’s language and culture will ...	
Answer	Rate
a. offer chances for bringing different people together.	8.5%
b. convey their own cultures and comprehend cultures from other countries.	43%
c. develop learners’ understanding of similarities and differences in terms of a nation’s language, culture, socio-cultural and intercultural competence.	
d. avoid cultural gaps, possible offence and unexpected misunderstanding in communication.	
e. All of them	48.5%

For the answer of understanding similarities and differences of one nation’s language and culture, only 8.5% of teachers agreed this is a chance to bring people together; 43% said that speakers can convey their own cultures and comprehend cultures from other countries; a majority of them (48.5%) combined all given suggestions above as the benefits of grasping language and culture of many different countries. From these statistics, it can be concluded that teaching language cannot be separated from teaching culture. Obviously, language allows people to express their thoughts in many different words that are derived from life and experience for generations. It is unable for a learner to use a language well if he or she does not understand the characteristics of a culture and vice versa how can a learner explore profound meaning of a culture without mastering a language. Besides, comprehending language and culture helps learners, especially Vietnamese, avoid cultural gaps, possible offence and unexpected misunderstanding in communication. [32] points out “Learner possessing socio-cultural competence will be able to interpret and bring different cultural systems into relation with one another, to interpret socially distinctive variations within a foreign cultural system, and to manage the dysfunctions and resistances peculiar to intercultural communication”.

The eighth question: What are main aspects in English learning that students usually ask for explanation?	
Answer	Rate
a. Strategies of communication	23.6%
b. Implicit and explicit knowledge of grammatical rules	24.7%
c. Pronunciation	24.5%
d. Meanings of cultures	3.1%
e. Rules of language use	24.1%

When asked about main aspects in English learning that students usually ask for explanation, 24.7% stated that it is implicit and explicit knowledge of grammatical rules and 24.1% affirmed language use; 24.5% chose pronunciation and 23.6% considered strategies of communications the common issue; while only 3.1% thought meanings of cultures can arouse their curiosity. This smallest number shows that students with different levels are not concerned with knowledge of underlying cultural meanings. As mentioned above, language mirrors culture and culture influences language. In other words, these two factors are closely attached so that one does not separate from the other and keep the meaning of language or culture. For this reason, if Vietnamese second language teachers do not explain the underlying meanings, it is easy for students to have problems with communication.

The ninth question: What unexpected situations do you cope with during the period of teaching English for Vietnamese students?	
Answer	Rate
a. a wide divergence of language and cultures	95%
b. use of language in many different contexts	0%
c. profound meanings of English idioms	5%
d. lack of understanding of students’ cultural, educational and linguistic background	0%

With the answers to the question number nine, we are very satisfied with the students not for their results but for their honesty. The outcome shows that 95% of the Vietnamese

teachers coped with a wide divergence of language and cultures while only 5% of them found it difficult to explain profound meanings of English idioms. These unexpected situations prevent them from making the lessons more thoroughly because according to [33], “Culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough, what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants”. From this point of view, the importance of cultural knowledge in language teaching is undeniable. Vietnamese language teachers should supplement the teaching materials with cultural factors to provide students with information about social linguistic elements.

The tenth question: What new methods of integrating language and culture can you apply in English teaching? (More than two answers are acceptable)	
Answer	Rate
a. Have students watch movie from other culture.	12.1%
b. Get involved in real cultural activities with the native speakers	17.4%
c. Simulate foreign language and culture into practice	16.8%
d. Compare and contrast target language and culture with the ones of our own	11.5%
e. All of them	42.2%

According to the last question, most of the Vietnamese teachers (42.2%) believed that all suggested new methods of integrating language and culture on the list can be applied in their teaching lesson plans. These methods play a very important role in a period of cultural assimilation. To use all these advanced methods, language teachers are required to be aware of the indispensable factors of target language culture. [34]-[35] point out the five elements to the development of intercultural competence. They are: attitudes, knowledge, skills, abilities and critical awareness. Thus, intercultural competence involves the skills to observe other people’s behavior, to reflect on one’s own culture and compare to other cultures. Understanding these two primary objectives will make target language teachers not only create a good environment for students to learn but also contribute their duties to teach a foreign language interculturally.

• **Results from observation**

As mentioned in the method, by basing on data collected from observing and shooting in English classes, we have several ideas about teaching methods in terms of language and culture. Mentioning to the issue of culture and language learning, [36] describes four dimensions of culture:

- “1. Aesthetic sense, in which a language is associated with the literature, film, and music of a particular country.
2. Sociological sense, in which a language is linked to the customs and institutions of a country.
3. Semantic sense, in which a culture’s conceptual system is expressed in the language.
4. Pragmatic sense, in which cultural norms influence what language is appropriate for what contexts”.

However, in this paper, we just focus on the relationship between language and culture in terms of semantic sense. Here are some of the typical ideas from their simulation teaching classes:

In dealing with culture in the semantic sense, particularly in relation to a culture’s conceptual system expressed in the language, one of the first steps that needs to be taken is to examine how pre-service teachers explain another target

culture to members coming from the same cultural background. This would be the case, for example, all of these students were given a lesson of English idioms and had one week to prepare their lesson plans before doing their teaching practice. The problem is that most of them do not use the target culture to explain its meanings. The explanation for each idiom is rather blurred and translated from English to Vietnamese. In the comparative English and Vietnamese, the cultural characteristics of each language and the thinking of each nation is quite different and clearly reflected through idioms. Although having careful preparation, pre-service teachers tend to use their own language culture awareness to explain the English idioms.

Here are some major reasons for this tendency:

First, lack of language competence prevents them from using language as natural as the native speakers do. Living in the country where English is not a daily communicative language, they do not have many chances to get hold of English like many other speaking countries.

Second, lack of different ideology obstructs them to understand a foreign culture because culture can be seen as the “sum total of ways of living, including behavioral norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining transmitted over the course of generations” [21]. To overcome this barrier, learners should be aware of touching cultures, especially the values, beliefs and attitudes of the native speakers. Having the same idea, [37] delivered “A person who possesses these qualities can become an ‘intercultural speaker’, or an ‘intercultural mediator’ who understands the relationship between his or her native language and culture on the one hand and the foreign language and culture on the other”.

VI. EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR VIETNAMESE TO INTEGRATE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN ENGLISH TEACHING

With an awareness of these important factors for Vietnamese teachers in language teaching, some suggestions of effective strategies for teaching methodology are given. Today, in the integration, learning a foreign language is indispensable because it is a means that helps people communicate each other. However, [19] states that “A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture”. Language cannot be learnt or used well if a person is not knowledgeable about the culture in which it is embedded because learning a new language is inherent in learning a new culture. Then, we not only expand our ability to access ideas and information, but also become aware of how our behaviors and attitudes have been shaped by the language and cultures we experience. Understanding the relationship between language and culture, teachers can help students expand their ability to access ideas and information and become aware of how their behaviors and attitudes have been shaped by the language and cultures they experience.

As the strong relationship between culture and language has been confirmed, it can be inferred that culture plays an important role and should be included in language education.

In other words, language teaching is culture teaching. Mentioning the necessity of teaching language, together with culture, [38] emphasizes “If we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the students attaches the wrong meaning ...”. Additionally, [39] also believes “culture should be taught as an interpersonal process and, rather than presenting cultural facts and teachers should assist language learners in coming to grips with the other culture”. In fact, without learning to identify the culture and language of one country can cause misunderstanding and lead to cross-cultural miscommunication.

Language teachers need to teach culture in the classroom for the following reasons: Firstly, it makes people aware of the cultural factors inside the language use. Secondly, it helps students understand and use language appropriately in accordance with the knowledge of the culture in which it is embedded. More importantly, this helps students avoid misunderstanding or culture shock due to their lack of cultural knowledge.

Obviously, culture is often considered a significant component of communicative competence that EFL learners need to acquire because of the close relationship between knowledge of a foreign language and knowledge of the culture from which that language originated [40]. Since culture plays such an important role in language teaching, incorporating culture in language teaching seems almost inevitable. It is true that teaching cultural differences along with the structural and typological differences of the language is vital because it helps learners prevent misinterpretation caused by the confusion of cultural referents. As linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language [41], language learners need to be aware of the culturally appropriate ways to address people, express gratitude, make requests and agree or disagree with someone. Therefore, when teaching culture, teachers need to arouse students’ curiosity of finding out the cultural meaning in the language they use. Besides, in the process of teaching language, teachers are required to present the customs and beliefs or ways of life and social organization of a particular country. In addition, the teaching of culture should make learners aware of speech acts. More importantly, educators need to do some activities in class to stimulate students because according to [42], “an effective and stimulating activity is to send students on ‘cultural errands’ and have them write down the names of imported goods”. To do this, teachers need to bring into the classroom some real objects such as posters, maps, pictures, badges, etc. so that students can develop their mental image of the target culture. Another effective way is that students need to participate in cultural exchanges with a native speaker.

As language and culture are strongly interrelated, culture included in language education is an indispensable component. However, the perception of culture included in language education varies from one teacher to another. Although sharing a similar cultural history, most Vietnamese teachers have different understandings of foreign language and culture because “they interpret the world in the roughly different ways that native speakers express their thoughts and feelings” [43]. This makes difficulty for teachers to impart

knowledge to students who need cultural awareness. Therefore, it is necessary for government to have a good policy to encourage teachers to enhance professional competence. In reality, some programs of training such as educational seminars, academic conferences have been opened for all language teachers. It is a good environment for teachers to share their experiences in their process of teaching and to broaden professional knowledge.

Obviously, English, nowadays, becomes an indispensable language for international exchange and better chance in future career. From this viewpoint, it becomes evident that in the educational system, students have been encouraged to study both social and science subjects in English by Vietnamese government. So, cultural content should be included in English language teaching textbooks. It is an effective way for students to be exposed to culture of native speakers more frequently because language and culture are inseparable.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

This paper analyzes the relationship between language and culture. Based on some examples of interconnection between culture and language in Vietnam, we find out that language is fundamental to the expression of culture. This helps people understand and appreciate cultural differences and avoid misunderstandings.

Besides, we cannot deny that teachers play a significant role in guiding students to approach the target language and in instructing them how to use language properly in any cases. Being a foreign language teacher, we think that it is very significant for the teachers to teach both culture and language because it helps students understand the cultural factors inside the language use in order to avoid cultural shocks and limit the inappropriate use of language. To do this, some effective strategies suggested above should be taken in consideration so that language teaching and learning process become more effectively.

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