# An Investigation of Thai Undergraduates' Satisfaction with Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) in the English for the 21st Century Communication Course

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**Abstract**

This research aimed to: 1) evaluate students' satisfaction levels with the Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) approach, and 2) identify the practical challenges and opportunities encountered by students in culture-integrated language instruction. The research sample consisted of 64 fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in the English for the 21st Century Communication course at Naresuan University, Thailand. The research instrument was a questionnaire designed to evaluate student satisfaction across five key dimensions: course content, instructor performance, teaching methodology, facilities and resources, and assessment practices. The instrument's content validity was verified by experts with an Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) of 1.00, and its internal consistency was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.71. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean ($\bar{x}$), and standard deviation (S.D.). The findings revealed that: 1) Students expressed an overall high level of satisfaction with the ICLT approach, particularly in the teaching methodology dimension ($\bar{x}$ =4.50), followed by instructor performance, facilities, and course content. 2) Regarding challenges and opportunities, assessment practices received a moderate satisfaction level ( $\bar{x}$ =3.41), with qualitative feedback highlighting a critical need for more rapid and individualized feedback to optimize 21st-century communication instruction.

**Keywords:** INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING, STUDENT SATISFACTION, 21ST CENTURY COMMUNICATION, THAI UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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**Introduction**

In the age of globalization, people all across the world rely on language as one of the most essential tools for communicating with one another. Given the role of English in breaking down communicative barriers, learners are increasingly prioritizing language proficiency to engage effectively with the international community. Consequently, pursuing language education has become a primary strategy for individuals seeking to bridge the divide created by linguistic differences.

In the past several years, numerous intellectuals in foreign language education (e.g. Alptekin, 2002; Byram, 1997; Byram, Gribova & Starkey, 2002; Corbett, 2003; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013) recommend assimilating intercultural communicative competence (i.e. the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures) into foreign language instruction in order to assist and equip learners with the knowledge, attitudes, critical cultural awareness, and skills required for intercultural communication (Byram,1997). The significance of cultivating intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has therefore gained widespread recognition in the field of education pertaining to foreign languages. Educators in English as a foreign language (EFL) are coming to the realization that teaching a language involves more than just ensuring students have a strong command of the language itself; rather, an emphasis must also be placed on the students' ability to understand and appreciate the culture of the target language's speakers.

Traditional language instruction, as in the past, centered on a set of literature considered to be the pinnacle of a language's development and made slight use of cultural context (Peiser & Jones, 2013). Byram's work in the 1990s introduced and expanded upon the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which has since been the foundation for the evolution of language instruction worldwide. In particular, Byram and Zarate's work (Byram and Zarate, 1996) laid the groundwork for ICC education. The corresponding pedagogical strategy was subsequently developed as an improvement on communicative language teaching (CLT) (Hymes, 1972) to remedy deficiencies in the conceptualization of culture's role in language education, culture's relationship with language, and the influences of background and need (Jebahi, 2013; Kelly, 2012; Manjarres, 2009; Ryan, 2012). Consequently, Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) has become a relatively recent method of

fostering students' communicative competence across cultural boundaries through language instruction.

To fully grasp its application, it is crucial to recognize that ICLT fundamentally intertwines linguistic skills with cultural understanding. The primary objective of this approach, as noted by Rivers (2010), is to cultivate the intercultural competence of learners. The educational paradigm shifts from a strict emphasis on grammatical and linguistic mastery toward a more comprehensive development of intercultural communication skills. According to Newton (2009), the practical execution of ICLT relies on several core principles: merging language and cultural instruction from the onset, immersing students in authentic social dialogues, promoting an exploratory and critically reflective mindset, facilitating direct comparisons between the students' own backgrounds and the target contexts, and prioritizing intercultural adaptability over the pursuit of native-like fluency. Furthermore, Byram (1997) highlights the significant benefits of equipping students with the analytical tools necessary to comprehend and empathize with the diverse social realities of their conversational partners. Ultimately, ICLT empowers learners to view themselves not as mere mimics of native speakers, but as active social agents engaged in meaningful, dynamic cross-cultural exchanges.

The efficacy of this teaching approach is strongly supported by research in both international and Thai contexts. Internationally, Byram's (1997) foundational work highlights that ICLT cultivates specific components of intercultural competence, termed savoirs, which enable learners to effectively mediate intercultural exchanges. Similarly, Liddicoat (2008) found that systematic cultural integration transforms students' perspectives of culture from static facts into a dynamic process of shared meaning-making. In the Thai higher education context, empirical evidence strongly supports the multidimensional benefits of integrating intercultural approaches. For instance, a study by Thongprayoon et al. (2020) investigating undergraduate students in an international program identified that Intercultural Communicative Language Learning Competencies intrinsically comprise intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness. Crucially, the study reveals that willingness and motivation act as essential implementation forces. When supported by interculturally informed instruction, these intrinsic motivators, combined with linguistic skills, drive Thai learners to practically and effectively exhibit intercultural communicative competence in diverse encounters.

In a range of Thai circumstances, English has served as a critical means of international communication. Consequently, all Thai schoolchildren from the first grade and above are required to take English classes (Ministry of Education, 2001). Although the educational system has long centered on improving the functions and applications of English teaching, outcomes often remain unsatisfactory (Chaibunruang, 2000). Previous observations indicate that while a number of Thai university graduates are skilled in linguistic rules, they frequently struggle to sustain effective conversations in English with international coworkers due to disparate cultural backgrounds. As a consequence, understanding and navigating cultural differences are crucial in encouraging an individual to become a proficient and confident English user.

According to shifting notions in the field of language education, it is reasonable to assert that the necessity of integrating culture into language instruction is now well-established. However, for innovative pedagogical approaches like ICLT to be successfully implemented, learners' receptiveness and engagement are paramount. As a result, the purpose of this study is to identify students' satisfaction with the ICLT approach in the Culture and English Language Teaching course. Investigating learner satisfaction is a critical step in evaluating the pedagogical effectiveness of this approach in a local setting. The findings of this study will not only indicate the level of satisfaction among students but will also benefit all involved educators by providing practical insights on how to exploit the rich affordances of language classes to further enhance learners' intercultural communicative competence.

## Objectives

1. To evaluate students' satisfaction levels with the Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) approach.

2. To identify the practical challenges and opportunities encountered by students when engaging with culture-integrated language instruction.

## Methods

This section delineates the research procedures employed in the study, encompassing the description of participants, the development of research

instruments, the systematic data collection process, and the statistical methods used for data analysis.

Selected via purposive sampling, the participants were 64 Thai undergraduate students enrolled in the English for the 21st Century Communication course at Naresuan University during the first semester of the 2025 academic year. This intact class was chosen because its objectives aligned directly with the study's focus on the ICLT approach, and utilizing the researcher's own class ensured consistent pedagogical intervention. To maintain data validity, inclusion criteria required official registration, regular attendance, and voluntary informed consent. Conversely, students who withdrew or missed critical assessments were excluded. Finally, to minimize linguistic bias, research instruments were administered in Thai, and data collection strictly adhered to ethical standards, guaranteeing voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

The primary research instrument was a comprehensive questionnaire divided into three distinct sections. The first section aimed to elicit demographic profiles, including gender, nationality, duration of English language study, and prior intercultural communication experience. The second section employed a five-point Likert scale comprising 25 items designed to evaluate student satisfaction across five key dimensions: course content, instructor performance, teaching methodology, facilities and resources, and assessment practices. Each dimension contained five specific items. The final segment featured open-ended questions, allowing respondents to provide qualitative insights, personal opinions, or suggestions for improvement. To ensure the quality of the instrument, it was reviewed by experts for content validity, achieving an Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) of 1.00. Additionally, the instrument’s internal consistency was verified through a reliability analysis, yielding a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.71.

This study adopted a quantitative research design to systematically assess student satisfaction with the Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) approach. The data collection process was conducted in a controlled manner; participants were briefed on the objectives of the survey and instructed on how to complete the questionnaire. The instruments were distributed during a scheduled break, and participants were allocated approximately 15 minutes for completion to

ensure a thoughtful response. Upon collection, all raw data were coded and entered into a digital database for subsequent processing using the SPSS software package.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS to determine the overall level of student satisfaction. The data were analyzed and are presented through descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation (S.D.). Specifically, frequencies and percentages were utilized to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample. For the Likert-scale items, means and standard deviations were calculated to categorize the levels of satisfaction across the five pre-defined categories. These quantitative findings were then interpreted based on a standardized satisfaction scale to provide a clear overview of the students' perceptions of the ICLT approach. The criteria for evaluating the satisfaction levels were interpreted based on a 5-point scale: 4.50–5.00 (Highly satisfied), 3.50–4.49 (Satisfied), 2.50–3.49 (Moderately satisfied), 1.50–2.49 (Dissatisfied), and 1.00–1.49 (Highly dissatisfied).

Furthermore, the qualitative data derived from the open-ended section of the questionnaire were analyzed to provide deeper insights into the participants' experiences. The words, phrases, and suggestions provided by the respondents were evaluated using content analysis, which involved identifying recurring themes and patterns related to the challenges and opportunities of the course. These qualitative findings are described in paragraph form, complementing the statistical data to offer a comprehensive understanding of student satisfaction and their perspectives on 21$^{st}$ century communication instruction.

**Results and Discussion**

The findings of this study and the subsequent discussion are organized into two primary sections, aligned with the research objectives. The first section addresses the quantitative assessment of learner perceptions, while the second explores the qualitative experiences of the participants.

**Part 1: Evaluation of Student Satisfaction Levels with the ICLT Approach**

This section presents the empirical findings and statistical analysis derived from the survey regarding student satisfaction with the Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) approach within the English for the 21$^{st}$ Century

Communication course. The data were processed and analyzed using SPSS (Version 24.0) to provide a systematic overview of the results. In accordance with the structure of the research instrument, the findings are categorized into three primary sections:

**1. Demographic or participants' personal information**

Of the 64 participants enrolled in the English for the 21st Century Communication course, the majority were female (n = 46, 71.88%), while males accounted for 28.12% (n = 18). Regarding nationality, the sample was entirely homogeneous, with 100% of the students being Thai. In terms of language learning background, the findings indicated that all students possessed significant experience in studying English. Specifically, 59.37% (n = 38) of the respondents had between 5 and 10 years of English-learning experience, while the remaining 40.63% (n = 26) had been studying the language for more than 10 years. Furthermore, the data revealed that half of the participants (50.00%, n = 32) had less than 5 years of intercultural experience. This was followed by 34.37% (n = 22) who reported having between 5 and 10 years of experience, and a small minority of 15.63% (n = 10) who possessed more than 10 years of experience in intercultural contexts.

**2. Student satisfaction towards the ICLT approach**

The quantitative analysis of student satisfaction across five key dimensions of the ICLT approach is summarized in Table 1. The overall findings indicate a generally positive reception of the English for the 21st Century Communication course, with satisfaction levels ranging from moderately satisfied to highly satisfied.

**Table 1**

*Students' satisfaction towards ICLT in five areas*

| Areas | $\bar{x}$ | *S.D.* | Level of Satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Course content | 4.14 | 0.75 | Satisfied |
| 2. Instructor | 4.34 | 0.69 | Satisfied |
| 3. Teaching method | 4.50 | 0.56 | Highly satisfied |
| 4. Facilities and resources | 4.23 | 0.63 | Satisfied |
| 5. Assessment practice | 3.41 | 0.76 | Moderately satisfied |

The results demonstrate that participants expressed the highest level of satisfaction with the teaching Method ($\bar{x}$ = 4.50). This finding aligns with research by

Tran and Seepho (2016), which highlighted that EFL learners tend to hold positive attitudes toward ICLT pedagogical shifts, even when they have had no prior exposure to intercultural courses. The high satisfaction in this area suggests that the active learning strategies employed in the ICLT framework effectively engage Thai undergraduate students. Regarding instructor performance ($\bar{x}$ = 4.34), items 6 through 10 in the survey received high ratings. This indicates that students highly valued the instructor's ability to facilitate both individual and group discussions, encourage the exchange of personal experiences, and scaffold new knowledge onto prior learning. This role of the teacher as a fellow inquirer is crucial in ICLT, as it shifts the classroom dynamic from teacher-centered to a collaborative exploration of culture. In the area of facilities and resources ($\bar{x}$ = 4.23), the findings suggest that students particularly appreciated the integration of the instructor's personal cultural experiences. While Oranje and Smith (2018) noted that traditional, school-owned materials can often become outdated and fail to support an intercultural approach, this study confirms that authentic cultural resources, specifically those shared by the teacher, are viewed as highly advantageous. By leveraging personal narratives, the content becomes less static and external (Dewey, 1938), fostering a pedagogy of encounter (Larzén-Östermark, 2008) that makes cultural exploration more meaningful for the learners. Conversely, Assessment Practice received the lowest rating, yielding a moderate level of satisfaction ($\bar{x}$ = 3.41). The survey items revealed that the primary concern was a lack of individual feedback. This challenge is often attributed to large class sizes, which can reduce the immediacy and depth of teacher feedback. Despite this, students expressed satisfaction with the variety of assessment methods used, such as portfolios, visual/audio recordings, and peer evaluations. This suggests that while the methods of assessment are well-received, the process of providing timely, individualized feedback remains an area for pedagogical improvement in the Thai EFL context.

**3. Student opinions and suggestions**

The final section of the survey provided participants with an opportunity to offer qualitative feedback and practical suggestions regarding their learning experience. Although this component was optional, the responses yielded significant insights that complement the quantitative data. Through content analysis, the feedback was categorized into three primary themes: instructional excellence, the

efficacy of the ICLT process, and areas for pedagogical improvement. The most prominent feedback from the respondents pertained to the instructor's role and the teaching methodology. A majority of the students expressed high satisfaction with the instructor's ability to foster an inclusive and participatory classroom environment. Specifically, students valued the opportunities for open discussion and the exchange of diverse ideas. The findings suggest that the instructor effectively employed scaffolding techniques, such as relating students' prior knowledge to new cultural content and simplifying complex theoretical topics through the use of authentic examples. Furthermore, the participants appreciated the instructor's role as a facilitator who provided comprehensive support by sharing personal experiences and offering constructive suggestions. Beyond the instructor's performance, participants highlighted the transformative nature of the ICLT approach. Students reported that the structured process of ICLT significantly aided their cognitive and intercultural development. Key elements that were highly regarded included: 1) knowledge construction: observing and analyzing various cultural practices. 2) intercultural connection: linking existing knowledge with emerging cultural insights. 3) social interaction: engaging in meaningful communication across cultural boundaries, and 4) critical reflection: developing an awareness of stereotypes and reflecting on personal biases. These responses indicate that the ICLT framework successfully moved the learners beyond rote memorization toward a deeper, more reflective engagement with the English language.

Despite the overall positive feedback, a recurring concern was identified regarding assessment and feedback mechanisms. A significant number of respondents emphasized the need for clearer evaluation criteria and more rapid feedback, which directly explains the lower satisfaction score for assessment practices observed in the quantitative results. This finding highlights a fundamental pedagogical challenge inherent in Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT): the complexity of evaluating intercultural competence. Unlike traditional linguistic assessments that measure objective grammatical accuracy or vocabulary recall, ICLT necessitates the evaluation of abstract, multidimensional constructs such as intercultural attitudes, empathy, and critical cultural awareness. When these subjective elements are not measured with highly explicit frameworks, it naturally leads to student anxiety and a perceived lack of transparency. Furthermore, evaluating such complex cognitive and

affective domains significantly increases the instructor's cognitive load and grading time, which often results in the delayed feedback reported by the students.

**Part 2: Identification of Practical Challenges and Opportunities in Culture-Integrated Instruction**

The implementation of Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) within the English for the 21st Century Communication course revealed a complex interplay between pedagogical opportunities and practical challenges in the Thai higher education context.

Regarding pedagogical opportunities, the ICLT approach successfully transformed the language classroom into a dynamic space for collaborative knowledge construction, moving learners beyond the constraints of traditional rote memorization. This shift fostered communicative agency, empowering students to engage in meaningful social interactions and cross-cultural negotiation. Furthermore, integrating the instructor’s authentic cultural narratives created a "Third Space," which not only enhanced student engagement but actively prepared them for global citizenship by cultivating essential attitudes of openness and critical cultural awareness.

However, significant practical challenges emerged, primarily concerning assessment mechanisms and cognitive load. The most prominent obstacle reported was the lack of immediate, individualized feedback, a common issue exacerbated by large-scale EFL classrooms. Additionally, evaluating abstract intercultural constructs, such as attitudes and awareness, introduces inherent subjectivity, creating ambiguity for learners who subsequently demanded more transparent evaluation criteria. Furthermore, the transition to reflective pedagogy proved intellectually taxing; engaging in deep social analysis and challenging long-held stereotypes requires continuous, careful instructor scaffolding to keep the learners' cognitive load manageable. To systematically address these evaluative challenges and capitalize on the pedagogical opportunities, future implementations should shift toward transparent and formative assessment models. First, transitioning from traditional summative testing to continuous formative assessments, such as reflective portfolios, allows educators to track students' intercultural growth over time and provide ongoing feedback. Second, the use of explicit analytic rubrics is crucial. By breaking down abstract intercultural skills into measurable behavioral indicators, students gain a

clearer understanding of the evaluation criteria, thereby reducing anxiety. Finally, promoting shared assessment responsibility through peer- and self-evaluations can offer students more immediate feedback to adjust their performance, while simultaneously fostering learner autonomy and managing the instructor's grading workload.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the investigation into student satisfaction within the English for the 21st Century Communication course reveals that the Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) approach is highly effective in the Thai higher education context. The findings demonstrate a high level of student satisfaction, particularly regarding teaching methodologies and the instructor's role as a cultural mediator. Students perceived significant opportunities for growth, moving beyond rote linguistic learning. This transition successfully fostered the essential 21st century skills of critical reflection and global cultural awareness, allowing learners to relate their own identities to a broader international landscape.

However, the study also identifies critical challenges that must be addressed to optimize this pedagogical shift. The relatively lower satisfaction scores in assessment practices highlight a persistent demand for more transparent evaluation criteria and rapid, individualized feedback. Furthermore, the transition to a reflective pedagogy presents a notable cognitive load for students accustomed to traditional methods, requiring consistent scaffolding from instructors. Ultimately, while the ICLT approach offers a transformative pathway for language education, its long-term success depends on balancing engaging, culture-integrated activities with robust administrative support and clear evaluative mechanisms. Addressing these logistical hurdles will ensure that Thai EFL learners are fully equipped for the complexities of global communication in the modern era.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

1. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of digital assessment tools or automated feedback systems to address the dissatisfaction with the lack of immediate feedback in large-scale Thai EFL classrooms.

2. Since this study focused on satisfaction, future research could track the actual development and sustainability of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in students over a longer period.

3. Further studies should explore the challenges and training needs of Thai instructors to better support them in implementing the ICLT approach effectively.

4. Research could compare the satisfaction levels and challenges of ICLT between students in different fields, such as English Education and Business English, to see if the findings remain consistent across different professional contexts.

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