การศึกษาความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี ชาวไทยในบริบทการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ: แนวทางเชิงปฏิบัติสำหรับการสอน[*]

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งศึกษาสมรรถนะด้านการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในมหาวิทยาลัยเอกชนแห่งหนึ่งในกรุงเทพมหานคร ประเทศไทย และศึกษาอุปสรรคที่ขัดขวางการพัฒนา สมรรถนะด้านการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษา โดยใช้วิธีวิจัยแบบผสมผสาน เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถามตามโมเดล ICC ของ Byram (1997) แบบทดสอบสนทนา และการสัมภาษณ์กลุ่มเชิงลึก ผลการวิจัยพบว่าแม้นักศึกษาจะมีทัศนคติที่ดีและมีความอ่อนไหวทางวัฒนธรรม แต่ยังคงประสบปัญหาในการนำความรู้และทักษะระหว่างวัฒนธรรมไปใช้ในสถานการณ์จริง อุปสรรคสำคัญ ได้แก่ การขาดประสบการณ์จากวัฒนธรรมที่หลากหลาย หลักสูตรที่เน้นทักษะทางภาษามากกว่าทักษะด้านวัฒนธรรม และการขาดความมั่นใจในการใช้กลยุทธ์การสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม เพื่อตอบสนองต่อปัญหาเหล่านี้ การศึกษานี้เสนอแนวทางการเรียนการสอนที่ผนวกรวมองค์ประกอบทางวัฒนธรรมเข้ากับการสอนภาษา โดยเน้นการเรียนรู้จากประสบการณ์ การจำลองสถานการณ์ และการแลกเปลี่ยนวัฒนธรรมเสมือนจริง การศึกษานี้เน้นย้ำถึงความสำคัญของการส่งเสริมทั้งทักษะทางภาษาและความสามารถด้านระหว่างวัฒนธรรมเพื่อเตรียมความพร้อมให้นักศึกษาสำหรับการสื่อสารในระดับโลก

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Investigating Intercultural Communicative Competence of Thai EFL Undergraduates: Implications for Pedagogies[*]

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Abstract

This research investigated the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of Thai EFL undergraduates at a private university in Bangkok, Thailand and explored the challenges and barriers that obstructed students' ICC development. This research was a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through self-report questionnaires based on Byram's (1997) ICC model, conversation-based quizzes, and focus group interviews. The findings reveal that the students exhibit positive attitudes and cultural sensitivity, they face challenged in applying intercultural knowledge and skills in real-world contexts. Key barriers include limited exposure to diverse cultural experiences, a curriculum that emphasized linguistic proficiency over intercultural skills, and a lack of confidence in using intercultural communication strategies. To address these issues, this study proposed pedagogical strategies that integrated cultural elements into language instruction, focusing on experiential learning, role-playing, and virtual intercultural exchanges. The study highlighted the importance of fostering both linguistic and intercultural competence to better prepare students for global communication. Limitations and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), Language Education, Pedagogical Strategies, Thai EFL Learners

Introduction

In today's globalized world, English functions as the primary medium of international communication, essential across business, education, and diplomacy (Pang & Li, 2023; Zhang, Xiaoya, and Cheung, 2022). However, language proficiency alone is insufficient for effective cross-cultural engagement; individuals must also develop intercultural competence (IC) (Martin, Esteve-Faubel, and Esteve-Faubel, 2021), which includes cultural knowledge, sensitivity, curiosity, and openness toward diverse perspectives (Pasand et al., 2021). These components are crucial for achieving intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Bennett, 1993; Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman, 2003), especially in foreign language education where fostering ICC is essential to prepare students as intercultural speakers.

Byram (1997) introduced the concept of the "intercultural speaker," emphasizing the need for language learners to not only achieve linguistic competence but also to interpret, appreciate, and adapt to cultural differences. This shift from aiming solely for grammatical accuracy or native-like fluency to ICC enables learners to navigate diverse cultural contexts more effectively (Byram et al., 2002; Fantini, 2001).

Despite its importance, ICC remains underexplored in EFL contexts, particularly in non-Western settings like Thailand, where factors such as homogeneous classrooms, outdated pedagogies, and limited intercultural exposure create challenges (Jhaiyanuntana, and Nomnian, 2020; Lee, Ho, and Chen, 2023; Tran & Duong, 2018).

At Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI), students are equipped with entrepreneurial skills alongside specialized knowledge in their respective fields, preparing them for dynamic global business environments. Exploring their ICC is, therefore, crucial, as effective intercultural communication is key to international business success. While students develop English proficiency through courses like Business Correspondence in English and English for Management, language skills alone are not enough for professional interactions across cultures. Assessing their ICC helps bridge the gap between language proficiency and cultural awareness, ensuring they can navigate diverse business settings with confidence. Additionally, Thai students often face challenges in developing ICC due to limited intercultural exposure; identifying these barriers allows for targeted curriculum enhancements, integrating culturally relevant content and real-world engagement opportunities. This study also supports TNI's commitment to internationalization by informing curriculum improvements, faculty training, and policy development, ultimately strengthening students' readiness for global entrepreneurship and professional success. The study aims to answer three questions:

1. What is the current level of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among Thai EFL undergraduates at the Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI)?

2. What challenges and barriers prevent the development of intercultural communicative competence among TNI students?

3. What pedagogical strategies can be proposed to enhance intercultural communicative competence among TNI students?

Literature review

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds using a second language (Byram, 1997). It comprises three dimensions: attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Byram, 2014; Deardorff, 2006), which include cultural knowledge, communication skills, and intercultural awareness—all crucial for successful communication (Lallana, and Salamanca, 2020). Attitude involves curiosity, openness, and empathy toward one's own and other cultures, while knowledge refers to understanding cultural norms, values, and worldviews. The skill dimension includes learning about and interpreting other cultures, using abilities like listening, observing, and engaging effectively (Byram, 2014; Porto, 2019). For successful intercultural communication, individuals need linguistic and sociolinguistic competence, alongside attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Alaei, and Nosrati, 2018). Özdemir (2017) highlights key traits of intercultural communication effectiveness (ICE), such as cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, social initiative, and flexibility, which are essential for navigating intercultural interactions.

Challenges of intercultural communication

Challenges in intercultural communication often arise from different perceptions and attitudes toward other people's language and culture, particularly in diverse settings (Nomnian, 2018; Phumpho & Nomnian, 2019). These differences lead to varied social roles, thoughts, and communication behaviors (Deresky, 2002; Keles, 2013; St. John, 1996).

Vivatananukul (2016) identifies three key communicative obstacles: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Cognitive obstacles occur when speakers misunderstand others' language or misuse genres, such as using formal language in casual contexts, often due to a lack of cultural knowledge. Affective barriers include negative attitudes, biases, and stereotypes that lead to discriminatory judgments based on race, gender, or religion. Behavioral challenges stem from misinterpreting non-verbal cues like gestures and social distance. Dang (2016) emphasizes that violating cultural norms or assuming cultural similarity can exacerbate communication difficulties, often leading to ethnocentrism, where one judges another culture by their own standards (Jandt, 2003). Stereotypes and prejudice further complicate intercultural exchanges, as individuals make assumptions based on cultural generalizations. Even shared languages can

present challenges due to dialectal differences. Thus, both verbal and non-verbal factors contribute to the complexities of intercultural communication.

Developing ICC in EFL classroom

Byram et al. (2002) emphasize that the primary goal of language education should be to equip learners to function as intercultural speakers or mediators by developing both linguistic competence and intercultural competence. Linguistic competence enables accurate expression, while intercultural competence fosters understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives. Fantini (2001) also highlighted key components of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), including awareness, attitudes, skills, and knowledge, which are essential for understanding and empathy. Although Fantini did not focus on linguistic competence, he stressed the importance of proficiency in both the first (L1) and second language (L2) for ICC development. Both frameworks underscore the integration of cultural elements into language instruction, with Peng et al. (2009) and Wimontham, Prachanant, and Jarat (2024) offering practical instructional methods based on Byram's model (Byram et al., 2001), as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Five Components of ICC Developed for the ICC Instructional Methods in EFL Class

Components of ICC	Expected Learning Outcomes	Suggested Teaching Methods
Attitude	EFL students should cultivate curiosity and openness toward the norms, cultures, and beliefs of other English speakers, while also demonstrating tolerance for variations in English heritage, dialect, and pronunciation.	EFL learners should actively explore the customs, culture, and beliefs of English speakers. Teachers can assign projects researching diverse English-speaking communities and reflecting on their practices, dialects, and pronunciation. Classroom discussions can emphasize embracing and respecting linguistic diversity.
Knowledge	EFL students must acquire knowledge about both English and global cultures, as well as the customs of their peers. Using English, they can convey and adapt this knowledge in intercultural interactions.	EFL students should engage with both English and international cultural practices through peer interactions. Group activities like cultural exchange presentations and collaborative projects can foster learning about classmates' customs. Students should then practice using English to apply this knowledge in new intercultural contexts.

Components of ICC	Expected Learning Outcomes	Suggested Teaching Methods
English Skills	Students should develop the necessary English language skills to interpret and express their viewpoints. This includes learning how to confidently communicate cultural information from their own perspective, while also tolerating differing viewpoints held by others.	EFL students should build confidence in expressing their cultural viewpoints in English. Role-playing or storytelling activities can help them practice interpreting and delivering cultural information, while discussions can encourage active listening and tolerance of different perspectives.
Skills of Discovery	EFL students are encouraged to explore and gain new insights into cultural practices from both English-speaking and international contexts. They should apply their English skills to integrate knowledge, attitudes, and cultural competencies during real-time English communication and interaction.	EFL learners need real-time practice to apply their knowledge, attitudes, and language skills. Teachers can facilitate this by organizing simulations or debates on culturally relevant topics, allowing students to respond spontaneously while incorporating cultural understanding. Pair work and group discussions also help students navigate cultural differences in dynamic settings.
Critical Cultural Awareness	EFL students are taught to analyze and critically evaluate English language use-such as dialogue, speeches, and conversations-through various intercultural perspectives. This component equips EFL instructors with the tools to design lessons that help students effectively engage in conversations with English speakers from diverse backgrounds.	Students should analyze English dialogues from an intercultural perspective using authentic audio or video materials. This allows them to assess how cultural factors influence communication and reflect on these insights through group discussions or written reflections. Such an approach equips students to communicate effectively with English speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

However, integrating intercultural language teaching into EFL classrooms faces several challenges. Lee, Ho, and Chen (2023) note that culturally homogeneous classrooms, coupled with limited experiential learning and interaction with target language communities, hinder the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Additionally, ineffective teaching methods, inadequate materials, and a shortage of qualified teachers further obstruct ICC growth (Liu, 2017; Tran, & Duong, 2018). Despite growing recognition of the need to integrate cultural knowledge, many classrooms still focus on outdated pedagogies centered on linguistic accuracy and grammar, limiting students' exposure to diverse cultural

content and real-world applications (Chao, 2013). Consequently, these barriers lead to reduced ICC development and negatively affect overall English learning experiences for EFL students.

Research methodology

Participants

This study involved students from the Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI) who enrolled in three elective English courses: Business Correspondence in English, Professional English Reading and Writing, and English for Management. These courses were offered during the first semester of the 2024 academic year, under the General Education program. This cohort was selected since their courses emphasize professional communication and intercultural interactions. These students are preparing for global workplaces, making their ICC development crucial. Their exposure to business-oriented English provides insights into linguistic and cultural challenges in real-world settings. Table 2 provides an overview of the personal profiles of the research participants.

Table 2 Summary of participants' profile

Profile	Category	N (172)	%
Gender	Male	70	40.7
	Female	97	56.4
	Others	5	2.9
Faculty	Business Administration	169	98.3
	Information Technology	3	1.7
Year of Study	2	2	1.2
	3	155	90.1
	4	15	8.7
Duration of Studying English	1-5 years	5	2.9
	6-10 years	24	14
	11-15 years	31	18
	16 years and above	112	65.1
Have you ever traveled abroad?	Yes	87	50.6
	No	85	49.4
Have you ever attended intercultural workshop?	Yes	52	30.2
	No	120	69.8

As shown in Table 2, the study's participants are predominantly female (56.4%) and mostly from the Business Administration faculty (98.3%), with a smaller group from Information Technology (1.7%). The majority are in their third year (90.1%), and most have been studying English for over 16 years (65.1%). Approximately half (50.6%) have traveled abroad, reflecting moderate international exposure, yet a significant number (69.8%) have never attended an intercultural workshop, highlighting gaps in formal intercultural training despite their extended English study.

Data collection and analysis

To respond RQ1, this study collected data through a questionnaire adapted from Duisembekova's (2021) instrument, aimed at assessing students' ICC. Duisembekova's tool, with a high reliability score (Cronbach's alpha of .925), included 23 items measuring Attitude, Knowledge, Skills, and Awareness, alongside eight conversation-based questions to assess ICC in intercultural settings. Six demographic questions covered gender, faculty, year of study, English study duration, travel experience, and intercultural workshop attendance. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale, from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree." The scale was interpreted based on statistical formulas as follows: $\overline{X}$ = 4.20–5.00 indicating "Strongly agree," $\overline{X}$ = 3.40–4.20 indicating "Agree," $\overline{X}$ = 2.60–3.40 indicating "Neutral," $\overline{X}$ = 1.80–2.60 indicating "Disagree," and $\overline{X}$ = 1.00–1.80 indicating "Strongly disagree."

Additionally, to answer RQ2, a focus group of five voluntary participants, who are all third-year students from Faculty of Business Administration, was conducted in Thai, recorded, and translated into English to deepen insights from the quantitative data. This mixed-methods approach offered a comprehensive view of ICC. Data collection took place in the first semester of 2024, with 172 out of 212 students from three elective English courses participating. The questionnaire was administered online, while the focus group was in-person. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for percentages, means, and standard deviations, while qualitative data were analyzed for themes related to ICC challenges and desired learning activities. Thematic analysis involved systematic coding and categorization of responses collected from focus group discussions and open-ended survey questions (Castleberry, and Nolen, 2018). The data were transcribed, read multiple times for familiarization, and then coded to extract meaningful patterns.

Finally, in response to RQ3, after obtaining both quantitative and qualitative results, pedagogical strategies were proposed to enhance intercultural communicative competence. These strategies were developed based on the participants' current level of ICC, as well as the challenges and barriers identified within this group.

Results and discussion

RQ1: What is the current level of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among Thai EFL undergraduates at the Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI)?

To address Research Question 1, a structured questionnaire was administered to assess the students' current level of ICC, providing a basis for gathering quantitative data. The questionnaire was designed to capture various dimensions of ICC, enabling a comprehensive evaluation of the students' self-assessed proficiency.

The findings from the 23-item self-report on students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) revealed key insights across four categories: Attitude, Knowledge, Skills, and Awareness. The attitude category had the highest mean score (4.29), showing that students highly value cultural diversity and respect individuals from different backgrounds, as reflected in items like "I value cultural diversity" (Mean = 4.60) and "I respect people who have different cultures" (Mean = 4.66). However, the knowledge category had a lower mean score (3.80), indicating that while students recognize cultural differences, their deeper understanding of cultural perspectives remains limited, as shown in items like "I can interpret cultural information" (Mean = 3.77). The skills category had the lowest mean score (3.54), with items such as "I can communicate in English effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds" (Mean = 3.29), suggesting a lack of confidence in real-world intercultural communication and a need for skills-based training. The awareness category, with a mean score of 4.07, reflects that while students are generally aware of cultural backgrounds, this awareness does not always translate into practical action. These gaps imply the need for pedagogical interventions that focus on experiential learning to enhance students' skills and knowledge through intercultural workshops and collaborative projects.

In addition, eight conversation-based questions were included to assess students' practical intercultural competencies. The results show that most students demonstrated strong intercultural competence by choosing culturally appropriate responses, particularly in areas such as greetings, traditions, and customs. This suggests they are well-prepared for intercultural communication. However, 34.3% of students opted for the universal greeting, "You can just say hi like everyone else," instead of the culturally specific "We usually bow slightly." This choice may reflect a tendency towards cultural adaptation, simplifying interactions to avoid misunderstandings, and prioritizing ease of communication in global contexts. It highlights the adaptive nature of intercultural competence, where students modify their behavior to fit the context and ensure mutual understanding.

RQ2: What challenges and barriers prevent the development of intercultural communicative competence among TNI students?

After analyzing the quantitative data, a focus group interview was conducted to explore the challenges and barriers hindering the development of ICC across four key domains. In terms of attitude and cultural sensitivity, students expressed positive attitudes toward cultural diversity but felt hesitant to engage in intercultural discussions due to fears of offending others or limited classroom opportunities. Student A noted, "I have respect for other cultures, but I don't always feel comfortable asking questions," highlighting a lack of open dialogue in academic settings. Regarding knowledge and understanding of cultural differences, students expressed the need for more authentic intercultural experiences. Student C mentioned, "We learn about cultural differences in theory, but we don't get to experience them firsthand," reflecting a gap between theoretical learning and practical exposure.

When it came to skills and practical application, students found it challenging to apply culturally appropriate strategies, like politeness, in real conversations. Student B shared, "I tried to be indirect to avoid offending someone, but it felt awkward." They emphasized the need for more practice through role-playing and simulations, as well as feedback from instructors. In the domain of awareness and intercultural experiences, many students admitted that while they were aware of cultural differences, this awareness did not always translate into action. Student A explained, "I know about cultural differences, but when it comes to interacting, I freeze." Students suggested more low-pressure intercultural interactions to build confidence.

Finally, when discussing barriers to developing ICC, students pointed to a lack of resources and opportunities for real intercultural engagement, both inside and outside the classroom. Many students emphasized that while they are eager to develop their intercultural skills, they have had limited exposure to international environments due to financial constraints, lack of institutional support, and a curriculum that prioritizes linguistic proficiency over intercultural competence. Student C remarked, "There aren't enough events or exchange programs that focus on intercultural communication. Most of our English courses emphasize grammar and vocabulary" Similarly, Student A, who has never traveled abroad, shared, "I feel nervous when I have to talk to foreigners because I've never really had the chance to practice outside the classroom." In contrast, students with previous exposure to intercultural experiences expressed greater confidence in navigating diverse settings. Student B, who attended an intercultural workshop during a short-term university program, stated, "That workshop was the first time I really interacted with people from other cultures. It helped me understand different perspectives, and I wish we had more of those

activities." Meanwhile, Student D, who had traveled abroad on a family trip, observed, "Traveling to another country made me realize how different communication styles can be. But since most students don't get that experience, it's hard to develop ICC without real interaction." These results suggest that direct exposure to intercultural environments, whether through travel or structured IC workshops, plays a crucial role in shaping students' ICC. Those with prior experience felt more comfortable, open-minded, and prepared for cross-cultural interactions, while those without such exposure faced hesitation and communication difficulties. To bridge this gap, educational institutions should incorporate more immersive intercultural experiences, such as workshops, exchange programs, or collaborative international projects, to provide students with practical opportunities to develop their ICC beyond the classroom.

RQ3: What pedagogical strategies can be proposed to enhance intercultural communicative competence among TNI students?

The results from RQ1 indicate that Thai EFL undergraduates at TNI show strong attitudes toward intercultural diversity, as reflected in the high scores for valuing and respecting different cultures. This aligns with Byram's (2014) assertion that curiosity and openness are essential dimensions of ICC. However, the lower scores in the knowledge and skills categories suggest gaps in students' deeper understanding of cultural perspectives and their ability to apply communication strategies in real-life situations. This finding is consistent with previous literature (Alaei, and Nosrati, 2018; Porto, 2019), which emphasizes the importance of cultural knowledge and practical application in ICC. The lower skill scores in particular suggest a lack of confidence in intercultural communication, which Byram (1997) and Özdemir (2017) argue are crucial for effective engagement. The results from the eight conversation-based questions further reinforce this, as many students adapted their responses to simplify communication, reflecting flexibility but also highlighting a preference for universal approaches over culturally specific ones.

For RQ2, the focus group results indicate that students face multiple challenges in developing ICC, particularly in gaining real-world intercultural exposure, applying practical communication skills, and translating awareness into action. This is consistent with challenges identified in the literature, such as the lack of experiential learning opportunities and cultural biases (Nomnian, 2018; Vivatananukul, 2016). Students' hesitation to engage in intercultural discussions due to fear of offending others points to cognitive and affective obstacles, as outlined by Vivatananukul (2016), which stem from a lack of cultural knowledge and awareness. Similarly, students' difficulty in applying politeness strategies and non-verbal cues mirrors Özdemir's (2017) emphasis on the need for emotional stability and flexibility in intercultural interactions.

The barriers to developing ICC, such as limited resources and insufficient intercultural engagement opportunities, highlight a critical gap between theoretical learning and practical application.

To bridge these gaps and design effective pedagogies, future instructional approaches should focus on providing students with more experiential learning opportunities. With theoretical frameworks from Byram (2002) and Fantini (2001), as well as practical suggestions from Wimontham, Prachanant, and Jarat (2024) and Peng et al. (2009), the following pedagogical strategies are proposed in Table 3. These strategies aim to develop students' attitudes, knowledge, skills, discovery abilities, and critical cultural awareness through interactive and experiential learning opportunities, which are especially necessary in culturally homogeneous classrooms.

Table 3 Pedagogical strategies for students' ICC development

Pedagogical Activity	Approach
Theme 1 *Attitude: Cultivating curiosity and openness toward other cultures*	
Objective: To help students foster curiosity and openness toward cultural differences.	
Research and reflection projects Students can be assigned research projects to explore the cultural practices, dialects, and beliefs of various English-speaking communities, such as those in South Africa, Ireland, or Jamaica. Through presentations or written reports, followed by classroom discussions, students reflect on these cultural elements, fostering a deeper appreciation of diversity and viewing intercultural encounters as enriching experiences rather than challenges.	**Cross-cultural virtual exchange** In contexts with limited cultural exposure, virtual exchange programs can be incorporated into the curriculum, allowing students to engage in online conversations with peers from diverse backgrounds. This fosters open-mindedness and tolerance for cultural diversity, supporting Fantini's (2001) emphasis on engaging with both local and global perspectives.
Theme 2 *Knowledge: Enhancing cultural knowledge and understanding*	
Objective: To help students understand the values, customs, and communication practices of different cultures.	
Cultural exchange presentations Students can engage in group projects to present on unfamiliar cultures or aspects of their classmates' cultures, such as comparing wedding traditions or holiday celebrations across countries. These presentations, conducted in English, help students practice conveying cultural knowledge using the target language.	**Cultural case studies** Educators can also use case studies simulating intercultural interactions, such as business negotiations or social gatherings, to illustrate cultural differences in everyday communication, helping students deepen their understanding and prepare for real-world intercultural encounters.

Pedagogical Activity	Approach
Theme 3 *Skills: Developing Practical Communication Strategies* **Objective:** To help students use culturally appropriate communication strategies such as politeness, requesting, and interpreting nonverbal cues.	
Role-Playing and Simulation Exercises Role-playing and simulations allow students to practice communication strategies in a controlled setting, such as navigating cultural misunderstandings or resolving conflicts in multicultural teams. Teachers can provide feedback to help refine strategies and build students' confidence in intercultural interactions.	**Storytelling and Dialogue Practice** Storytelling activities can help students share culturally significant stories in English, followed by discussions that encourage questions and explore diverse interpretations. This promotes active listening, dialogue, empathy, and flexibility in communication, aligning with Fantini's (2001) model.
Theme 4 *Skills of discovery: Encouraging exploration of cultural practices* **Objective:** To help students discover new cultural practices as they engage in intercultural interactions.	
Simulated Intercultural Debates To develop students' skills of discovery, teachers can organize debates on cultural differences, such as individualism versus collectivism or attitudes toward hierarchy. This encourages students to research both perspectives and apply their English skills in real-time intercultural exchanges.	**Intercultural Fieldwork or Cultural Journals** Encouraging students to engage in intercultural fieldwork or maintain cultural journals can enhance their skills of discovery. Activities such as visiting cultural centers, interacting with exchange students, or attending cultural events allow them to integrate attitudes, knowledge, and language skills in real-world contexts (Peng et al., 2009).
Theme 5 *Critical cultural awareness: Analyzing and evaluating cultural perspectives* **Objective:** To help students critically evaluate both their own and others' cultural perspectives in intercultural interactions.	
Media Analysis of Cultural Interactions Students can analyze authentic media (films, TV shows, news) from different cultural contexts to explore how individuals communicate across cultural differences. Group discussions or written reflections following the	**Reflective Essays or Discussions** To foster critical cultural awareness, students can engage in reflective essays or group discussions to assess their cultural biases and their impact on interactions. For instance, students can reflect on a cultural misunderstanding and

Pedagogical Activity	Approach
analysis allow students to critically evaluate the intercultural communication strategies used.	analyze how their background influenced their behavior.

Conclusion

This study examined the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of Thai EFL undergraduates at the Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI) and the barriers affecting its development. Self-report questionnaires, quizzes, and focus group interviews revealed that while students demonstrate positive attitudes and cultural sensitivity, they face challenges in applying ICC skills in real-world contexts. Key barriers include limited intercultural exposure, a curriculum prioritizing language over cultural skills, and a lack of confidence in intercultural interactions. To address these issues, pedagogical strategies grounded in Byram and Fantini's frameworks are proposed, focusing on role-playing, cultural exchanges, virtual collaborations, and media analysis to strengthen students' ICC. Overall, fostering ICC requires a holistic approach that integrates experiential learning into the EFL curriculum to prepare students for effective global communication.

Limitations and suggestions for future studies

This study has several limitations. Conducted in a culturally homogeneous environment at TNI, students' limited exposure to authentic intercultural interactions may have influenced their ICC development. Reliance on self-report measures may have introduced bias, and the classroom-based scenarios may not fully capture real-world intercultural complexities. Additionally, the sample size of the focus group in this study is quite small, limiting the diversity of opinions and perspectives. Future research should include more diverse participants, use longitudinal methods to track ICC over time, and incorporate mixed methods for more accurate assessments. Expanding studies to explore multilingual communication, technology's role in ICC, and comparing pedagogical approaches could provide deeper insights into enhancing ICC among EFL learners.

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