



Intercultural Competence in the Context of Teaching Chinese in Sri Lanka: Ideology vs Spirituality

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Abstract

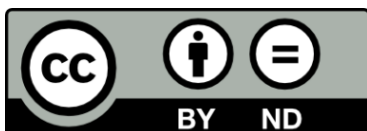
Significant transformations have occurred in the anatomy of societies along with rapid digitalisation, migration, and language change, which, in liaison with various other influencers, have highlighted the need to incorporate intercultural competence into education. The qualitative and quantitative changes that have occurred in teaching Chinese in Sri Lanka in the recent past have stemmed new paradigm shifts in curriculum development, teaching methods and material for teaching Chinese language, of which consolidating intercultural competence is indispensable. The present study has examined the existing modes and extents of intercultural competencies incorporated into teaching Chinese in Sri Lanka from the perspectives of ideology and culture. The study adopts a convergent parallel design juxtaposing qualitative and quantitative data from the informants to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the situation. The results indicate that the informants' preference is more toward learning cultural content, especially content related to spirituality, than ideological content in language learning. The limitations of the Sri Lankan CFL learners' cross-cultural knowledge are clearly depicted by the low performance of informants in identifying rudimentary Indic loanwords in Chinese. Existing teaching material, approaches and language policy planning have to be reassessed and redesigned to cope with rapid language change and increasing diversity of learners.

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**Original Article****INTRODUCTION**

In the modern-day multiethnic, multilingual, and pluricultural global society, intercultural competency is considered one of the key competencies in education. Yet, the multimodal nature of language and culture itself makes inculcating intercultural competence in language learners an arduous task. If conceptualising communication competence is difficult within a given culture, the challenge is clearly multiplied when extending such concepts across distinct cultural milieus (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p.2). Therefore, defining, conceptualising, and incorporating intercultural competence into teaching has been a topic of controversy in many recent research studies.

Along with the strengthening of economic, trade, and political relations between China and Sri Lanka during the past few decades, teaching and learning the Chinese language in Sri Lanka has paralleled considerable development, with a dramatic increase in students selecting Chinese as a foreign language. Nevertheless, the existing approaches, benchmarks, and teaching material used in Sri Lanka for teaching the Chinese language require substantial reconsideration and modification to cope with the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of the modern global context. Especially the cultural component in the existing Chinese language

teaching-learning environment in Sri Lanka is predominantly delivered through global textbooks, which encompass limited cultural connotations of the target culture. The present study attempts to examine the ideological and spiritual cultural content delivered in teaching the Chinese language in Sri Lanka and proposes pedagogical implications.

Despite the significant progress in Chinese language education in Sri Lanka, there is a critical gap in the integration of comprehensive cultural content within the curriculum. The current reliance on global textbooks offers a limited perspective, often failing to reflect the rich and diverse cultural ideologies and spiritual values inherent to the Chinese language. This limitation hampers the development of true intercultural competence among learners, which is an essential aptitude of a language learner in the modern global context. Therefore, this study seeks to address the critical problem of optimising existing Chinese language teaching approaches and materials in Sri Lanka to include a more nuanced and extensive representation of Chinese cultural content, thereby enhancing the intercultural competence of learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW**Multilingualism and Intercultural Competence in Education**

As clearly stated in the Special Eurobarometer 386 on Europeans and

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Their Languages (European Commission, 2012), 84% of Europeans agree, and more than 44% 'totally agree', that all citizens of the European Union should be able to speak at least one foreign language and 72% agree that people in the European Union should be able to speak more than one language other than their mother tongue and another 33% have responded that they 'totally agree' to this view. Facilitating a 'pluricultural space' is a key scale in the CEFR new companion volume, which reflects the 'capacity of dealing with 'otherness' to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features in order to enable communication and collaboration.' (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 122)

The role of intercultural competence in education has been examined from a variety of perspectives by recent researchers. A deeper insight into the plurilingual and pluricultural setting of modern-day global society would be an ideal prelude to evaluating intercultural competence. As stated by Maher (2017, p. 19), there are four conditions that promote the spread of languages: introduction, establishment of sustainment, and benefit. Maher further proposes that social, religious, and economic are major benefactors behind the spread of languages. Thus, plurilingualism encompasses a sociolinguistic aspect as well as a sociocultural aspect, both of which are interdependent variables. Therefore, intercultural competence can neither

deviate itself from linguistic appeal nor from its sociological appeal.

As claimed by Aronin & Singleton (2012, p. 33), the present-day existence and social behaviour accompanied by language differ largely from the past, and the most apparent transformations are connected with multimodal dimensions. They further claim that despite the remarkable significance of these shifts, they have largely been neglected. Todeva & Cenoz (2009, p. 4) propose that there have been some internal development trends in interest towards the acquisition of third and multiple languages as an alternative to traditional second language acquisition. The shift from monolingualism and bilingualism towards multilingualism is depicted through the language policy shifts that many nations have adopted to cope with the linguistic diversity that occurred along with migration and technological advancements. Weber & Horner (2013, p. 69) reveal that the distinction between officially monolingual or multilingual nations cannot be reduced to a fixed binary but is a dynamic and shifting continuum towards either monolingualism or multilingualism. Popescu et al. (2014, p.581) conclude that cultural pluralism is not a novel phenomenon, but what is new is its recognition and systematisation in everyday life.

Intercultural competence and multilingualism in education are two dependent variables, the latter of which has been attached to much importance

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in modern-day education. Nevertheless, despite the hypercritical demand for language policy, curricula and strategic transformation in the existing education system in the drive towards multilingualism, most regions of the world still resort to monolingual or largely bilingual models. Hélot (2012, p. 214) argues that despite the growing change in population in schools everywhere, especially in urban settings, the increased visibility of linguistic diversity is not reflected through classroom practices. Hélot further claims that although the existing language policies need reframing, the ideology of linguistic uniformity in the existing education system poses challenges to addressing linguistic diversity.

Portera (2019, p. 24) proposes that intercultural education is a process that promotes a comprehensive understanding of concepts of democracy and pluralism and many other traits such as customs, traditions, faiths and values. Portera further claims that it encompasses a Copernican revolution for two reasons: firstly, because it defines culture and identity rigidly but perceives them as constantly changing dynamic variables, and secondly, because it does not perceive diversity, otherness, emigration and life only as risk factors but also as opportunities for progress. According to Huber & Reynolds (2014, p. 23), intercultural competence enables people to interact, cooperate and act as mediators in settings where cultural

"otherness" and "difference" have significant importance.

Mara (2021, p. 11) proposes that students with intercultural competencies can ensure the sustainability of future society owing to their capacity to integrate socially, culturally and professionally cost-effectively. According to a study by Hantsiuk et al. (2021, p. 19), the sample students have demonstrated a significant improvement in attitudes of openness and curiosity, knowledge of cultural self-awareness and worldview frameworks, skills of empathy and skills of non-verbal and verbal communication after the completion of an intercultural competence course than before. Szőke, 2018 (p. 372) emphasises the significance of intercultural competency in characterising intercultural communication in business, and their study reveals that interculturally competent business persons are more likely to avoid miscommunications in their interactions.

Intercultural competence is a decisive factor in the context of migration, which demands cultural literacy, intercultural competence, and intercultural communication skills in both migrant and native communities. Nagy (2018, p. 658), taking the situation of Irish migrants, claims that developing migrant learners' intercultural competence is crucial to their successful integration into Irish society. However, it is a question whether the specific sociolinguistic

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requirements of migrants are met by the existing initiatives. Existing training programs on intercultural competence tend to focus on the needs of particular communities or social groups, but it has to be ensured that stereotypes are not followed (World Health Organization, 2020).

It is of paramount importance to identify how a lack of intercultural competencies would influence people in different settings. As claimed by Braslauskas (2021, p. xx), inadequate intercultural competencies would cause issues in four aspects: 1) different time planning and management; 2) different temperaments of communicators; 3) different work culture and rules of conduct; 4) different perceptions of managerial and subordinate relationships. As claimed by Byram et al. (2001, p. 1), though many curriculums emphasise the importance of cultural learning and, recently, intercultural competence, sufficient attention has not been directed to the intercultural dimension in education.

In the pandemic era, most educational programmes are delivered via online platforms, including the ones that encompass intercultural competencies, and the question arises of how effective online teaching is in developing intercultural competencies. Ivenz (2021, p. 52) states that in-class teaching of intercultural competencies results in more natural conversations than online courses. He further claims that it is easier to ensure inclusiveness in the

classroom when the program is conducted physically than online. Nevertheless, as claimed by Jiang et al. (2021, p. 2), existing literature reveals that there is considerable progress in technology meant to address intercultural issues in the field of education both directly and indirectly. Both these statements have significant insights since, while, on the one hand, the advancements in technology have a remarkable impact on enhancing intercultural competence, at the same time, some aspects of intercultural competence are intangible to technology.

Nikiforova & Skvortsova (2021, p. 6) propose that intercultural competence is a key supra-professional competence of any future specialist in any field of specialisation. It is also a professional aptitude that encompasses several skills such as linguistic competence, meta-communicative competence and other skills that foster professional performance in intercultural interaction. Trede et al. (2013, p. 12) propose that professional development can be instrumental in training academics to be effective facilitators of intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence is attached to a specific significance in teaching and learning foreign languages owing to the key role culture plays in the acquisition of foreign languages. As stated by Yagubova (2021, p. 2788), mastering the communicative competence of foreign language students demands enhancing learners'

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knowledge, abilities and skills in familiarising themselves with a foreign culture and communicating with natives. As evidenced by Wolff & Borzikowsky (2018, p. 22), stay-abroad programs have a significant impact on enhancing the intercultural competencies of learners. Therefore, foreign language study abroad programs could lead to even better acquisition of intercultural competence given the fact that they include extensive sociolinguistic content when compared to other domains. However, as claimed by Abe (2019, p.4), although it is generally assumed that study abroad programs automatically offer learners a multicultural experience, host institutions cannot always provide a real multicultural environment that could foster the intercultural competence of exchange students.

Culture and Ideology in Foreign Language Learning

The definitions of the term culture are diverse, even with the study and teaching of languages that are concerned with forms of speech acts, rhetoric, social constructions, and knowledge constructs (Hinkel, 1999, p. 1). Byram (1989, p. 39-40) claims that irrespective of whether in a generic or a specific point of view, the rapport between language and culture is an extremely complex issue that encompasses psychological, sociological and political dimensions. Liddicoat & Scarino (2013, p. 1981) argue that language learning involves inherent intercultural processes in

which meanings are created and inferred across and between languages and cultures within complex interrelationships of cultures and cultural repertoires. From these interpretations, it could be inferred that the relationship between language and culture is extremely intricate.

Buttjes (1991, p. 8) argues that although the psychological concerns with language learners' cultural identities are a relatively novel discovery, the role of culture in foreign language learning can be traced back to more than one origin. Yang & Chen (2016, p. 1133) propose that a competent language instructor should possess knowledge of target culture and teaching, motivation and assessment in addition to linguistic knowledge of the target language. However, the extent and modes of integrating culture into foreign language teaching is a matter of controversy. As claimed by Ndhlovu (2021, p. 13), the rapid evolution of cultures makes an isolated perspective on culture problematic, and languages need to be perceived in their global roles rather than as isolated entities.

According to Ulum & Köksal (2019, p. 83), the ideology of inner and expanding circle cultures is dominant in textbooks. Although culture is the most prevalent factor in both globally and locally written textbooks, cultural content and perspective are often prejudiced, with the inclusion of their own ideologies implicitly and explicitly. Integration of local cultures into language learning has been a topic

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of discussion in recent studies as a remedial measure to the hegemony of target cultures in foreign language learning. Khan (2014, p. 69) argues that the integration of local culture into foreign language learning could be instrumental in promoting contextual learning, learners' emotional concern, learners' active participation and lessening the burden on learners.

Ideological and spiritual aspects of the target language culture are inevitably transferred to the learners in the process of learning foreign languages. However, it is the responsibility of educators, curriculum developers, and teachers to regulate and scrutinise ideology and spirituality in cultural content before delivering it to students. Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger (2015, p. 2) raise several important questions related to ideology in language education, namely 1) What ideological agendas are promoted through the conception, design and dissemination of material? 2) How is culture conceived in textbooks? 3) What type of pedagogies and educational goals are promoted? 4) How are dominant or non-dominant languages perceived in relation to local languages 5) What alternative worlds, identities and pedagogies might be envisioned for language education?

While language functions as a communicative glue that holds society together, it also functions as a marker of social class and ethnic identity. Just as some knowledge is more important than other knowledge, certain

languages have different values in different contexts. (Reagan, 2002, p. 2) The power assigned to languages is generated mainly through the relationship between language and identity, which ranges from individual identity to the identity of large communities or territories. As claimed by Llamas (2009, p. 1), language-mediated attribution of identity is deeply integrated into human social affairs, and a lack of a name leads to a lack of identity. According to Edwards (2009, p. 21), all individuals are used to particular disparities in accent, dialect and language that signify their membership in speech communities, social classes, and ethnic and national groups.

The role played by ideology in language and language education is characterised by politics and language policy. As stated by Wodak (1989, p.137), political groups require their own language through which they can reflect themselves; they define their territory through it and disseminate their ideology through slogans and stereotypes. According to Woolard (1998, p. 3), ideologies of languages are not only related to language alone, but they envision and enact ties of language to identity, aesthetics, morality and epistemology. Zhou (2018, p. 35) has taken a sociolinguistic approach towards language ideology and claims that language ideology is fundamentally about the conscious interaction between ideology and language and the politics of language.



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The concept of linguistic ideology enfolds the relationship between ideology and linguistic structure.

The ideology of donor languages is generally transmitted to learners through teaching material, in most cases through textbooks. Language ideology and political ideologies in textbooks have been studied by a number of researchers from various aspects. As claimed by Dinçay & Ömer (2020, p. 52), both teachers and learners have to perceive textbooks so that they can deconstruct and decolonise Western ideologies. Their study further proposes that learners must be made aware that the language used is not neutral but always encompasses ideologies. Kirkgöz (2019, p. 103) proposes that conceptualising language as an ideology can enable us to understand the underlying ideologies in the curriculum documents as well as teaching materials.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Sample Design

The participants of the study were ($n=29$) university students who are majoring in Chinese language from a state university in Sri Lanka (26 females and three males, mean age = 24.8). All informants have studied Chinese culture for a minimum of 180 hours of taught courses. Only eight students (27.6%) out of the total sample have had firsthand cultural experience in China.

Total population sampling was used to select the participants, considering the smallness of each cluster.

A questionnaire and a worksheet were utilised to collect primary data from the informants. The objective of the questionnaire was to identify the situation of cultural components in existing CFL material and Sri Lankan CFL learners' attitudes towards the integration of Chinese culture and ideology into teaching. The questionnaire approached the respondents from five perspectives, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Composition of the Questionnaire

Dimension	Type	Items
Demographic information	Multiple Choice	4
Learners' attitude towards the integration of culture into learning Chinese	Multiple Choice	6
Learners' interest in different aspects of Chinese culture	5-point Likert Scale	10
Nature of culture content in existing CFL textbooks	Multiple Choice	3
Learners' attitude towards a pluricultural learning environment	Multiple Choice	3
Integration of local culture into learning foreign languages	Multiple Choice	4

The worksheet was aimed at measuring the intercultural competence of the informants, which included 10 multiple-choice questions on Indic loanwords in the Chinese language.



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Indic loanwords in the Chinese language were chosen since these words account for the strongest linguistic and intercultural connection between Chinese and Sinhala languages. Both the questionnaire and the worksheet were administered online using Google Forms.

Data Analysis Methods

SPSS Statistics 21 was used to analyse primary data from the questionnaire and the worksheet. The five dimensions were analysed in both isolation and synthesis. A *t*-test was carried out on the responses to Likert-scale questions (Harpe, 2015) in dimension 2. For data collected under dimensions 3, 4 and 5, a more descriptive statistical analysis was conducted alongside a qualitative analysis. The accuracy of recognition of loanwords was checked in the worksheet while a one-sample *t*-test was run in comparison with the responses from the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Students' Language and Cultural Learning Preferences

55.2% of the sample ($n=16$) had studied the Chinese language for more than

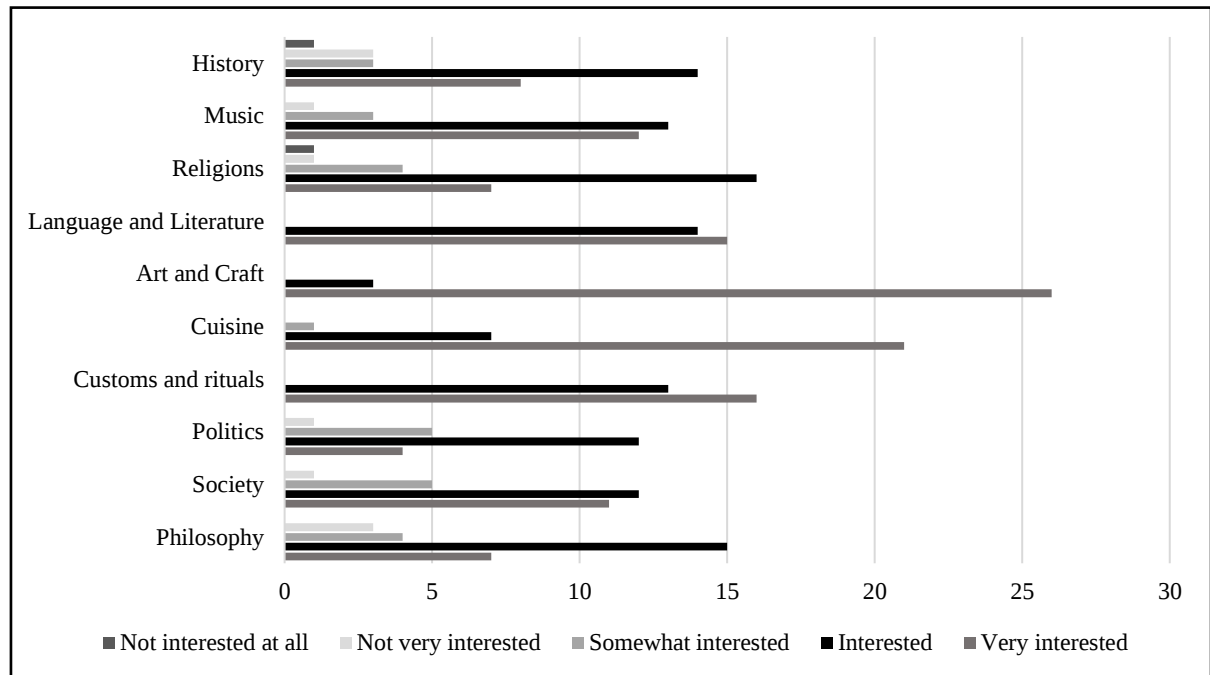
four years, and another 34.5% of respondents ($n=10$) had studied the Chinese language for more than three years, while the remaining 10.3% respondents ($n=3$) had studied Chinese for more than two years. 72.4% of the respondents ($n=21$) had not visited China to have a firsthand experience of Chinese culture, and only 27.6% ($n=8$) had visited China.

100% of the informants responded that they wanted to learn about Chinese culture and the Chinese language. 62.1% ($n=18$) of the informants responded that they wanted to learn Chinese culture because they felt that culture lessons were interesting. 55.2% ($n=16$) have responded that their motive has been to learn about the world through culture. 34.5 % ($n=10$) have responded that they like to enhance their multicultural knowledge, and the same number of informants have claimed that they can always learn new words through culture. Only 17.2% of the informants have responded that learning culture will be important for their future careers. Figure 1 illustrates the students' preference for each aspect of Sinology in the Chinese language classroom.



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Figure 1: Students' Interest in Different Aspects of Sinology



Standard error of the Likert-scale question on the students' preference of each aspect of Sinology integrated into CFL learning is recorded as .12859. The grand mean is 1.8207, and the median is recorded as 1.70. The minimum and maximum are recorded as 1.00 and 3.60, respectively. The overall standard deviation is recorded as 0.69250, and the variance is 0.480.

From Table 2, it could be inferred that students' preference in learning

Chinese culture is more inclined towards art and craft, cuisine, customs, language, and literature. Their interest in learning Chinese religions, politics, philosophy, and history is much lower, as depicted by the higher standard deviations and higher mean values. The maximum number of responses to Chinese language and literature, Chinese arts and crafts, and Chinese customs is 2, which means that all responses have been shared among 1 (very interested) and 2 (interested).

Table 2: Students' Interest in Different Aspects of Sinology

Aspect	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Chinese history	29	1.00	5.00	2.1379	1.05979
Chinese Music	29	1.00	4.00	1.7586	.78627
Chinese Religions	29	1.00	5.00	2.0690	.92316
Chinese Language and Literature	29	1.00	2.00	1.4828	.50855
Chinese Art & Craft	29	1.00	2.00	1.1034	.30993
Chinese Cuisine	29	1.00	3.00	1.3103	.54139
Chinese Customs	29	1.00	2.00	1.4483	.50612
Chinese Politics	29	1.00	5.00	2.9310	1.22273



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Chinese Society	29	1.00	4.00	1.8621	.83342
Chinese Philosophy	29	1.00	4.00	2.1034	.90019
mean	29	1.00	3.60	1.8207	.69250
Valid N (listwise)	29				

Note. 1 very interested, 2 interested, 3 somewhat interested, 4 not very interested, 5 not interested at all

Table 3: *Students' Preference for the Language-culture-history-ideology Combination*

Combination	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Language & Literature 50% Culture & History 25% Society & Politics 25%	8	27.6	27.6	27.6
Language & Literature 60% Culture & History 30% Society & Politics 10%	8	27.6	27.6	55.2
Language & Literature 60% Culture & History 10% Society & Politics 30%	2	6.9	6.9	62.1
Language & Literature 40% Culture & History 40% Society & Politics 20%	11	37.9	37.9	100.0

From Table 3, it could be inferred that most students ($n=11$) have preferred the fourth combination, which includes more language (40%) and culture (40%) and relatively less content on Chinese society and politics (20%). The least preferred combination ($n=2$) is the third combination, which includes the

highest proportion of society and politics (30%) and less content on culture and history (10%). P10, P11 and P12 were dedicated to testing students' attitudes towards the integration of cultural content into existing CFL textbooks in Sri Lanka.

Table 4

Cultural Content in Existing CFL Textbooks

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Satisfaction with cultural content included in existing textbooks	29	1.00	2.00	1.4138	.50123
Integration of native or South Asian culture	29	1.00	2.00	1.4828	.50855
Issues in the Integration of culture into Existing textbooks	29	1.00	4.00	2.2414	1.09071
Valid N (listwise)	29				

Table 4 demonstrates the students' opinions on the cultural content in existing CFL textbooks in Sri Lanka. 41.4% of the informants ($n=12$) have claimed that they are satisfied with the culture content included in existing textbooks, while 58.6% ($n=17$) of the informants have responded that they

are not satisfied with the culture content integrated into existing textbooks. 51.7% ($n=15$) of the informants have responded that terms the textbooks they use contain terms of their native culture or South Asian culture, while 48.3% ($n=14$) of the informants have claimed that such



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vocabulary is not included in the existing textbooks. Four major issues related to the integration of cultural content into existing CFL textbooks used in Sri Lanka were highlighted in the questionnaire. 31% ($n=9$) of the informants have responded that the culture content included in the textbooks is 'not sufficient', while 24.1% ($n=7$) of the informants have responded that the culture content included in existing CFL textbooks is 'not interesting'. 20.7% ($n=6$) of the informants have responded that 'major cultural aspects are not included' in existing textbooks. The remaining 24.1% ($n=7$) have responded that culture content in existing CFL textbooks is 'difficult to understand'.

P14 and P15 were employed to test the students' perception of their native culture and foreign cultures in language learning. Table 5 depicts the statistical analysis of responses to P14 and P15. 82.8% ($n=24$) informants have responded that Chinese culture is more interesting than their native culture, while the remaining 17.2% ($n=5$) have opposed the idea. 86.2% ($n=25$) informants have responded that learning Chinese culture is not as important as learning their native culture, while 13.8% ($n=4$) have responded in disagreement with this idea.

Table 5: *Students' perception of their native culture and foreign cultures in CFL*

Question	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
P14 Is Chinese culture more interesting than native culture?	29	1.00	2.00	1.1724	.38443
P15: Is learning Chinese culture more important than learning one native culture?	29	1.00	2.00	1.1379	.35093
Valid N (listwise)	29				

Students' attitude towards a pluricultural learning environment was tested in P17 to P19. Table 6 demonstrates the informants' attitude towards learning in a pluricultural environment. The descriptive statistics

analysis shows that 93.1% ($n=27$) of the respondents are in favour of a pluricultural learning environment, and only 6.9% ($n=2$) have responded that they do not wish for a pluricultural learning environment always.

Table 6: *T-test Analysis of Informants' Attitude towards Learning in a Pluricultural Setting*

Question	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Er. Mean
P17 Do you like to learn in a pluricultural environment?	Female	26	1.0385	.19612	.03846
	Male	3	1.3333	.57735	.33333
P18 If answer to P17 was "yes"	Female	25	2.320	.9452	.1890



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	Male	2	2.000	1.4142	1.0000
P19 If answer to P17 was “no”	Female	1	1.0000	.	.
	Male	1	4.0000	.	.

Analysis of Vocabulary Accuracy and Impact of Cultural Exposure

Table 7: Accuracy of Worksheet Responses

Item	N	No of accurate responses	Per cent	mean	Std. Dev
佛牙节 Perahara	29	29	100.0	1.0000	.00000
毗湿奴 Vishnu	29	23	79.3	1.4138	.86674
夜叉 Yaksa	29	13	44.8	2.7931	.94034
阎魔 Yama	29	17	58.6	2.1034	.85960
窣堵波 Stupa	29	7	24.1	2.0345	.82301
菩提 Bodhi	29	18	62.1	3.1379	1.24568
轮王 Chakravarti	29	7	24.1	2.1379	.99010
劫波 Kalpa	29	18	62.1	1.7931	1.08164
阿梨耶 Arya	29	15	51.7	2.4483	1.02072
本生 Jataka	29	11	37.9	1.9655	.98135

Several important inferences could be drawn from the analysis in Table 7. Firstly, the overall accuracy of the informants remains at 54.47%, which is relatively low, and 40% of the informants have scored an average below 50% of the total marks. The words 佛牙节 *Kandy Perahara*, 毗湿奴 *Vishnu*, 劫波 *Kalpa*, and 菩提 *Bodhi* demonstrate higher accuracies while the words 窣堵波 *Stupa*, 轮王

Chakravarti and 本生 *Jataka* demonstrate very low accuracies. The words 夜叉 *Yaksa*, 阎魔 *Yama* and 阿梨耶 *Arya* have demonstrated average accuracies. The words 菩提 *Bodhi*, 劫波 *Kalpa* and 阿梨耶 *Arya*, show higher standard deviations, while all other words show relatively similar standard deviations except for 佛牙节 *Perahara*, which show 100% accuracy.

Table 8: One Sample T-test on the Worksheet Marks of Respondents

	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error Mean	t	Mean Dif.
Not been to China	21	3.4762	1.07792	.23522	-6.478	-1.52381
Been to China	8	5.0000	2.13809	.75593	.000	.00000

Test value = 5

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Table 8 demonstrates the results from the one sample t-test conducted on the worksheet responses and the question on the informants' firsthand experience in China. The test value for the t-test was 5. Only 27.5% ($n=8$) of the sample informants have had a chance to be in China. The one sample t-test results clearly indicate that the students who have had firsthand cultural experiences in China have scored higher in the worksheet than those who have not been to China.

DISCUSSION

Several significant inferences could be drawn from the analysis of the questionnaire data. Most significantly, a majority of informants' responses indicate that they are in favour of a pluricultural learning experience that involves their native culture, target culture, and other cultures of the world. However, two key issues arise from this phenomenon, which will directly influence their intercultural competence. Firstly, since these students are specialised in the Chinese language, it is of paramount importance for them to have a firsthand experience of Chinese culture, which only 27.5% of the total population have been able to receive. As claimed by Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva (2020, p. 162), spending a period abroad can not only help improve one's resume but also develop the intercultural competencies of students. Secondly, it is a question of whether the existing language and education policies in Sri

Lanka support a local pluricultural learning environment.

The current trends in intercultural education have their connotations to far-reaching societal changes in recent times, which include globalisation of the finance and economy, dramatic increase in private and professional mobility and expansion in migration. (Neuner, 2012, p.11) The countries, communities and societies in South Asia have taken a much-diversified outlook along with the recent trends in market economy, digitalisation and migration factors. Therefore, educational and language policy reforms are essential for coping with the novel issues that emerge from these social transformations. As claimed by Liyanage (2019, p. 410), the current bilingual model of education in Sri Lanka, English MOI education, does not satisfy the English language proficiency requirements for interaction with monolingual English speakers from abroad.

The questionnaire responses depict that the informants are more inclined towards learning Chinese culture than Chinese ideology. Chinese politics, society and religion are the least favourite topics among the learners. This is also depicted in the responses to P15, in which most students have responded that learning their own culture is as important as learning foreign cultures. As Kumar and Prakash (2018, p.2) observe, the process of globalisation, hypermobility, swift

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urbanisation and the increasing desire for local communities to mingle with international communities have resulted in a pressing need for reconfiguring identity in the new world order. As stated by Crystal (2014, p. 70), how minority languages fare in the present world, which records the highest number of populations in history, highly omnipresent transport and communication technologies, and very high language contact is a matter of ongoing discovery.

The role of textbooks is a highly influential factor in developing intercultural competence, and most existing textbooks used in TCFL in Sri Lanka are global textbooks that are not specifically designed for South Asian learners. Although a considerable number of informants have claimed that words of their own culture are included in the textbooks that they use, most global textbooks used in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Sri Lanka, such as Hanyujiaocheng, Contemporary Chinese, Experiencing Chinese and New Practical Chinese Reader. Textbooks do not include words related to South Asian cultures. As clearly stated by Mishan (2005, p.46), native culture can always be used as a reference point in the language learning process, and perceiving culture in comparison with another can broaden and deepen understanding and exploration of culture.

The aforementioned issue of incorporating native culture into

foreign language learning and striking a balance between foreign culture and native culture in learning material is directly related to the responses from the worksheet. Indic loanwords included in the worksheet account for the strongest linguistic relationship between Chinese and Indo-Aryan Languages in South Asia, including Sinhala. Owing to the phonological and semantic similarity of these words in Chinese and Sinhala, knowledge of Indic loanwords is of significant importance to Sri Lankan Chinese language learners. Secondly, owing to the influence of Buddhist philosophy and culture on both China and Sri Lanka, these words play an important role in intercultural communication between the two countries. However, the analysis of the worksheet responses indicates that the learners' knowledge of these words is relatively low.

As claimed by Heller (2008, p.540), in the globalised new economy, not only is communication important, but it also entails dealing with multifaceted linguistic variety. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to incorporate intercultural competence into education to train learners to be versatile and culturally sensitive humans who are able to operate in ethnically diverse environments. Recent researchers have studied the incorporation of intercultural competence into education through various means, such as literature (Held, 2021), story circles (Deardorff, 2020)



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and online intercultural exchange (O'Dowd, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The present study has explored the existing modes and extents of intercultural competence in teaching Chinese in Sri Lanka. Using empirical data supported by relevant literature, the study concludes that the existing measures taken to incorporate intercultural competence into teaching Chinese in Sri Lanka are inadequate to prepare learners as global citizens capable of harmonious existence in diverse communities. The relatively low performance of informants in identifying rudimentary Indic loanwords in Chinese is indicative of the limitations of the Sri Lankan CFL learners' cross-cultural knowledge. It is clearly identified that the learners' preference is gravitated towards cultural, especially content related to spirituality, rather than ideological content. The present study is limited to identifying the issues of incorporating intercultural competence into teaching Chinese in Sri Lanka, and further research on designing curriculums, textbooks and teaching methods to incorporate intercultural competence into language learning is of paramount importance.

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