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Intercultural communicative competence in the Polish educational context: EFL primary school teachers' practices and opinions

ABSTRACT. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is defined as "a complex of abilities (including host language proficiency) that are needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (Fantini 2020: 5). The development of ICC in learners has been recognised as one of the key elements of foreign language (L2) education by, for instance, the Council of Europe (2022). The article presents the findings of a study conducted among primary school teachers of English which investigated their practices in teaching and assessing ICC, as well as their opinions on coursebook content and on learner motivation regarding ICC development. Quantitative and qualitative data have been gathered by means of a questionnaire administered to 39 teachers of English and interviews conducted with five teachers of English. The findings show that most respondents attempt to prioritise integrating ICC into English courses and aim to develop students' ICC. However, less than half give ICC equal importance to language in their teaching. Moreover, most participants often rely on teaching national attributes to foster ICC.

KEYWORDS: Culture, intercultural communicative competence, foreign language teaching in Poland, culture teaching, teachers' practices, teachers' opinions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Increased levels of globalisation in today's world and living in evolving cultural environments result in blurred boundaries among cultures rendering them in closer contact than ever before. Thus, members of various cultural groups participate in intercultural interactions on a daily basis, which requires well-developed intercultural competences (e.g., Edwards & Usher 2008; Council of Europe 2012, UNESCO 2013). This inevitably poses new challenges for language teachers and language educators, especially those of the English language as it has become *lingua franca*, a language for intercultural communication among people from different cultural backgrounds (Jenkins 2006). Therefore, the need for incorporating plurilingualism and interculturality in present-day education

has arisen. According to the Council of Europe (2022: 14), intercultural education "is essential to education for democratic culture; respects and values linguistic and cultural diversity; promotes language awareness and language sensitivity across the curriculum; [and] encourages critical reflection on cultural diversity". Moreover, it also aids with developing critical digital literacy and digital citizenship, promotes the autonomy of a learner, and advocates for the inclusion and equality of disadvantaged and marginalised learners. However, as Czura (2016: 84) states, the role of teachers should go beyond passing on theoretical knowledge; "the teachers' objective is to help students apply theoretical concepts in practice as well as develop a set of key competences sought and valued by employers". Doing so through developing students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) seems to be of utmost importance.

Manifesting ICC assumes possessing "a complex of abilities (including host language proficiency) that are needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (Fantini 2020: 5). The Council of Europe (2022: 12–13) provides a more extensive definition of the term by highlighting the essential role of respect, openness and understanding while approaching other cultures as well as the ability to reflect critically on issues related to interacting with members of different cultures:

Thus, in order to contribute to and provide more insight into the research concerned with practices and opinions of English as a foreign language (EFL) primary school teachers in the Polish educational context which are related to the notion of ICC, this article aims at reporting on the mixed-method research comprising an online survey and interviews conducted among primary school teachers of English in Poland. The study aimed at exploring whether and how primary school teachers implement elements of ICC in their lessons, how they evaluate coursebooks and the national curriculum in relation to ICC elements as well as whether and how they motivate their students to develop their ICC. The report on the study is preceded by literature review comprising the theoretical background of the concept and the overview of selected previous research in the field.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. ICC models

The notion of ICC emerged in Byram's (1997, 2021) work by means of a model comprising five dimensions crucial for its development. The dimensions involve skills of interpreting and relating, knowledge of self and other (and of individual

and societal interaction), attitudes of curiosity and openness (and relativizing self and valuing others), skills of discovery and interaction, and education involving political education and critical cultural awareness. However, the development of critical cultural awareness is of utmost importance, as it allows for enrooting "the ability to critique one's own way of thinking and acting and how this is influenced by societal factors" (Byram 2021: 45), which eventuates in being capable of revaluating stereotypes and prejudices towards particular cultural groups acquired throughout one's life. A well-developed critical cultural awareness alongside the remaining dimensions of Byram's model leads to becoming an intercultural speaker, which should be an aim in present-day education. As Byram (2021: 59–61) notes, the intercultural speaker is distinct from the native speaker as the intercultural speaker needs to possess the ability to mediate intercultural interactions and accommodate to their unique nature, which may not be the essential quality of the native speaker. Moreover, intercultural speakers should be skilled in observing verbal and non-verbal modes of communication and relating them to their own. Thus, foreign language (L2) teaching should strive for focusing on intercultural communication and nurturing intercultural speakers rather than aiming at imitating native speakers of a particular language. A perfect understanding of the target culture akin to being native-like is not what ICC aims for, as there is no singular native representation for any culture (Oranje & Smith 2017; Byram & Risager 1999).

Furthermore, in addition to Byram's model, throughout the decades numerous other theoretical constructs to define ICC have been introduced in the L2 teaching literature (e.g. Bennett 1986; Deardorff 2006). A frequently quoted one is the ICC Process Model proposed by Deardorff (2006); its circular representation highlights the significance of the continuous process of intercultural competence development and the need of perpetual improvement practices (Deardorff 2006). The Process Model comprises five components: attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, skills, internal outcome, and external outcome. Attitudes that are crucial in this model are respect, which involves valuing other cultures, openness, which concerns the ability to withhold judgement, and curiosity and discovery, which are based on the tolerance for ambiguity. This starting point is a foundation for knowledge and comprehension as well as for skills. Knowledge and comprehension involve being culturally self-aware, possessing deep cultural knowledge and being sociolinguistically aware. Moreover, skills which are relevant in this model are the ability to listen, observe and evaluate, and analyse, interpret and relate to other cultures. These skills are necessary for processing possessed knowledge and thus being able to understand and process information. The next two components, internal and external outcomes, are involved in the interaction part of the Process Model.

Internal outcomes consist of adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative view and empathy, which are based on attitudes and knowledge. External outcomes, however, concern effective and appropriate communication and behaviour in an intercultural situation, which are the demonstration of one's intercultural competence stemming from their attitudes, knowledge, skills and internal outcomes. The interrelationship among all the components of the Process Model points to, as already mentioned, a continuous nature of ICC development, thus it is of utmost importance to regularly and consistently aid students by fostering their ICC and becoming intercultural speakers.

2.2. Overview of previous studies

Most research investigating EFL teachers' practices and opinions about ICC has mainly focused on secondary school teachers (e.g., Oranje & Smith 2017; Sercu et al. 2005; Derenowski 2015), university lecturers (e.g., Vo 2017; Romanowski 2017; Kusiak-Pisowacka 2018) and student teachers (e.g., Czura 2016). Research on primary school teachers, which is the focal point of this study, is scarce, especially in the Polish educational context.

Nevertheless, it would be of significance to report on previous research from different educational contexts and settings in order to compare them with the results of the present study. Sercu et al. (2005) inquired into teachers' perceptions of their profession and teaching practice in relation to intercultural competence. They administered a questionnaire to 424 secondary school teachers of foreign languages, mostly of English, in seven countries. The findings of the study revealed that language teachers' objectives were related mainly to language competence (across all countries in which the questionnaire was administered) and that due to their attitudes towards intercultural teaching, they could be distinguished into two profiles: the favourably disposed foreign language teacher and the unfavourably disposed foreign language teacher. Moreover, participants considered knowledge of cultural facts and events as the most vital culture-teaching objective and were in favour of teacher-oriented transmission of knowledge, which indicates that the teachers displayed a more essentialist approach to including culture during L2 lessons. Oranje and Smith's study (2017), which was based on Sercu et al. (2005), resulted in similar conclusions. Their research aimed at exploring links between teachers' opinions about interculturality in education and their practices in this respect. In order to achieve the goal, they administered a questionnaire to 76 language teachers from secondary schools in New Zealand. They discovered that "[t]he significant majority spent most of their time teaching the language dimension rather than culture"

(Oranje & Smith 2017: 14), with the largest group (33 teachers) of the participants reporting teaching the language 80% of the time. Moreover, a clear mismatch between teachers' opinions and their classroom practices was evident, meaning that their attitudes towards intercultural language teaching were favourable, yet it was not their teaching practice of choice. Additionally, the teachers reported that external constraints, such as lack of time, are the reason for sacrificing the cultural dimension, which may provide an explanation for the abovementioned mismatch between opinions and practices. The last study to be overviewed is Vo's (2017) mixed-methods research based on an online questionnaire and interviews aiming to explore Vietnamese lecturers' opinions on ICC in English teaching in tertiary context. The study revealed participants' positive attitudes on ICC in English Language Teaching (ELT) and readiness to engage ICC in their teaching. However, they highlighted challenges with its implementation, such as limited time or limited teaching resources and admitted that ICC development occurred mostly through textbooks.

2.3. ICC development techniques and assessment tools

In order to develop the intercultural dimension and develop students' ICC, teachers should implement techniques which may aid them with such an objective. One of the most prevalent and typical techniques for ICC development that may be found in literature is role play, which is defined an immersive method where students act out real-life scenarios, such as ordering food or small talk, using language, gestures, and facial expressions. This technique is described as an effective way to develop both verbal and non-verbal communication, with teachers pre-teaching vocabulary and providing feedback (Reid 2014: 942−943; Xu 2011: 37−38). Another technique is critical incidents, also referred to as cultural assimilation, present learners with short stories about cross-cultural misunderstandings and ask them to choose appropriate responses. This method highlights how reactions differ across cultures and helps learners understand unfamiliar situations (Hughes 1986: 167; Zoni Upton 2021: 305−306). Moreover, the comparison method is also frequently employed as it encourages learners to compare and analyse differences between their own culture and others, as well as recognise changes within cultures over time. For instance, students may compare school routines across countries, fostering socio-cultural and sociolinguistic skills (Reid 2014: 941). What teachers may also consider as a tool for ICC development is engaging students in telecollaboration which assumes "the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations

to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work." Thus, it provides learners with opportunities for communicating with members of other cultures in a regular and (semi-)authentic manner, which is said to be one of the key points in foreign language education (O'Dowd 2012: 342−343).

Additionally, based on existing research concerned with approaches for developing positive attitudes towards members of diverse cultures, Róg (2016: 139−140) managed to extract techniques which are used for that purpose in the Polish educational context. These methods include recognizing cultural symbols, analysing behaviours, values, and communication styles across cultures (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich 2005), and using activities like role plays, simulations, discussions, and lectures (Kurtyka 2005). Additional approaches involve analysing stereotypes, critically examining superstitions (Paprocka--Piotrowska 2007), and engaging with films and cultural themes to reflect on intercultural experiences (Balcerkiewicz & Kułaczkowska 2010). Other strategies include utilizing authentic materials like films, literary texts, and advertisements (Żydek-Bednarczuk 2012), incorporating visual aids, and addressing emotionally engaging topics to build empathy. Ethnographic projects, case studies, and creative drama are also highlighted as useful tools for cultural analysis (Róg 2014).

While discussing ICC development and assessment tools, it is crucial to mention to portfolio-based aids, namely *the European Language Portfolio* (ELP) and *the Autobiography of intercultural encounters*. The ELP, introduced by the Council of Europe alongside *the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), aims to foster respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, mutual understanding, and intercultural education (Little et al. 2011). It includes three key components: a language passport, where learners self-assess their language skills and experiences; a language biography, which focuses on ICC by prompting learners to reflect on their intercultural experiences; and a dossier, which stores both finished work and works in progress demonstrating language proficiency (Little et al. 2011). *The Autobiography of intercultural encounters*, developed by Byram et al. (2009), encourages learners to critically reflect on specific intercultural encounters, focusing on emotions and responses rather than the context or location. It helps learners analyse experiences with people from diverse cultural, religious, or linguistic backgrounds, even within the same country, emphasising that both positive and negative encounters contribute to ICC development (Byram et al. 2009). Moreover, it needs to be mentioned that both ELP and *the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* are frequently applied as assessment tools as teachers may follow their students' ICC development based on their personal experiences and reflections.

Apart from being faced with the challenge what techniques teachers should use to develop students' ICC, they need to decide what assessment tools would be the most suitable for that purpose. Some resolve to apply abovementioned portfolio-based tools, however, widespread are also various types of scales such as Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) and Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS). ISS, developed by Chen and Starosta (2000), assesses the affective aspect of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), specifically focusing on intercultural sensitivity. This concept includes six components: self-esteem for managing feelings of alienation and frustration; self-monitoring to recognise and adjust communication barriers; open-mindedness to appreciate different cultural perspectives; empathy for understanding emotions from diverse backgrounds; interaction involvement which includes attentiveness and responsiveness; non-judgment to listen without making premature assumptions. ISS is a 24-item self-report questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. It encompasses five factors: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. Higher total scores indicate greater intercultural sensitivity, reflecting an individual's ability to engage effectively in intercultural interactions (Chen & Starosta 2000). On the other hand, CQS, developed by Ang et al. (2007), measures an individual's ability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings. It consists of four dimensions: metacognitive intelligence (awareness of one's cultural knowledge), cognitive intelligence (knowledge of different cultures), motivational intelligence (desire to learn about and adapt to other cultures), and behavioural intelligence (ability to adjust verbal and non-verbal behaviour). CQS is a 20-item questionnaire using a 7-point Likert scale, where participants indicate their level of agreement with statements related to the four dimensions. Higher scores represent greater cultural intelligence and motivation for developing one's ICC (Ang et al. 2007).

2.4. ICC in the Polish National Curriculum

In order to provide background for L2 education in Poland and investigate whether or not it incorporates developing students' ICC among its objectives, it is crucial to delve into the Polish National Curriculum and specifically, into the sections concerning L2 teaching.

In the document, it is circumscribed that "in the social development it is particularly significant to cultivate civic attitude, attitude of respect for tradition and culture of one's country as well as attitude of respect for different cultures and traditions" (Ministry of Education 2017: 10). Moreover, according to the same

document, schools are required to take the necessary measures in order to prevent any instances of discrimination. The Polish National Curriculum also stipulates more specific objectives in terms of (inter)cultural education relevant for the first and second educational stages, which involve, respectively, grades first to third and grades fourth to eighth. As for the first education stage, it is stated that students possess the knowledge that "people speak different languages and in order to communicate with them it is worth learning their language" as well as they "possess basic information about countries in which people use a particular foreign language" (Ministry of Education 2017: 48). Moreover, the Polish National Curriculum highlights the importance of cultivating and developing the attitude of curiosity, openness towards and respect for the diversity of languages, cultures and national identities not only of the target language, but globally (Ministry of Education 2017: 56−57). As far as the second educational stage is concerned, the objectives are more extended in comparison with the first stage. Namely, according to the Ministry of Education (2017: 74), students should have "basic knowledge about countries, societies and societies' cultures which use a particular foreign language and about a home country, including local, European and global contexts." Furthermore, students on the second educational stage are ought to be aware of the links between their own culture and the foreign culture as well as be interculturally sensitive.

Even though the notion of ICC is not included *ad litteram* in the Polish National Curriculum when delineating aims for L2 teaching, there is no denying the fact that it ought to be an integral part of classroom practices. Nevertheless, the aforementioned objectives for both educational stages suggest that intercultural education, raising students' awareness about cultural differences and fostering their respect and openness are of interest in L2 teaching in Poland.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. Aims and research questions

The aim of the study was to provide insight into the opinions and practices of English as a foreign language (EFL) primary school teachers regarding ICC. This was achieved by collecting and analysing data representative of their attitudes towards the implementation of ICC development during EFL lessons and teachers' evaluation of the inclusion of ICC in curricula and teaching materials. Specifically, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the primary school teachers' opinions about the need to incorporate the intercultural component into English lessons?

2. What teaching procedures and materials do the teachers use to develop their learners' ICC?
3. What are the teachers' opinions about intercultural components included in coursebooks and the national curriculum?
4. How do they evaluate their learners' motivation to develop ICC in English lessons and how did they motivate their learners to develop ICC outside of the classroom?

Moreover, the goal of the study was to contribute to existing research into the integration of ICC in the Polish primary school EFL classroom and through that to serve as a signpost for further research in the ongoing debate around the integration of ICC into L2 teaching.

3.2. Participants

The participation in the study was voluntary and the participants were assured that their anonymity was maintained. That was done in order to gather as objective data as feasible. In order to collect data, the link to the questionnaire was shared with teachers who worked in schools in which the researcher had completed her teacher training, rendering it a convenience sampling procedure (Dörnyei 2007: 98–99). The teachers were also kindly asked to send the link to their fellow teachers with the request to complete it, resulting with the addition of snowball sampling (Dörnyei 2007: 98). The link was also posted on several Facebook groups for EFL teachers, however the response from those was minimal. Thus, the participants of the quantitative part of the study were 39 primary school teachers of English as a foreign language. The mean length of EFL teaching experience was 14 years (min. 1 year, max. 30 years). Nine of the participants reported teaching other subjects among them being physical education, business and management, career counselling, German, Medical English, Religion, Russian, biology, music and mathematics. Apart from teaching in primary schools, 15 teachers reported working in kindergartens, secondary schools, vocational schools, technical schools as well as in private language schools. Moreover, 28 out of 39 teachers denied having had intercultural communicative training included in their teaching education, but 31 out of 39 teachers reported developing their ICC on their own.

As for the interviews, the participants were 5 primary school teachers of English as a foreign language. The sampling procedures for this part were also convenience and snowball, as some of the EFL primary school teachers who were invited by the researcher to participate in interviews while distributing the questionnaire recommended their fellow teachers from different schools,

who had also completed the questionnaire during the first part of the study. The mean length of EFL teaching experience was 10 years (min. 1 year, max. 18 years). What is significant is that the participants, in both the questionnaire and interviews, did not work in the same school, thus it may be assumed that the gathered data were more representative of a broader perspective, possibly providing insight into the state of affairs in the Polish primary school education regarding ICC.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

The study employed a mixed-methods design comprising a questionnaire and follow-up interviews as data collection tools so as to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data and provide more in-depth insight into the participants' responses and improve validity of the study through methodological triangulation (Dörnyei 2007: 42–46). Both parts of the research were designed and conducted in English.

In the quantitative part, the questionnaire consisted of the demographic part and the main part concerned with ICC aiming to explore teachers' practices and opinions. The demographic part comprised nine questions among which two were optional open-ended ones. The participants were asked to provide details about their work experience and their own ICC. The main part of the questionnaire involved 20 items, 12 of which applied a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree and 8 of which – from never to very often. Each of the Likert scale answers was converted into numerical values during the analysis in the following manner: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither disagree nor agree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree or 1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, 5 – very often. In the process of analysis, the questionnaire items were grouped into four thematic sets, namely beliefs and opinions about ICC in teaching (7 items), teachers' practices involving ICC (7 items), beliefs about learners' ICC (4 items) and observed learners' behaviours (2 items). The data gathered from the questionnaire were analysed with the use of IBM SPSS Statistics ver. 28 software and will be presented in the further section by means of tables including descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) for each item in each thematic set. The questionnaire is enclosed in Appendix 1. The internal consistency of the tool was at a sufficient level, as the calculated Cronbach's alpha displayed the value $\alpha = 0.771$ for all of the 20 questionnaire items. Moreover, Spearman's correlation test was conducted in order to establish any existing correlations between participants' experience in teaching (measured in years) and answers provided by them in

the questionnaire. Despite values of kurtosis and skewness being in the range between -1 and +1 indicating normal distribution of the data (George & Mallery 2016: 114−115), Spearman's correlation test was selected as for the substantial majority of questionnaire items the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated values $p < 0.05$ pointing to the lack of normal distribution.

As far as the qualitative part of the study is concerned, the interview comprised 14 open questions concerned with teachers' practices and opinions about ICC in EFL teaching, opinions about the national curriculum and educational materials which they utilise on daily basis as well as their own education related to ICC (the interview protocol is enclosed in Appendix 2). Interviews were conducted with 5 primary school teachers of English in two manners: face-to-face or online via Google Meet, depending on which mode was more convenient for the interviewee. All of the conversations were recorded with the agreement of the participants, transcribed and manually analysed, which effected the formation of four thematic groups: teachers' understanding of ICC, teachers' instructional practices concerning ICC, opinions on ICC content in materials and the national curriculum, evaluation of learners' ICC, teachers' ICC training. The interviews lasted on average 13.47 minutes (min. 8.57 minutes, max. 17.51 minutes, $M = 13.47$ minutes).

What is also imperative to mention is the fact that the teachers participating in the questionnaire were provided with the definition of ICC before the completion of the study in order to ensure their awareness of the concept. The interviewees, however, were initially asked to delineate their understanding of the term and, when necessary, the researcher clarified their doubts and incomprehension regarding ICC.

3.4. Research findings: Questionnaire

This subsection provides the analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the study, focusing on descriptive statistics and their interpretation. The outcomes are presented by means of tables for each group of questionnaire items, offering a clear overview of collected responses. Moreover, the report on Spearman correlation test is included, which was conducted in order to explore if there is any correlation between participants' teaching experience measured in years and their responses to each questionnaire item. The descriptive statistics for the abovementioned groups are presented in Tables 1−4.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for beliefs and opinions about ICC in teaching

Questionnaire item	M	Mdn	SD
I think it is important to assess students' intercultural communicative competence.	3.64	4.00	1.112
I know how to assess my students' intercultural communicative competence.	3.41	3.00	0.993
I am familiar with teaching techniques for developing learners' intercultural competence.	3.69	4.00	0.922
It is important to include intercultural competence in an English language course.	4.08	4.00	0.957
The development of my students' intercultural competence is an aim in my teaching.	3.62	4.00	0.935
I attach as much importance to developing intercultural competence as to teaching the language.	3.23	3.00	1.012
I like the way in which culture and intercultural content are presented in the coursebook I use.	3.13	3.00	0.978

Source: current study.

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for the group of questionnaire items related to teachers' beliefs and opinions about ICC in teaching. The highest mean ($M = 4.08$) referred to the importance of ICC inclusion in an English language course, which suggests that the participants deemed this as significant in teaching. Moreover, the second highest mean ($M = 3.69$) revealed that teachers were confident with their knowledge about ICC development techniques. This is substantiated by the lowest mean value ($M = 2.18$) in the group of items presented in Table 2, pointing to the fact that teachers make use of their theoretical knowledge about techniques for ICC development and they do not rely solely on coursebooks.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for teachers' practices involving ICC

Questionnaire item	M	Mdn	SD
I develop my students' intercultural competence only by using the coursebook.	2.18	2.00	0.790
I asses my learners' intercultural communicative competence.	2.38	2.00	0.847
I allow my students to discuss culture-related matters during lessons.	3.72	4.00	0.759
I prepare my own materials for developing my students' intercultural competence.	3.26	3.00	1.019
I develop my students' intercultural competence by teaching about other countries' national attributes.	3.74	4.00	0.751
I use authentic materials for developing my students' intercultural competence.	3.69	4.00	0.922
I clarify stereotypes when they appear during the lesson.	4.15	4.00	0.709

Source: current study.

Table 2 includes descriptive statistics for items regarding teachers' practices involving ICC. What is of utmost significance, the majority of teachers reported often or very often clarifying stereotypes during the lesson, which resulted in the highest mean (M = 4.15) for this set of items. Moreover, teachers indicated that quite frequently (M = 3.72) they allow discussions related to culture during lessons. However, the second highest mean (M = 3.74) revealed that teachers tend to develop students' ICC by teaching about other countries' national attributes, pointing to more essentialist practices of the participants. On the other hand, teachers are also prone to using authentic materials for ICC development in their students (M = 3.69).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for beliefs about learners' ICC

Questionnaire item	M	Mdn	SD
Most learners I work with are interested in learning about other cultures.	3.56	4.00	0.912
My students develop their intercultural competence outside of the classroom.	3.56	4.00	0.718
I noticed that my learners have become more tolerant after lessons including intercultural content.	3.49	4.00	0.756
My students develop their intercultural competence by participating in events organised by the school (for example: trips abroad, meetings with international guests or participating in international programmes such as Erasmus).	3.67	4.00	0.806

Source: current study.

In Table 3 descriptive statistics for items regarding teachers' beliefs about leaners' ICC are shown. The highest mean (M = 3.67) in this set suggests that students display willingness to participate in ICC developing initiatives organised by their schools, which also implies that schools provide students with opportunities to foster their ICC within their formal education. Moreover, teachers' reports provide insight into the fact that their learners are quite interested in learning about other cultures (M = 3.56) and that they tend to do that outside of the classroom (M = 3.56).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for observed learners' behaviours

Questionnaire item	M	Mdn	SD
My students are more active during lessons including intercultural content.	3.51	4.00	0.885
My students use stereotypes while talking about other cultures.	3.15	3.00	0.779

Source: current study.

3.5. Research findings: Interviews

The aim of the interviews was to broaden the data gathered through the questionnaire. In the analysis, the content of the responses was divided into the following thematic groups: teachers' understanding of ICC, teachers' instructional practices concerning ICC, opinions on ICC content in materials and the national curriculum, evaluation of learners' ICC, teachers' ICC training.

As far as the teachers' understanding of ICC is concerned, all of the interviewees defined the term "intercultural communicative competence" as an ability to communicate with and understand other cultures. Two of the participants also highlighted that it is the ability to communicate "effectively and appropriately". One teacher also mentioned that ICC is "a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours", and pointed to its importance due to living in an increasingly globalised world. Moreover, only one teacher said that ICC also involves knowledge about one's own culture and the ability to use and interpret gestures. Thus, it may be concluded that the basic understanding of ICC was the same for all the participants, however the answers differed in terms of provided details relating to what ICC involves. The thematic group referring to teachers' instructional practices concerning ICC comprised lesson topics, applied materials, techniques for ICC development and assessment, and including ICC development as a teaching aim. Firstly, all of the participants highlighted the significance of selecting topics appropriate and suitable for the age of their students so that they do not have difficulty understanding them and the concepts they refer to. Thus, for instance, those who worked with students from grades 1st to 5th reported that it is most important to include topics related to food, fashion, education, family life and arts as they are the most attractive for young learners and render students do not confuse them. Moreover, all respondents said that teaching about festivals, customs and traditions is vital. In order to familiarise students with these lesson topics, they reported resolving to using authentic materials, for instance: videos, articles, interviews, pictures and photos, maps, cartoons, audio recordings, Ted-Talks as well as Twitter, Facebook and TikTok posts. One participant also stated that they sometimes prepare their own materials for ICC development which are based on popular TV shows and series in order to engage students in the lesson. Additionally, two teachers said that their schools participate in letter exchange programmes with schools from different countries and invite foreigners to have workshops and conversations with students. As far as implementing regular coursebooks for ICC development is concerned, the majority of the participants stated that they do not use a specific coursebook during lessons. They said that the coursebooks they use (*Big English* by Person, *Brainy* by Macmillan and *Open world* by Cambridge) serve a role of a signpost and a point of reference, but the

materials with ICC elements they frequently include are authentic ones or taken and adapted from various websites, such as British Council. Furthermore, in terms of the assessment of students' ICC, teachers' reports were also consistent; the participants reported not having particular techniques or tools for assessing their students' ICC, but none of the teachers admitted to giving students grades for their ICC. They claimed that they focus mostly on constructive feedback, some guidance and being sensitive, encouraging their students to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds, and observing students when they interact with guests from abroad visiting their schools or when they perform role-play tasks in the classroom. One of the teachers believed that observing students during interactions with visitors and role-plays are among the best ways to assess their students' ICC, but also one of them said that they hardly ever assess students' ICC because "it's really fun to learn about other cultures, so there is no point focusing on assessing intercultural communicative competence".

Even though the interviewees reported employing various sources for developing their students' ICC and being engaged in that process, none of them straightforwardly claimed having such an aim in their teaching. The participants said that schools focus mostly on developing students' linguistic competence and accuracy with the purpose of preparing them for exams, which occupies most of the teaching time. Therefore, the participants implement intercultural teaching when time allows, usually before festivals such as Easter, Christmas or Halloween as they prepare lessons related to traditions significant for these events. They also pointed to the difficulty of achieving intercultural objectives, especially with younger learners, but they attempt to equip students with "skills and knowledge to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds". The teachers also highlighted that the factor influencing whether or not they include developing students' ICC as their aim is students' overall linguistic ability. When students struggle with the language itself, the focus is placed on practising grammar, vocabulary and the four skills, especially when the students get older and they need to prepare for the exams, even though the interviewees believed that language and ICC development should go hand in hand.

Teachers' opinions on ICC content in materials and the national curriculum were consistent and rather negative. The coursebooks were said to include intercultural components which are not satisfactory and diversified, as illustrated by the following quotations from the interviews:

Teacher 1: "They [coursebooks] are limited in scope and provide only a starting point for further debates,"
Teacher 2: "They [coursebooks] include information that is not interesting and everybody is aware of, for example, that [in the UK] we have now the king."

Teacher 3: "The materials used in the course should contain more cultural knowledge and activities aiming to promote ICC."

Teacher 4: "They [coursebooks] often don't include other countries and cultures, they concentrate on the English-speaking countries."

The cultural components included in coursebooks were deemed to be monotonous in their format since they usually comprise only texts to read and it was claimed that it would be more interesting for students, especially teenagers, if some videos were attached to the topic. In relation to the national curriculum, the interviews revealed that the majority of teachers were not aware of what is included in it with respect to ICC. Those who were familiar with the contents of the national curriculum reported that in their opinion the national curriculum is not satisfactory in terms of ICC, as "[it] focuses on enhancing language skills rather than promoting ICC" and "[it] should focus more on speaking and developing communication and not being grammatically correct". One of the interviewees also described the national curriculum as "a disaster" with regard to intercultural aims.

The participants were also asked to evaluate the advantages of developing students' ICC and their motivation for this process. The responses displayed a significant amount of benefits the teachers observed in their learners after introducing elements of ICC in their L2 teaching, among them: becoming more open to other cultures, becoming more tolerant and culturally sensitive, broadened horizons and knowledge, becoming aware of cultural differences, understanding other cultural backgrounds and one's own culture, becoming prepared for effective communication while abroad, minimising possibilities of conflicts and misunderstandings with people from other cultures, and becoming aware of their own assumptions and thoughts related to other cultures. The interviewees also stated that their students display substantial levels of motivation while developing their ICC, therefore they attempt to foster this motivation and provide students with encouragement by raising their awareness of how they may develop their ICC even further and providing them with helpful and valuable sources.

The last theme concerned the teachers' ICC training, which may be understood as the development of their own ICC and the preparation to guide their students in and aid them with that process by applying appropriate tools and techniques. Four out of five respondents denied having been prepared to develop their students' ICC during their teacher education and were not able to recall any university courses involving ICC training. They stated that they had participated in courses which were strictly related only to culture and not to communicative competence and which focused mostly on gaining knowledge of cultures of English-speaking countries such as the USA, the UK and Canada.

Only one of the interviewees claimed attending a seminar devoted to the topic of ICC in L2 education during their graduate programme. Despite not having been taught how to do that, all of the interviewees reported that they develop their own ICC by attending webinars, reading articles, listening to podcasts, reflecting on their own culture and differences among various cultures, immersing into other cultures through interactions with members of different cultures and social media. The participants highlighted the significance of developing their own ICC because such practice is invaluable as it aids them with developing their students' ICC and provides them with creative and engaging ideas of how to do so.

4. DISCUSSION

The qualitative and quantitative data analyses presented in the previous section yielded quite extensive answers to the posed research questions aiming at exploring EFL primary school teachers' practices and opinions concerned with developing their students' ICC. As for the first research question concerning the primary school teachers' opinions on the need to incorporate the intercultural component into English lessons, the questionnaire part of the study showed that the participants deem including elements of ICC in teaching English significant. That finding was also supported by the responses in the interviews. However, with regard to practices in this area, a discrepancy emerged between teachers' beliefs and their actions, which is consistent with previous research, such as those by Sercu et al. (2005), Oranje and Smith (2017) and Vo (2017). In the present study, in both the qualitative and quantitative parts, the participants were hesitant whether or not they attach as much importance to developing students' ICC as to teaching the language. In the interviews, they pointed to time constraints, the necessity of preparing students for exams and the schooling system focusing on accuracy and not on enabling students to becoming communicatively competent. This may indicate that, due to these factors, teachers may perceive developing students' ICC as an addition to L2 teaching rather than its integral part. While in the questionnaire, the majority of the participants claimed having an aim of developing their students' ICC, none of the interview-participants reported such a goal. The interviewees highlighted the challenges, such as limited time and overloaded curricula, as obstacles in achieving ICC-related objectives. They also pointed to the limitations arising from the age of the students. The youngest learners, from grades 1 to 3, have not yet developed abstract thinking and they are not able to comprehend more complex, culturally related topics, contrary to, for instance, seventh or eighth graders who are eager to develop their ICC. This

struggle may also result from insufficient, or the lack thereof, teaching training concerned with ICC, as in both parts of the study the teachers reported not having been prepared to implement ICC in their teaching.

As for the second research questions, connected to the teaching procedures and materials used to develop learners' ICC, the questionnaire data revealed that the participants evade relying only on coursebook materials; they tended to make use of authentic materials from external sources and sometimes created their own materials for that purpose. The implementation of authentic materials by the teachers may be indeed perceived as beneficial for developing students' ICC, as such materials expose learners to real-life language, motivate them and connect them with the community of target language users. Moreover, by encountering authentic materials, learners grasp the reality of language use, understand its cultural context, and envision their participation in that community (Reid 2010). What is interesting, however, in the qualitative part, none of the participants mentioned resources such as *The European Language Portfolio* (Council of Europe 2011), *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (Byram et al. 2009) or techniques such as comparison model, critical assimilation (or incidents), cultural island or cultural capsule (e.g., Hughes 1986; Reid 2014). Only briefly did one of the interviewees list role-play, but as a form of assessment, not practice. That is rather contrary to the fact that the majority of the participants reported in the questionnaire that they are familiar with techniques for developing students' ICC. Furthermore, the teachers reported often developing learners' ICC through teaching about other countries' national attributes, which may suggest that they display a fairly essentialist approach to teaching about culture, as also reported by Sercu et al. (2005).

In response to the third research question, about the teachers' opinions on ICC in coursebooks and the national curriculum, the data unveiled the teachers' disappointment with how culture and intercultural elements are presented in the coursebooks they use. Moreover, in the interviews it was stated that culture-related topics comprise monotonous and repetitive exercises which do not engage students, and topics concerned with non-English speaking countries are rare. Additionally, the teachers were either rather dissatisfied with the national curriculum in relation to ICC or unaware of its contents in that matter. As pointed out in the literature review, references to ICC are scant in the Polish national curriculum (Ministry of Education). For this reason, the teacher participants complained in the interviews that too much focus is placed on, for instance, mastering grammar accuracy rather than developing students' communicativeness. Therefore, it may be suggested that a revision of educational materials may be needed if L2 learners are to become interculturally competent users of a language.

Considering the last research question, on how the participants evaluate their learners' motivation to develop ICC in English lessons and how they motivate

their learners to develop ICC outside of the classroom, some positive conclusions may be drawn. The teachers reported their students being favourably disposed towards lessons including (inter)cultural content and being eager to participate in culture-related class discussions. Thus, it may be an indication that L2 lessons should be more frequently related to culture and interculturality. Moreover, the participants reported that their students are keen on participating in initiatives which help with developing their ICC such as virtual exchanges with schools from abroad, going on trips abroad and engaging in conversations with guests from different countries visiting their schools. Thus, the teachers admitted they motivate their students to actively participate in such events, introduce them to similar activities outside of school, and provide them with ideas and incentives how they may develop their ICC with the use of Internet and social media, which definitely may be more encouraging for primary school learners.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the study findings revealed that the primary school teachers indeed consider including ICC elements in lessons and developing their students ICC vital. However, many admitted doing so by teaching about national attributes, which may not be of the most significant value for becoming competent in effective communication in intercultural contexts. Thus, it may be stated that the teachers' main aim generally seems to focus on enhancing students' linguistic competence, mostly due to limited time and the need to prepare students for exams. Moreover, majority of teachers do not rely on coursebooks while developing students' ICC and they make use of external materials, either authentic or developed by themselves, which indeed provides students with some variety of topics and exercises. Furthermore, it can be concluded that assessment of students' ICC is rather an infrequent practice and if it takes place, it is not graded as regular tests and assignments. Students are also reported to have positive attitudes towards learning about other cultures and to willingly develop their ICC outside of the classroom. The findings of the study may also imply that there is a need to revise teacher training programmes and include in them developing teachers' intercultural communicative competence and prepare them to incorporate it in their teaching. This claim stems from the fact that the majority of the teachers reported not having had any intercultural training and preparation for developing ICC in their students, which may render this practice difficult and therefore, it may lead to teachers' avoiding it. Thus, it may be suggested that in order to improve the state of affairs of ICC development in the Polish educational context teachers' awareness of the concept should be raised

as has already been pointed by Róg (2016). His research overview highlighted that sole participation of future foreign language teachers in courses related to culture is not sufficient for the development of their ICC and them assuming the role of intercultural mediators, which was supported by teachers' responses in the present study, therefore ICC training ought to be introduced in teachers' education programmes in order to foster abilities imperative to such a role. It might be essential to devise and unify teacher training programmes in relation to ICC so that all teachers are equipped with tools to introduce ICC development in their teaching practices because as teachers reported in this study, they deemed their education in that matter unsatisfactory. Thus, it may be recommended that future teachers should engage in various activities aiming to foster their ICC, for instance participating in international projects held online (Wach 2015), attending seminars devoted to intercultural competence (Siek-Piskozub 2013), or forming the ability to reflect on other cultures (Mihułka 2014). Moreover, coursebooks may need a greater inclusion of contexts outside of the English-speaking countries and of more topics relating to students' lives and personal experiences. Hence, the portfolio-based tools mentioned in the literature review of this article may appear useful for guiding more personalised and meaningful reflections on students' intercultural encounters, therefore it may be advised that they are introduced into curricula as one of the main techniques for the purpose of ICC development. Furthermore, policy makers could consider literal inclusion of the notion of ICC in the National Curriculum and the development of suggestions concerned with its fostering during foreign language lessons in order to facilitate teachers' educational practices and materials design.

6. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Among the limitations of the study, the low number of participants in both qualitative and quantitative parts, which influenced the reliability of the elicited data, needs to be mentioned. For this reason, the findings cannot be generalised to the broader population of EFL primary school teachers in the debate concerning the state of affairs of ICC inclusion in teaching younger learners. Furthermore, the study was entirely based on self-report techniques being a questionnaire and interviews, which might have undermined its reliability as the truthfulness of the participants' reports could not have been measured. Moreover, no follow-up questions were asked during the interviews, which limited the study in obtaining more in-depth perceptions on the subject matter and justification for the participants' opinions.

Thus, in the light of these limitations, it may be suggested that further research on the topic involving a larger sample, could be conducted in order to yield more reliable data, which could be generalised to the educational context of primary schools in Poland. Preferably, it could employ additional methods such as diary entries and observation in order to thoroughly scrutinise teachers' practices and opinions concerned with developing students' ICC in the context of teaching languages to young learners.

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APPENDIX 1

The questionnaire used in the study

1. Personal information questionnaire

No.	Question
1.	Years of experience in teaching.
2.	The types of schools you have worked in.
3.	The type of school you work in now.
4.	Do you teach other subjects?
5.	If you answered "Yes" in the previous question, write which other subjects you teach.
6.	Was intercultural communication training included in your own teacher education?
7.	If you answered "Yes" in the previous question, describe briefly your intercultural communication training.
8.	Do you develop your own intercultural competence?
9.	If you answered "Yes" in the previous question, write in what ways you develop your own intercultural competence.

2. The research project questionnaire

No.	Question
1.	I think it is important to assess students' intercultural communicative competence.
2.	I know how to asses my students' intercultural communicative competence.
3.	I am familiar with teaching techniques for developing learners' intercultural competence.
4.	It is important to include intercultural competence in an English language course.
5.	The development of my students' intercultural competence is an aim in my teaching.
6.	I attach as much importance to developing intercultural competence as to teaching the language.
7.	I like the way in which culture and intercultural content are presented in the coursebook I use.
8.	I develop my students' intercultural competence only by using the coursebook.
9.	Most learners I work with are interested in learning about other cultures.
10.	My students develop their intercultural competence outside of the classroom.
11.	I noticed that my learners have become more tolerant after lessons including intercultural content.
12.	My students develop their intercultural competence by participating in events organised by the school (for example: trips abroad, meetings with international guests or participating in international programmes such as Erasmus).
13.	I asses my learners' intercultural communicative competence.
14.	I allow my students to discuss culture-related matters during lessons.
15.	I prepare my own materials for developing my students' intercultural competence.
16.	I develop my students' intercultural competence by teaching about other countries' national attributes (e.g. geography, national symbols, cuisine, literature, holidays).
17.	I use authentic materials for developing my students' intercultural competence.
18.	My students are more active during lessons including intercultural content.
19.	My students use stereotypes while talking about other cultures.
20.	I clarify stereotypes whenever they appear during the lesson.

APPENDIX 2

The interview protocol used in the study

No.	Question
1.	How do you understand the term "intercultural communicative competence"? What does it refer to?
2.	Which topics related to culture do you consider most important in teaching a foreign language? Why? (Family Life, Community Life, Society; Religion and Spiritual Beliefs; Government and International Relations; Arts and Crafts; Education; Resources and Economics; Food; Customs and Traditions; Clothing; Festivals; Values)
3.	Do you include developing students' ICC as your aim? Why? / Why not? Do you think it is appropriate to have such a goal?
4.	Do you develop your students' ICC? How do you do that? What materials and/or techniques do you use? Why? (e.g. inviting people from other countries/nationalities; bringing authentic materials; arranging video conferences; arranging student exchange programmes or summer camps; guiding students to use technology such as Facebook, Twitter or forum pages)
5.	How much importance do you attach to developing intercultural communicative competence compared to teaching grammar, vocabulary and the four skills? Why?
6.	How do students benefit from developing their ICC?
7.	How do you motivate your students to develop their ICC outside of the classroom? (e.g. encouraging them to participate in international projects or competitions or attend international concerts, exhibitions or festivals).
8.	What coursebook do you use while teaching? What cultural elements does it include?
9.	What is your opinion regarding intercultural components included in the coursebook and the national curriculum? Do you think they are satisfactory? Why? / Why not?
10.	Do you prepare your own ICC materials? Why? / Why not?
11.	Do you think that there is a need to incorporate more intercultural elements in EFL courses? Why? / Why not?
12.	How do you assess your students' ICC? What tools do you use? Do you think that your assessment techniques are effective? Why? / Why not?
13.	In what ways, if any, was intercultural communication training included in your own teacher education? What did you do in intercultural communication training? Do you think it was satisfactory? Did it prepare you for teaching ICC?
14.	Do you develop your own ICC? If yes, in what ways? Do you participate in seminars, courses, lectures, etc.?

Interkulturowa kompetencja komunikacyjna w polskim kontekście edukacyjnym: praktyki i opinie nauczycieli języka angielskiego w szkołach podstawowych

Abstrakt. Interkulturową kompetencję komunikacyjną (IKK) definiuje się jako zespół umiejętności (w tym biegłość w języku docelowym) potrzebnych do skutecznego i stosownego przeprowadzania interakcji z osobami językowo i kulturowo różnymi (Fantini 2020: 5). Rozwój IKK u uczniów

przez Radę Europy (2022) został uznany za jeden z kluczowych elementów nauczania języka obcego (J2). Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje wyniki badania przeprowadzonego wśród nauczycieli języka angielskiego w szkołach podstawowych, którego celem było poznanie stosowanych przez respondentów praktyk dydaktycznych w nauczaniu i ocenianiu IKK, a także ich opinii na temat zawartości podręczników i motywowania uczniów w zakresie rozwijania IKK zarówno w klasie, jak i poza nią. Dane ilościowe i jakościowe zostały zebrane za pomocą kwestionariusza (n = 39) oraz wywiadów z pięcioma nauczycielami języka angielskiego. Wyniki pokazują, że większość respondentów stara się traktować priorytetowo integrację IKK podczas lekcji języka angielskiego i dąży do jej rozwijania u uczniów. Jednakże mniej niż połowa z nich przywiązuje równie duże znaczenie do IKK, jak do nauczania języka. Ponadto, większość respondentów koncentruje się na nauczaniu cech narodowych w celu rozwijania IKK.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura, interkulturowa kompetencja komunikacyjna, nauczanie języków obcych w Polsce, nauczanie kultury, praktyki nauczycieli, opinie nauczycieli.

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