

Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence via Blended Learning: A Korean Listening and Speaking Course for Thai Undergraduate Students

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Article information	Abstract
Article history: Received: 10 Oct 2025 Last revised: 23 Apr 2026 Accepted: 24 Apr 2026 Available online: 29 Apr 2026	<i>This study examines the enhancement of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) among 187 second year Thai undergraduates at the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce. The 15week intervention was implemented through a blended learning approach in Korean listening and speaking classes. Nine weekly instructional units were designed based on Byram (1997)'s ICC framework, integrating eight components across linguistic and cultural aspects. Data were collected through expert validation, formative assessments, pre and post tests, and student satisfaction surveys, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. Quantitative findings revealed improvement across all language competences, with discourse competence showing the strongest gains, followed by linguistic competence, while sociolinguistic competence progressed more gradually. Qualitative data further indicated that learners demonstrated consistent development in the five cultural aspects: attitudes, knowledge, discovery skills, interpreting/relating skills, and critical cultural awareness. Students reported high satisfaction with the integration of language and culture, recognizing its effectiveness in linking communication practice with intercultural understanding. However, they expressed only moderate satisfaction with the blended learning format, suggesting the need for refinement, particularly in instructional design and technological support.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), the competence to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures, has emerged as an essential skill for the 21st century (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2014). Effective intercultural communication requires more than linguistic proficiency; it demands understanding of cultural values, behaviors, and perspectives that shape communication patterns. Hall (1976) likened culture to an iceberg, with visible elements representing merely the surface, while deeper layers including beliefs, values, and worldviews remain hidden beneath.

The traditional emphasis on native speaker competence as the ultimate goal has been increasingly challenged. Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1993) argued that this model marginalizes learners and neglects their linguistic identity. In response, Byram (1997) proposed the ICC framework, which integrates eight components necessary for intercultural interaction: five cultural dimensions (attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness) and three linguistic dimensions (linguistic competence, discourse competence, and sociolinguistic competence), expanding language education goals beyond mere linguistic mastery.

The COVID19 pandemic fundamentally disrupted traditional education systems, prompting rapid shift toward digital learning (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). This transformation accelerated adoption of blended learning, an instructional approach strategically combining face-to-face (F2F) instruction with online experiences (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Graham, 2006). By combining both modalities, this approach addresses the limitations of purely online or face-to-face instruction. Blended learning has proven particularly valuable in language education, where real-time interaction, cultural immersion, and personalized learning remain crucial for developing communicative competence.

In Thailand, Korean language programs have expanded significantly since 1999, fueled by the Korean Wave (Hallyu), a term referring to the global popularity of South Korean culture including K-pop, K-dramas, and Korean entertainment. However, much instruction remains grammar-focused, with limited integration of intercultural perspectives (Namsaeng & Ambele, 2023). Despite growing interest in intercultural language education, challenges persist. Many cultural learning materials predominantly reflect Western perspectives (Moloney, 2013), and institutional constraints often lead educators to prioritize test preparation over intercultural instruction (Namsaeng & Ambele, 2023). These challenges are compounded by the lack of systematic frameworks for implementing and assessing ICC development in language classrooms. There remains a need for pedagogical models that integrate ICC components into language instruction with clear assessment methods and practical implementation strategies.

This study addresses these gaps by designing and evaluating blended learning instructional activities for a Korean listening and speaking course grounded in Byram (1997)'s ICC framework. Listening and speaking skills are essential for real-time intercultural communication, as they enable learners to engage in immediate interaction and respond appropriately to cultural cues. Unlike reading and writing, these oral-aural skills require spontaneous processing of both linguistic and cultural information, making them particularly important for ICC development. The study investigates three research questions:

- (1) To what extent does the implementation of blended learning in a Korean listening and speaking course enhance students' achievement in the linguistic aspects of intercultural communicative competence?
- (2) How does the blended learning approach contribute to students' improvement in the cultural aspects of intercultural communicative competence?
- (3) What are students' overall experiences and levels of satisfaction with the blended learning implementation in the Korean listening and speaking course?

To answer these questions, the study employed formative assessments to measure linguistic competence (RQ1), pre-post ICC tests to measure cultural competence development (RQ2), and satisfaction surveys with open-ended responses to capture student experiences (RQ3).

By integrating Byram (1997)'s eight ICC components into blended instructional activities, this research contributes to both theory and practice, offering insights for Korean language educators seeking to implement culturally responsive curricula in similar contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural communicative competence

Chomsky (1957, 1965)'s early work distinguished between language competence and performance, focusing primarily on grammatical knowledge. However, this approach proved inadequate for explaining language use in authentic social contexts. Hymes (1972) challenged this grammar centered view, introducing "communicative competence," which was subsequently systematized by Canale and Swain (1980) into four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Van Ek (1986) presented practical abilities that enable foreign language learners to perform various social roles. However, Byram identified two critical limitations of Van Ek's framework. First, Van Ek's sociocultural competence was defined only as what learners needed to know, which Byram argued was insufficient for assessing students' actual competence. Second, Van Ek's model tended to use native speakers as students' ideal model, which failed to consider that learners from different cultural backgrounds could have various perceptions of the same culture due to ethnocentric tendencies.

Byram (1997) established the concept of ICC, emphasizing that foreign language education's goal is not merely communicate like native speakers but to cultivate intercultural speakers who can connect their own culture with others, construct meaning, and interact effectively. Byram (1997)'s ICC model comprises eight elements across two interconnected dimensions: the intercultural dimension (five cultural components) and the linguistic dimension (three communicative components).

Since its introduction, Byram (1997)'s ICC framework has been subject to ongoing refinement and critical examination. Hoff (2020) noted that while Byram's model provided a foundational framework, early applications tended to address culture in a nation centered manner and treated identity singularly, failing to adequately reflect complex identities or dynamic cultural contexts in globalized settings. Building on these critiques, recent scholarship has emphasized the need to balance linguistic and cultural dimensions within ICC instruction. Feng et al. (2025) confirmed through qualitative research the necessity of integrating linguistic and cultural competencies rather than treating them as separate domains. Baker (2024) further argued that "language learning is inherently an intercultural process, whether it is explicitly manifested in education or not" (p. 23), underscoring that ICC cannot be relegated to supplementary cultural content but must be embedded throughout language instruction.

Contemporary research demonstrates ICC's continued relevance across diverse global contexts. Thompson et al. (2023) and Sarwari et al. (2024) confirmed that ICC plays a critical role in international collaboration, global business, and multicultural education, addressing communication challenges that arise from increased intercultural contact. Empirical studies further reveal the consequences of inadequate ICC development. Singh (2020) demonstrated that even linguistically proficient individuals encounter conflicts rooted in cultural misinterpretations, revealing that language proficiency alone cannot prevent misunderstandings arising from divergent cultural frameworks. Ali and Liu (2022) found that ethnocentrism in intercultural communication leads to unwillingness to communicate, resulting in cultural conflict. These findings underscore that ICC development cannot be assumed to occur naturally through language instruction but requires systematic pedagogical intervention.

The five cultural components include attitudes (*savoir être*), involving curiosity, openness, and readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures; knowledge (*savoirs*), encompassing understanding of one's own and others' cultures and awareness of interaction processes; skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), the ability to interpret cultural documents and relate them to one's own cultural context; skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), the capacity to acquire new cultural knowledge and operate effectively under real time communication constraints; and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*), the ability to critically evaluate practices and beliefs based on explicit criteria (Byram et al., 2002).

These five cultural dimensions are interconnected and develop progressively. Attitudes serve as the emotional and cognitive foundation, representing willingness to relativize one's own values and beliefs while viewing situations from others' perspectives. This psychological ability to decentre enables individuals to step out of their cultural framework. Knowledge encompasses both understanding of social groups and their cultural products as well as comprehension of interaction processes at personal and social levels. The skills of interpreting and relating involve cognitive abilities to comparatively analyze and connect cultural phenomena, discovering not only common backgrounds but also implications, gaps, and contradictory meanings. Skills of discovery and interaction demonstrate practical nature, requiring learners not simply to memorize cultural knowledge but to discover and utilize it in actual interaction situations while integrating previously acquired knowledge and attitudes in real time. Critical cultural awareness, positioned as the most core element, goes beyond simple cultural relativism to mean performing conscious and systematic reflection on cultural practices and values based on explicit criteria.

The three linguistic components comprise linguistic competence, involving grammatical, lexical, phonological, and orthographic knowledge; discourse competence, the capacity to combine forms and meanings to achieve unified communication; and sociolinguistic competence, the ability to use language appropriately across social contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980).

In the context of ICC, linguistic competence provides the basic tools for expressing intercultural understanding and participating in intercultural communication. Sociolinguistic competence is particularly important in intercultural communication as it enables navigation of complex social dynamics that arise when different linguistic and cultural norms intersect, including

understanding relationships between language and social factors such as status, role relationships, and situational variables. Discourse competence helps speakers organize communication in ways that are comprehensible and effective across cultural boundaries by understanding how to structure communication, maintain coherence and cohesion, and adapt discourse strategies to various communicative purposes and contexts.

Despite widespread recognition of ICC's importance and the comprehensive nature of Byram (1997)'s eight component framework, significant implementation challenges remain in language classrooms. Most ICC research has disproportionately emphasized cultural dimensions while neglecting systematic integration of linguistic competencies (Hoff, 2020; Lee et al., 2023). This separation creates a pedagogical gap: students may develop cultural knowledge without corresponding linguistic abilities to enact that knowledge in communication, or conversely, acquire linguistic forms without understanding their cultural appropriateness. Addressing this gap requires instructional approaches that provide both flexible access to cultural content and structured opportunities for real time linguistic practice, requirements that blended learning environments are uniquely positioned to fulfill, as examined in the following section.

Blended learning in language education

Blended learning has emerged as a powerful pedagogical approach, particularly following the pandemic's acceleration of digital learning adoption. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) define it as thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning with online experiences. Research demonstrates that blended learning environments offer distinct advantages for language acquisition by leveraging strengths of both modalities (Dziuban et al., 2018). The online component provides flexibility in accessing cultural content, while face-to-face sessions facilitate immediate interaction and collaborative activities essential for developing communicative competence.

Since these foundational conceptualizations, blended learning research has advanced considerably in both theoretical precision and empirical validation. Stein and Graham (2014) refined the pedagogical rationale, explaining that effective blended learning design organizes learning activities and assessments in ways that support learning outcomes while maximizing the strengths and minimizing the weaknesses of both online and offline environments. Horn and Staker (2015) further specified that authentic blended learning requires student agency, defining it as a formal education program in which students learn at least partly online with some control over time, place, path, and pace, and at least partly at a supervised location away from home. Allen et al. (2007) established operational criteria that have guided subsequent research, specifying that blended courses deliver between 30 and 79 percent of content online, distinguishing them from web facilitated or fully online formats.

Recent empirical studies have validated these frameworks across diverse educational contexts. Owston and York (2018) found that students in courses with medium to high online ratios (36–50%) demonstrated more positive perceptions and superior performance compared to lower blend configurations. Anthony et al. (2020) confirmed through systematic review that practitioners have adopted various ratio configurations based on contextual factors, establishing that optimal ratios are context-dependent rather than universally prescribed. Teng and Zeng

(2022) reported that blended learning environments enhance student autonomy by allowing learners to maintain their own pace and engagement with tasks, a finding particularly relevant for language education where individual differences in learning speed are pronounced.

Blended learning possesses unique educational characteristics that extend beyond simply mixing traditional face-to-face and online education. Synthesizing previous research, five key characteristics emerge that make blended learning particularly effective for language education contexts. First, flexibility and continuity allow blended learning to function as a flexible continuum of various language learning environments rather than an opposing alternative to online or classroom instruction (Hinkelman, 2005). Second, optimized learning design organizes learning activities and assessments in ways that support learning outcomes while maximizing the strengths and minimizing the weaknesses of both online and offline environments (Stein & Graham, 2014). Third, individualized learning support enables personalized learning that considers students' individual characteristics and needs, allowing learners to maintain their own pace and engagement with tasks (Teng & Zeng, 2022). Fourth, enhanced interaction promotes communication between teacher-learner and learner-learner through various modalities, with online environments enabling deep reflection through asynchronous communication while face-to-face environments provide immediate and direct interaction (Stein & Graham, 2014). Fifth, strengthened learner agency ensures that true blended learning is implemented when learners have control over their learning process, including control over time, place, path, or pace of their learning (Horn & Staker, 2015).

In language education contexts, blended learning particularly supports ICC development by enabling systematic exposure to authentic cultural materials through online platforms while providing opportunities for meaningful cultural discussion during in person sessions (Omar & Shaalan, 2023). Research demonstrates that blended environments support language skill development while fostering deeper cultural understanding (Alsalhi et al., 2021). Post pandemic studies further confirm that blended learning serves as an effective framework for promoting ICC by combining digital content with real-life communication practice (Yu et al., 2023). This dual environment addresses challenges regarding limited access to diverse cultural perspectives in traditional classrooms (Moloney, 2013), while catering to diverse learning preferences and promoting student autonomy in intercultural learning.

The theoretical and empirical foundations of blended learning reviewed above directly inform the present study's instructional design. This study adopts a 70% face-to-face and 30% online ratio, positioning at the lower boundary of Allen et al. (2007)'s blended learning spectrum. This configuration reflects the specific needs of TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean) Level 2 learners who require substantial teacher support for foundational language development while benefiting from flexible online access to cultural content. The five characteristics of blended learning translate into concrete design decisions: pre-class videos deliver vocabulary, grammar, and cultural input that students access at their own pace, while classroom sessions maximize time for interactive activities including role-plays, cultural comparisons, and collaborative discussions essential for developing sociolinguistic competence and discovery/interaction skills. This design specifically addresses the ICC implementation challenge identified in Section 2.1, the separation of cultural knowledge from linguistic practice, by distributing content

acquisition to online environments and reserving face-to-face time for communicative application. The following section examines prior research at the intersection of ICC and blended learning to identify specific gaps that this study addresses.

Blended learning and ICC in language education

While recent studies confirm the effectiveness of intercultural approaches in language education, critical gaps remain in the existing literature. Lee et al. (2023) reported that online EFL curricula integrating intercultural learning improved Thai students' ICC and English proficiency, while Kim and Kang (2024) found that intercultural approaches enhanced Korean learners' speaking efficacy. Research also demonstrates that blended learning, particularly flipped classroom approaches, effectively develops language skills and intercultural competency (Cheng, 2025; Qiu & Luo, 2022).

However, three critical gaps remain. First, despite Byram (1997)'s model including linguistic competence as a core component, most ICC research disproportionately emphasizes cultural dimensions over linguistic competencies (Hoff, 2020; Lee et al., 2023). This imbalance results in learners who may develop cultural awareness without acquiring the linguistic tools necessary to express that understanding in authentic communication. While such cultural focus has contributed valuable insights, most existing studies have concentrated primarily on cultural aspects rather than integrating both cultural and linguistic dimensions.

Second, while studies demonstrate ICC based instruction effectiveness for Thai EFL learners, research in Korean language education contexts for Thai students remains virtually absent (Lee et al., 2023). Third, systematic integration of ICC in blended learning faces implementation challenges including workload and student engagement issues (Lo & Hew, 2017), and existing assessment tools measure only self perception rather than actual competence. These gaps collectively indicate the need for research that integrates all components of ICC within blended learning environments, particularly in Korean language education for Thai learners.

Conceptual framework

Based on the literature reviewed above, this study proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that integrates Byram (1997)'s eight ICC components, five cultural aspects and three linguistic aspects, within a blended learning environment combining online (30%) and face-to-face (70%) instruction. This framework informed the design of instructional units and assessment instruments described in the Methodology section. In summary, the proposed framework addresses the three identified gaps: the imbalance between linguistic and cultural dimensions, the lack of research in Korean language education for Thai students, and the challenges in ICC integration within blended learning environments.

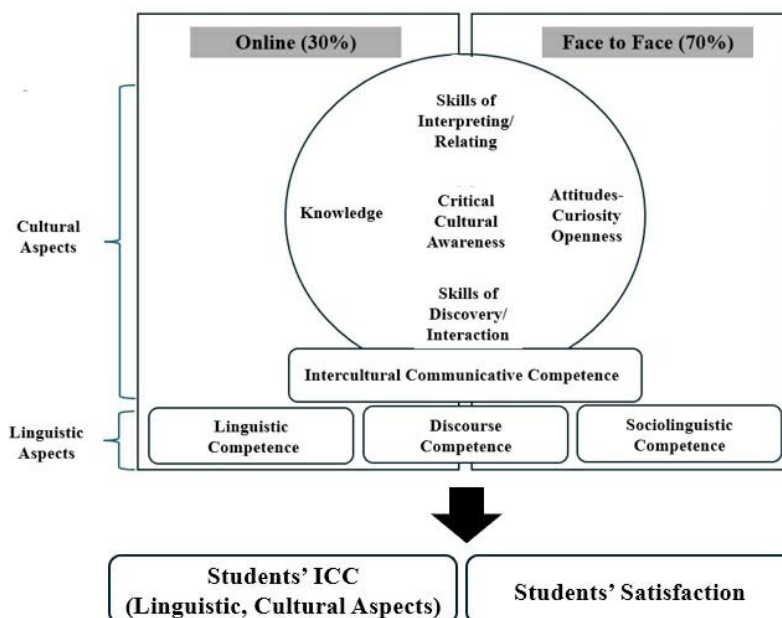


Figure 1 Conceptual framework for enhancing ICC through blended learning
Adapted from Byram(1997, 2009)'s ICC framework.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employed the Research and Development (R&D) approach (Borg & Gall, 1989; Gall et al., 2003) to design, implement, and evaluate blended learning instructional activities that integrate Byram (1997)'s ICC framework within a Korean listening and speaking course.

The R&D approach remains widely applied in contemporary language education research for developing and validating instructional materials (Muliastuti et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study adopted the R&D approach to develop and validate blended learning materials integrating all eight ICC components through a cyclical process of development, expert validation, and revision.

Participants

The study population consisted of 187 second year students from the Korean Language Department at the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC), Bangkok, Thailand. All participants had achieved TOPIK Level 2 proficiency and were enrolled in Korean listening and speaking courses during the first semester of 2024 (January to May). The age range was 19–21 years, with gender distribution of 90.37% female, 7.49% male, and 3.21% LGBTQ students. Participants shared similar curriculum backgrounds, Korean language proficiency levels, and learning contexts, with limited intercultural experience but high motivation to learn Korean, as indicated by the pre-test results.

Development and validation of instructional activities

This section describes the development process and expert validation procedures for the blended learning based Korean instructional activities.

Overview of the intervention

The intervention consisted of nine instructional activities integrating Byram (1997)'s eight ICC components, three linguistic dimensions (linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse competence) and five cultural dimensions (attitudes, knowledge, interpreting/relating skills, discovery/interaction skills, critical cultural awareness), implemented over one semester (15 weeks) covering everyday topics.

The blended learning model combined 70% face-to-face instruction (2.5 hours weekly) with 30% online learning (45 minutes weekly). Pre-class online learning (one session per unit, approximately 45 minutes total including linguistic instruction, cultural content, and assignments) via Microsoft Teams provided cultural and linguistic input. Completion was verified through notebook assignments containing comprehension questions and reflection tasks, which were checked at the beginning of each face-to-face session. Classroom sessions emphasized interactive activities (role-plays, cultural comparisons, pair/group work). Each instructional activity included clear objectives, structured procedures, authentic materials, and aligned assessments.

The instructional design followed three core principles that guided development across all nine units. First, ICC enhancement served as the main goal, ensuring that every learning activity integrated both linguistic and cultural dimensions. Second, integration of all ICC components meant that each unit deliberately incorporated elements from Byram (1997)'s eight components. Third, alignment of online and offline activities ensured progressive ICC development. To illustrate how these principles were operationalized, Unit 1 "My hometown is a beautiful place" is presented as an example. The remaining eight units followed the same instructional pattern with different thematic content.

During pre-class, students accessed instructor created videos on Microsoft Teams covering vocabulary and grammar to develop linguistic competence. For cultural competence, students watched related videos to build cultural knowledge (savoirs). Students then completed notebook assignments addressing both linguistic tasks (e.g., vocabulary and grammar exercises) and cultural tasks (e.g., reflection prompts about regional characteristics).

During in-class sessions, the instructor first checked students' notebooks to verify assignment completion. Warm-up activities using Kahoot reviewed online content. Students then engaged in pair activities, practicing dialogues with partners. Following this, the instructor delivered cultural instruction, explaining Korean regional characteristics and facilitating discussion comparing Korean and Thai regional differences. Finally, students formed groups to create posters using Canva comparing regional characteristics between Thailand and Korea, then uploaded their work to Microsoft Teams for group presentations.

Each instructional unit followed a consistent weekly pattern that maximized the benefits of the blended approach. Students began by accessing pre-class instructional videos covering vocabulary, grammar, and cultural content, then completed pre-learning tasks including vocabulary exercises and cultural reflection prompts before posting responses to cultural discussion questions on Microsoft Teams. Face-to-face sessions opened with warm-up activities reviewing online content, followed by interactive communicative tasks including pair work, role-plays, and group discussions. Cultural comparison activities connected Korean and Thai practices, while formative assessment activities including oral responses, presentations, and collaborative projects provided ongoing feedback on student progress.

Nine instructional activities

The topics, ICC focus, and online and face-to-face components of the nine instructional activities are summarized in Table 1. Each instructional activity focused on themes relevant to students' daily lives and intercultural experiences, combining linguistic and cultural dimensions through online and face-to-face learning.

The nine units were strategically sequenced to support progressive development of both linguistic complexity and cultural depth. Early units (1–3) established foundational knowledge and attitudes through familiar topics such as hometown introductions, daily routines, and shopping contexts. Middle units (4–6) developed discourse and sociolinguistic competence through phone conversations, healthcare interactions, and food culture exploration. Later units (7–9) addressed complex cultural concepts including gift-giving symbolism, educational systems, and workplace dining culture, requiring integration of previously learned patterns with sophisticated cultural analysis.

Table 1
Overview of the nine instructional units

Unit	Topic/Theme	ICC Focus	Online Component (Pre-class)	In-class Component (F2F)
1	My hometown is a beautiful place	Knowledge of self & others' culture; Linguistic competence	Video on hometown & cultural landmarks	Pair discussion, cultural comparison presentations
2	I'll take out the trash	Attitudes of responsibility & respect; Sociolinguistic competence	Video on Korean daily routines & recycling norms	Role-play daily-life conversations; group reflection
3	Try this on	Skills of interpreting & relating; Vocabulary use	Video on shopping etiquette & fashion norms	Dialogues in pairs; cultural comparison of shopping habits
4	Can you talk on the phone now?	Discourse competence; Skills of interaction	Video on phone conversation etiquette (honorifics)	Simulated phone calls; peer feedback
5	If you're very sick, take this medicine	Knowledge of health-related cultural practices	Video on Korean medical culture & expressions	Role-play patient-doctor; class discussion on healthcare culture

Unit	Topic/Theme	ICC Focus	Online Component (Pre-class)	In-class Component (F2F)
6	I'm happy when I eat delicious food	Attitudes of openness; Cultural knowledge	Video on Korean food & dining etiquette	Group discussions; food-culture comparison activities
7	Because it's a housewarming, I'll bring detergent or toilet paper	Skills of interpreting/relating; Pragmatic competence	Video on housewarming traditions & gift-giving	Role-play social visits; cultural value sharing
8	I decided to take Korean classes starting in September	Skills of discovery; Learner autonomy	Video on Korean education culture	Group projects on education systems; reflection
9	There is a restaurant I often go to nearby	Critical cultural awareness; Discourse competence	Video on eating-out culture & etiquette	Group discussion; role-play ordering & cultural comparison

Note: Detailed instructional activities for Unit 7 are provided in Appendix A.

Expert validation of instructional activities

Following the development of all nine units but prior to classroom implementation, a comprehensive expert validation process was conducted. Five experts with specialized expertise in language education, curriculum development, and educational evaluation reviewed all units using an expert validation instrument developed for this study. The instrument underwent expert validity examination through the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) prior to use, with all items achieving IOC values ≥ 0.67 . The instrument covered ten evaluation domains: (1) learning objectives and content organization, (2) alignment with ICC framework, (3) language competence development, (4) appropriateness of blended learning structure, (5) variety of activity types, (6) appropriateness of materials and engagement, (7) assessment methods and feedback, (8) learner-centeredness, (9) practical feasibility for implementation, and (10) diversity in ICC assessment methods. Each unit was evaluated using 37 items measured on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Expert validation results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of expert validation results

Unit	Topic	Mean	SD	Int
Unit1	My hometown is a beautiful place	4.79	0.22	Strongly agree
Unit2	I'll take out the trash	4.80	0.21	Strongly agree
Unit3	Try this on	4.91	0.11	Strongly agree
Unit4	Can you talk on the phone now?	4.82	0.24	Strongly agree
Unit5	If you're very sick, take this medicine	4.93	0.06	Strongly agree
Unit6	I'm happy when I eat delicious food	4.94	0.05	Strongly agree
Unit7	Because It's a housewarming, I'll bring detergent or toilet paper	4.96	0.05	Strongly agree
Unit8	I decided to take Korean classes starting in September	4.97	0.03	Strongly agree
Unit9	There is a restaurant I often go to nearby	4.96	0.07	Strongly agree
Total Average		4.90	0.69	Strongly agree

For every unit, the expert validation result was similarly rated as strongly agree, ranging from 4.79 to 4.97 (total average $M = 4.90$). Based on expert feedback, final refinements were made before classroom implementation.

Research instruments

Multiple instruments were employed to assess the effectiveness of the blended learning intervention:

Linguistic Competence Assessment: Students' linguistic competence across three dimensions (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence) was assessed through: (1) weekly assignments measuring ongoing language development (20%), (2) Quiz 1 on Units 1–4 administered in Week 7 (15%), (3) Quiz 2 on Units 5–7 administered in Week 11 (15%), (4) midterm group presentation involving collaborative dialogue creation in Week 8 (25%), and (5) final individual presentation demonstrating independent speaking performance in Week 15 (25%). All assessments were scored using predetermined rubrics aligned with TOPIK Level 2 proficiency standards on a 100point scale. Overall linguistic achievement scores were calculated by combining component scores according to the weighting system.

Intercultural Communicative Competence Assessment: A 67item ICC assessment instrument measured students' development across Byram (1997)'s five cultural dimensions: attitudes (18 items), knowledge (15 items), skills of interpreting and relating (8 items), skills of discovery and interaction (17 items), and critical cultural awareness (8 items). Each item was measured using a 5point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The instrument included five negatively worded items (reverse-scored during analysis) to reduce response bias (e.g., "I think my culture is better than other cultures" and "I feel interactions with people from different cultures are pointless"). The instrument was administered as both pre-test (Week 1) and post-test (Week 15) to measure students' cultural development over time.

Student Feedback Instrument: The feedback instrument comprised 34 items across three domains: general learning experience (10 items), ICC related development (12 items), and blended learning effectiveness (12 items), measured on a 5-point scale (5 = very satisfied to 1 = very dissatisfied). Two open-ended questions solicited perspectives on beneficial aspects and suggestions for improvement. The instrument was administered at the end of the intervention (Week 15).

Instrument validation

Content Validity: All research instruments were validated through the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) by three experts in measurement and evaluation, curriculum and instruction, and Korean language education. All retained items obtained IOC scores ranging from 0.67 to 1.00, indicating acceptable to excellent content validity. Items were revised based on expert recommendations before implementation.

Data collection procedures

The intervention was implemented over 15 weeks during the first semester of 2024 (January to May) following a threephase procedure. In Phase 1 (Week 1), students were introduced to the blended learning model and the 67item ICC assessment pre-test was administered. In Phase 2 (Weeks 2–14), the nine instructional units were implemented following the weekly pattern described in Section 3.3.1, with five assessment points distributed throughout the semester. In Phase 3 (Week 15), the ICC assessment post-test and 34item satisfaction survey were administered, and final individual presentations were conducted. All sessions were conducted by the researcher, who also developed all online materials.

Data analysis

Since this study collected data from the entire population of enrolled students ($N = 187$), descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were employed rather than inferential tests to present a comprehensive account of student achievement, intercultural development, and satisfaction. This approach eliminates sampling error and strengthens internal validity.

Linguistic Achievement Analysis (Research Question 1): Overall linguistic achievement and component level scores (linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse competence) were calculated for 185 students (excluding 2 withdrawals) using the established weighting system. Scores were interpreted as follows: 80–100 = excellent, 70–79 = good, 60–69 = fair, 50–59 = poor, 0–49 = very poor.

Cultural Competence Analysis (Research Question 2): Pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed for all 187 students. Mean scores, standard deviations, and change scores (post-test minus pre-test) were calculated for each of the five cultural dimensions and individual items. Scores were interpreted as follows: 4.51–5.00 = strongly agree, 3.51–4.50 = agree, 2.51–3.50 = neither agree nor disagree, 1.51–2.50 = disagree, 1.00–1.50 = strongly disagree.

Student Satisfaction Analysis (Research Question 3): Satisfaction scores were analyzed for 177 respondents (10 students absent or withdrew) across overall satisfaction and three specific domains (general learning experience, ICC related questions, blended learning questions) using the same 5point interpretation criteria.

Qualitative Data Analysis: open-ended responses regarding beneficial aspects (167 responses) and suggested improvements (173 responses) were analyzed using thematic analysis. All Thai language responses were maintained in original form during analysis, with identified themes translated into English for reporting. The analysis followed three phases: initial reading and familiarization with the data, generating codes and identifying patterns, and defining and naming themes. Qualitative themes were integrated with quantitative findings to provide deeper interpretation of learning outcomes and satisfaction.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of implementing blended learning instructional activities designed to enhance ICC among 187 Thai undergraduate students in a Korean listening and speaking course. The results are organized into three parts: linguistic achievement, cultural competence improvement, and student satisfaction.

Linguistic achievement in ICC

The linguistic competence assessment evaluated 185 students (excluding 2 withdrawals) across three dimensions of Byram (1997)'s ICC framework: linguistic competence, discourse competence, and sociolinguistic competence. As shown in Table 3, discourse competence achieved the highest score (80.38), followed by linguistic competence (74.40).

Table 3
Average score of formative assessment: ICC linguistic aspect

ICC : Linguistic Aspects	Linguistic (100)	Discourse (100)	Sociolinguistic (100)	Total Average (100)
	74.40	80.38	67.67	74.15

The 12.71point difference between the highest (discourse) and lowest (sociolinguistic) competence areas demonstrates varying learning characteristics across competence domains. Discourse competence showed systematic acquisition through pattern based learning in communicative contexts, while sociolinguistic competence exhibited characteristics requiring deeper cultural context understanding and longer term exposure.

Improvement in cultural aspects of ICC

Pre-test and post-test assessments measured students' development across Byram (1997)'s five cultural dimensions: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. All 187 students completed both assessments.

Table 4
Pre-post test results for five cultural domains

ICC: Cultural Aspects	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
Attitude (18 items)	3.74	4.00	+0.26
Knowledge (15 items)	3.70	4.02	+0.33
Skills of Interpreting and Relating (8 items)	3.97	4.19	+0.22
Skills of Discovery and Interaction (17 items)	3.74	4.00	+0.26
Critical Cultural Awareness (8 items)	3.75	4.00	+0.25
Overall ICC Average	3.78	4.04	+0.26

The results revealed modest but consistent improvements across all five cultural domains (overall change +0.26, from 3.78 to 4.04). The Knowledge domain showed the strongest improvement (+0.33), while Skills of Interpreting and Relating showed the smallest gain

(+0.22). This pattern suggests that the blended learning approach was particularly effective for developing factual cultural understanding through online resources, whereas skills requiring real-time cross-cultural interaction were more difficult to develop within the classroom context. All post-test scores fell within the “Agree” range, demonstrating meaningful development in intercultural competence. At the individual item level, this pattern was further evident. The highest gains appeared in Knowledge items such as “understanding that responses from different cultures reflect their cultural values” (+0.53) and “knowledge of cultural norms and conversation etiquette” (+0.49), which are well suited to online content delivery. In contrast, items requiring direct interpersonal application showed more modest improvements across all domains.

The Attitudes domain demonstrated consistent improvement across most items measuring openness, curiosity, and respect toward other cultures. The most significant improvement in respecting values and beliefs of people from different cultures suggests that learners developed greater cultural empathy through the blended learning experience. Regarding negatively worded items that were reverse scored, minimal changes were observed in fundamental cultural superiority attitudes, though slight improvements appeared in reducing cultural anxiety and prejudiced thinking.

In the Knowledge domain, substantial improvements occurred across most items measuring understanding of Korean culture, awareness of one’s own culture, and recognition of intercultural differences. The highest improvement in understanding that responses from people of different cultures reflect their cultural values indicated enhanced cultural attribution skills. Items focusing on cultural norms and conversation etiquette both improved significantly, suggesting effective acquisition of practical cultural knowledge. The smallest improvement appeared in identifying prejudices and stereotypes that people from different cultures have about Thai culture, suggesting that developing awareness of how others perceive one’s own culture remains challenging.

The Skills of Interpreting and Relating domain showed moderate but consistent improvements across all items. The most significant improvement in interpreting body language and facial expressions indicated enhanced non verbal communication interpretation skills. The improvement in discussing and comparing behavioral patterns between cultures suggested that learners developed better comparative analysis skills between Thai and Korean cultural practices.

In the Skills of Discovery and Interaction domain, positive improvements appeared across all measured items. The highest improvement in trying to act in culturally appropriate ways indicated enhanced cultural adaptation skills. Items focusing on active engagement and participation showed substantial improvements, while developing patience in cultural conflict situations showed the smallest improvement, suggesting this requires ongoing practice.

The Critical Cultural Awareness domain showed positive improvements across all items measuring critical thinking about cultural differences. The most significant change in knowing how to behave properly with foreigners indicated that learners developed enhanced competence to analyze and evaluate cultural behaviors critically. Items focusing on comparative cultural analysis showed modest improvements, suggesting that developing these skills may require extended practice beyond a single semester.

Student satisfaction and experiences

A total of 177 students (out of 187) participated in the satisfaction survey, which assessed three domains: general learning experience, ICC related development, and blended learning effectiveness. Results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
Student satisfaction results

Satisfaction Domain	Mean	SD
General Learning Experience (10 items)	4.64	0.50
ICC Related Development (12 items)	4.48	0.57
Blended Learning Effectiveness (12 items)	3.49	1.29

Students expressed high satisfaction with the general learning experience ($M = 4.64$, “Strongly agree”) and recognized significant ICC related development ($M = 4.48$, “Agree”). However, satisfaction with the blended learning methodology was moderate ($M = 3.49$, “Neither Agree nor Disagree”), indicating implementation challenges despite recognized educational value.

Within the general learning experience domain, the highest rated aspects included task effectiveness in reinforcing understanding ($M = 4.71$), variety of activities ($M = 4.68$), and usefulness of course materials ($M = 4.67$). For ICC related development, students particularly valued their competence to apply learned content to real life situations, acquisition of knowledge for intercultural communication, and learning appropriate Korean linguistic etiquette. Regarding blended learning methodology, students appreciated how pre-class online lectures improved offline class understanding, though lower ratings for overall online lecture effectiveness and willingness to take future blended courses indicated areas requiring improvement.

Qualitative findings

Content analysis of 167 open-ended responses identified three main themes regarding beneficial aspects of the course. The most frequently mentioned theme was speaking skills development (45 students, 26.9%), with students noting that regular speaking and presentation practice enhanced their Korean proficiency. The second theme was blended learning flexibility (35 students, 21.0%), as students appreciated the ability to access video content at convenient times before class. The third theme was cultural learning (22 students, 13.2%), with students reporting that exposure to authentic Korean cultural content deepened their understanding of Korean perspectives and values. Notably, 89 students (50.3%) expressed complete satisfaction with no suggestions for improvement.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of blended learning in enhancing ICC among Thai undergraduate students learning Korean. The findings contribute to understanding how systematic integration of Byram (1997)’s ICC framework within blended learning environments can support both linguistic and cultural competence development.

Differentiated development across ICC dimensions

The results revealed distinct developmental patterns across linguistic and cultural dimensions. The highest achievement in discourse competence (80.38%) suggests that the combined online-offline instructional approach effectively supported students' development of conversation management and interaction patterns. This finding confirms the effectiveness of the flipped classroom model documented by Bergmann and Sams (2012) and Bishop and Verleger (2013), where pre-class preparation enables more productive in-class active learning. The 12.71-point gap between discourse competence and sociolinguistic competence (67.67%) aligns with Kasper and Rose (2002) and Thomas (1983), who argue that pragmatic competence develops slowly due to its dependence on deep cultural knowledge. This finding is also consistent with Singh (2020), who demonstrated that even linguistically proficient individuals encounter conflicts rooted in cultural misinterpretations, and Ali and Liu (2022), who found that insufficient cultural understanding leads to unwillingness to communicate in intercultural contexts. The moderate achievement in linguistic competence (74.40%) reflects the gradual acquisition of basic Korean language elements, though morphological and syntactic complexity continued to present challenges, requiring extended exposure beyond a single semester.

Superior discourse competence reflects systematic discourse patterns learned in communicative contexts through the blended learning intervention. The gradual progression from simple introductions in Unit 1 to complex cultural discussions in Unit 9 enabled pattern based development of discourse construction abilities. Middle-level linguistic competence demonstrates gradual acquisition of basic language elements, though morphological and syntactic complexity, particularly honorific systems and particles, continued to challenge learners and requires exposure beyond one semester.

Lower sociolinguistic competence performance demonstrates that while students acquired basic rules for hierarchical relationship expression and formal/informal register distinction, difficulties persisted in acquiring subtle cultural nuances. The development of effective materials addressing this gap requires educators' deep familiarity with both Korean and Thai cultural frameworks, as successful intercultural education presupposes understanding of both target and source cultures. These results offer critical implications for instructional design. While discourse competence developed effectively through combined online-offline practice, sociolinguistic competence requires deeper cultural immersion. This can be achieved through strengthened authentic exposure via virtual exchanges, expanded culture language connections in online content, and increased context based roleplays simulating real world social hierarchies.

The moderate improvements across all five cultural domains (overall change +0.26, from 3.78 to 4.04) represent meaningful progress given the one semester timeframe. As Byram (1997, 2009, 2021) and Deardorff (2006) emphasize, deep cultural awareness develops over years rather than months. Recent studies support this finding: Hoff (2020) noted that ICC development requires sustained engagement with cultural complexity, while Feng et al. (2025) confirmed through qualitative research that integrating linguistic and cultural competencies is a gradual process. The consistent positive changes across all 187 participants demonstrate that designed

blended learning creates conditions for intercultural growth across diverse learner backgrounds, supporting findings regarding gradual ICC development through structured exposure (Lee et al., 2023; Serco, 2005).

Skills of Discovery and Interaction showed strongest improvement, supporting the notion that behavioral adaptation requires systematic practice. Critical Cultural Awareness improvements reflect analytical thinking complexity, with comparative analysis showing smallest gains. The key finding is that cultural attitude changes were modest, not failure, but reflecting ICC development's nature. One semester (15 weeks) merely begins this journey, yet all participants improved, demonstrating that designed instruction plants change seeds. These consistent changes align with research confirming intercultural competence develops gradually through sustained structured exposure. That all 187 participants improved indicates the blended approach successfully created conditions for intercultural growth across diverse backgrounds. Practical implications suggest ICC education requires multi semester programs, with minimum 2-3 semester continuous curricula necessary for meaningful transformation.

Blended learning implementation challenges

While students recognized the educational value of blended learning for ICC development ($M = 4.48$ for ICC related satisfaction), their moderate satisfaction with the methodology itself ($M = 3.49$) reveals an implementation paradox. Students valued pre-class videos for improving offline understanding ($M = 3.65$) but expressed concerns about cumulative workload and limited interactivity. This “effective but uncomfortable” pattern reflects expected resistance to pedagogical innovation (Lo & Hew, 2021; Rogers, 2003) and highlights the challenge of balancing microlearning principles (Hug, 2005) with total cognitive load management. Recent research confirms these challenges: Lo and Hew (2021) identified workload concerns and student resistance as common barriers in flipped learning implementation, while Kang (2024) reported similar satisfaction gaps in online Korean speaking classes. Anthony et al. (2020) further noted that successful blended learning adoption requires gradual scaffolding and institutional support.

The high satisfaction with interactive activities, presentations (32 students), role-plays (28 students), and cultural learning opportunities (22 students) confirms that face-to-face components effectively facilitated meaningful intercultural practice.

However, future implementations should address these concerns by enhancing interactivity within online components, providing clearer scaffolding for managing both cultural complexity and cognitive load, and gradually adjusting the online-offline balance as students adapt to the blended format.

Implications

Theoretical implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions to ICC research. First, it addresses the persistent imbalance in ICC scholarship by demonstrating that linguistic and cultural

competencies must be developed simultaneously rather than treating cultural content as supplementary to language instruction. The successful integration of all eight components of Byram (1997)'s framework within a blended learning environment confirms that comprehensive ICC development is both theoretically coherent and practically achievable. Second, the finding that different ICC competencies develop at different rates advances understanding of ICC developmental processes. The 12.71-point gap between discourse competence (80.38%) and sociolinguistic competence (67.67%) suggests that pattern based communicative skills can be acquired within shorter timeframes, while pragmatic appropriateness requires sustained cultural immersion extending beyond single semesters.

Practical implications

For instructors, these findings suggest moving beyond treating culture as supplementary content toward integrating cultural and linguistic dimensions through activities such as cultural comparisons, role-plays, and collaborative projects. Particular attention should be given to sociolinguistic competence development through multi-semester progressions addressing pragmatic appropriateness and honorific usage.

For administrators, meaningful ICC development requires institutional commitment to multi-semester curricula, faculty development programs focused on intercultural pedagogy, and technological infrastructure supporting effective blended learning implementation.

For curriculum developers, specialized modules targeting sociolinguistic competence are needed, along with enhanced online content featuring interactive elements. Assessment frameworks should capture the gradual nature of ICC development rather than expecting dramatic short term transformations.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that blended learning can effectively enhance ICC in Korean language education when instructional activities integrate all eight components of Byram (1997)'s framework. Through expert validated instructional design ($M = 4.90$) and one semester implementation with 187 Thai undergraduate students, this research provides empirical evidence for bridging the gap between ICC theory and classroom practice.

The findings revealed differentiated developmental patterns across ICC dimensions: discourse competence achieved the highest scores (80.38%), while sociolinguistic competence showed slower development (67.67%). All participants demonstrated improvements across the five cultural domains (overall change +0.26), with Knowledge showing the strongest gains (+0.33). The 70:30 face-to-face to online ratio proved pedagogically sound, though student feedback indicates that online components require enhanced interactivity to maximize engagement.

This study has several limitations. The single institution context at the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce with beginner level learners may limit generalizability. The 15-week

intervention likely initiated rather than completed the complex process of intercultural transformation that Byram (1997, 2021) suggests requires years of cultivation.

Future research should pursue longitudinal investigations tracking students across multiple semesters to understand sustained ICC development trajectories and determine optimal program duration for achieving meaningful sociolinguistic competence. Cross institutional studies examining diverse proficiency levels, technological resources, and institutional contexts would clarify which findings generalize and which require context specific adaptation. Research exploring integration of virtual exchange programs, immersive simulation environments, and structured interactions with Korean community members could address the authentic intercultural exposure limitations inherent in classroom based instruction. Qualitative ethnographic studies would provide deeper insights into intercultural identity development processes and critical cultural awareness formation that quantitative assessments cannot fully capture.

Despite these limitations, this research establishes that integration of all eight components of Byram (1997)'s ICC framework through carefully designed blended learning experiences offers a viable pathway for developing both linguistic and cultural competencies in Korean language education. The validated nine units curriculum provides a replicable model for educators seeking to implement culturally responsive pedagogy while addressing practical constraints of limited authentic intercultural contact.

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Appendix A

Instructional Activities Unit 7: Because It's a Housewarming, I'll Bring Detergent or Toilet Paper

	Learning Objectives	Blended Learning Activities	Materials	Assessment	ICC Focus
1	Ask & answer about why people invite others to events and what they do during those events.	Online: Watch vocab/grammar video; write 3 sentences; practice polite invitation expressions. F2F: Pair speaking (reasons for invitations); Kahoot.	Video, vocab list, notebook, Kahoot	Notebook check, oral warm-up, observation	- Linguistic: vocabulary for invitations/events, grammar (–으니까, –(으)르 거예요) - Sociolinguistic: appropriate invitation & response expressions (“집들이에 오세요,” “축하합니다”)
2	Identify and describe appropriate behaviors/etiquette when visiting someone's home or attending an event.	Online: Watch cultural videos on etiquette & gift-giving; reflect online. F2F: Roleplay invitations; pair work Q&A; polite suggestion practice.	Sample dialogues, cultural video, guidelines	Observation, oral participation, informal performance	- Skills of Discovery & Interaction: discovering Korean housewarming etiquette (e.g., bringing detergent or toilet paper as symbolic gifts, waiting for host to serve food) and practicing through roleplay - Discourse: describing and suggesting etiquette behaviors (“보통 세제를 가져가요,” “이렇게 하면 좋아요.”)
3	Investigate cultural meanings behind Korean ceremonial events (집들이, 돌잔치).	Online: Pre-class reading/video; post one reflection on Ms team. F2F: Discussion on visiting etiquette; group presentations; peer feedback.	Prompts, etiquette guidelines, scenarios	Discussion performance, cultural awareness demonstration	- Knowledge: Korean ceremonial traditions (집들이, 돌잔치, symbolic foods/gifts) - Attitude: respectful curiosity toward symbolic practices (e.g., detergent/TP = prosperity, 돌잔치 gold ring = blessings for the child)
4	Reflect & compare Korean & Thai cultural values in gift-giving & invitations.	Online: Watch video about gift symbolism (세제, 휴지, 금반지); complete ICC reflection worksheet. F2F: Cultural comparison discussion; sharing symbolic meanings; Q&A.	Gift symbolism materials, 돌상 visuals, reflection worksheet	Reflection quality, comparison analysis, self-assessment	- Knowledge: Korean ceremonial traditions (집들이, 돌잔치, symbolic foods/gifts) - Attitude: respectful curiosity toward symbolic practices (e.g., detergent/TP = prosperity, 돌잔치 gold ring = blessings for the child)