

# Work-based English Skills and Beliefs about Intercultural Communicative Competence of Thai Non-Academic Staff: A Gap Analysis

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| Article information                                                                                                                                | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| <b>Article history:</b><br>Received: 21 May 2025<br>Last revised: 22 Apr 2026<br>Accepted: 24 Apr 2026<br>Available online: 29 Apr 2026            | <p><i>Despite the growing internationalization of Thai higher education, little research has explored the gap between the English language skills and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) that non-academic staff perceive as essential and their actual self-assessed abilities, thereby identifying specific areas in need of development. This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the perceived importance and existing proficiency in English skills and ICC among Thai non-academic staff at a public university in Bangkok. Quantitative data from 46 questionnaire responses revealed that all four English skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—were considered highly important, yet proficiency levels, especially in writing and speaking, were rated low. Similarly, participants recognized attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness as key ICC components, but self-assessed competence was notably lower. Qualitative insights from five interviews further highlighted communication barriers, training needs, and the desire for culturally responsive workplace environments. The findings underscore the need for targeted professional development integrating language training with intercultural awareness to better equip staff for globalized academic settings.</i></p> |
| <b>Keywords:</b><br>English communication skills<br>Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)<br>Non-academic staff<br>Professional development |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization, the increasing demand for internationalization, and international ranking have significantly transformed Thailand's educational landscape (Bhumiratana & Commins, 2012; Pavel & Ek-Uru, 2020). With this respect, many Thai universities have actively developed international programs aimed at attracting international students and lecturers (Nilphan, 2005; Rhein, 2017; Smith & Fuangprang, 2020). These initiatives enhance international outlook and foster a multicultural educational environment, necessitating that not only students and academics but also non-academic Thai staff adapt effectively to international contexts (Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, 2020; Taylor, 2010). Despite these internationalization efforts, Thai non-academic staff, who work in non-teaching and non-research roles but are essential to the daily functioning of higher education institutions and take on administrative, operational, and service-oriented

responsibilities, frequently encounter substantial barriers when working within diverse and international settings. These obstacles include limited English proficiency (Chaiyapoo, 2017; Chamnaktan, 2022; Sukprasert, 2016), which obstructs clear communication with international colleagues, and insufficient intercultural competence (IC) (Chaiyapoo, 2017), which can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunication, or interpersonal conflicts. These challenges highlight the critical need to equip Thai staff with both effective English skills and intercultural awareness.

In Thai context, previous research has separately examined either the necessary English language competencies (Chaiyapoo, 2017; Chamnaktan, 2022; Khouroud, 2022; Puapuntuma, 2019; Sae-jeng, 2018; Sukprasert, 2016) or the current ICC levels of Thai employees (Inkaew, 2015; Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Kiatkiri, 2019; Mahayussnan, 2021) in international workplaces. Their aims are to identify the specific English language skills or ICC required by Thai employees in international workplaces, examine current proficiency levels, and propose strategies or training programs to enhance communication effectiveness in multicultural workplace settings. Some studies have emphasized the importance of both English language skills and ICC (Laohachaiboon, 2011; Winnuwat, 2011). Such studies have underscored the importance of both skills sets for effectively managing intercultural interactions and providing high-quality services. However, there is still limited research examining the gap between the skills employees believe they currently possess and the ones they consider important for their work in terms of English proficiency and ICC.

Building on the growing importance of internationalization in Thai higher education, this study aims to investigate Thai non-academic staff's self-perceived English language proficiency and beliefs about ICC within the context of their professional responsibilities. Conducted at the Faculty of Education in a public university in Bangkok, Thailand, the research specifically compares the participants' current skill levels with the levels they believe are necessary to perform effectively in increasingly diverse and multicultural academic environments. By identifying these perceived gaps, the study seeks to provide insights that can inform the design of targeted training and development programs, ultimately supporting Thai non-academic staff in adapting to the demands of internationalization and enhancing the overall quality of service in international academic settings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Thai non-academic staff and English skills in an international workplace

Non-academic staff play a crucial role in the educational workplace by supporting and facilitating various administrative and operational processes that contribute to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the institution (Chaiyapoo, 2017; Pommarang & Phusee-orn, 2023). As Thailand's higher education system becomes increasingly internationalized, staff members are required to enhance or further develop their English language competency to effectively engage in international activities and communication. Many Thai non-academic staff working at educational workplace encounter international interactions using English language as a medium communication.

Chamnaktan (2022) found that non-academic staff perceived listening as the most essential English skill, followed by reading, writing, and speaking. The emphasis on listening reflects their frequent interactions with international students and faculty, where accurate comprehension is crucial for providing correct information, avoiding miscommunication, and maintaining professional service. Participants emphasized the importance of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension since much of their work involves processing documents, regulations, and academic texts in English. Additionally, academic writing was emphasized, particularly in preparing official correspondence and reports, while interaction with foreign students highlighted the practical value of communicative competence in service encounters. In another study, Sukprasert (2016) reported that speaking and listening were the most needed skills. The emphasis on speaking reflects the necessity for clear oral communication in tasks such as answering inquiries, coordinating with international partners, and supporting exchange students. However, the study also found that writing proficiency was lowest, suggesting that while staff may use spoken English frequently, they still struggle with written tasks such as drafting formal letters or responding to emails in professional contexts. The findings highlighted a significant gap between the perceived importance of English skills and actual ability across all four skill areas. Participants consistently rated listening and speaking as highly important for their roles but reported low confidence and limited proficiency in applying these skills effectively in real workplace situations. This discrepancy suggests that, although staff recognize the value of English for functioning in international environments, they lack sufficient training and practical opportunities to develop these skills to a functional level. Chaiyapoo (2017) also noted that reading was considered the most important skill as staff often engage with English-language documents, policies, and academic information in their daily tasks. However, grammar emerged as the most challenging aspect, which directly affects both writing accuracy and oral clarity. Moreover, speaking was identified as the skill most in need of improvement, with participants preferring instruction from both Thai and native-speaking teachers suggesting their desire for learning that balances comprehensibility with authentic language exposure. The study recommended that English courses for non-academic staff be aligned with workplace needs, emphasizing writing, grammar, and vocabulary delivered through engaging activities.

According to these studies, it has been consistently emphasized that essential English skills for non-academic staff vary depending on job functions. For example, Chamnaktan (2022) found that English needs varied by department. General Administration emphasized writing for official documents, Educational Services and Student Affairs relied on listening and speaking for student support, Finance and Procurement required reading for contracts and policies, and Research Administration focused on academic reading and writing. Similarly, Chaiyapoo (2017) reported that staff in International Affairs and Admissions depended heavily on speaking and listening for direct communication with foreign stakeholders, while Public Relations required accurate writing and grammar for announcements and correspondence, and Academic Affairs prioritized reading for course materials and regulations. Nevertheless, core competencies such as listening, reading, and writing appear to be fundamental across departments. Listening is often highlighted as the most critical skill for effective communication with international stakeholders, while reading is necessary for processing emails, official documents, and academic materials. Writing skills are frequently associated with tasks such as drafting correspondence or preparing reports. These skills help non-academic staff carry out their duties more effectively and adapt to the demands of an international workplace.

## Intercultural communicative competence

The concept of ICC has evolved significantly, moving from early models of communicative competence toward more comprehensive frameworks that integrate language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and interpersonal skills. Building on Hymes's (1972) notion of communicative competence, later scholars such as Byram (1997), Fantini (2000), and Deardorff (2006) expanded the scope to include attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for effective and appropriate communication across cultures, making ICC a central construct in language education and internationalized workplaces.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the ICC model introduced by Byram (1997) comprises five core components: attitude, knowledge, interpreting and relating skills, discovery and interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness. *Attitude* encompasses openness and curiosity toward unfamiliar cultures, encouraging a willingness to look beyond personal cultural frameworks. *Knowledge* involves an understanding of social groups and practices in both one's own culture and those of others. *Interpreting and relating skills* focus on the ability to compare and connect cultural meanings across contexts. *Discovery and interaction skills* refer to the ability to explore and apply new cultural knowledge in real-world interactions. *Critical cultural awareness* enables the evaluation of cultural norms, perspectives, and behaviors through multiple viewpoints, promoting intercultural reflection and understanding. In addition to intercultural elements, the model also highlights the ongoing importance of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competencies. These components support culturally appropriate and effective language use in intercultural contexts and offer a comprehensive perspective on language education that merges linguistic proficiency with intercultural understanding.

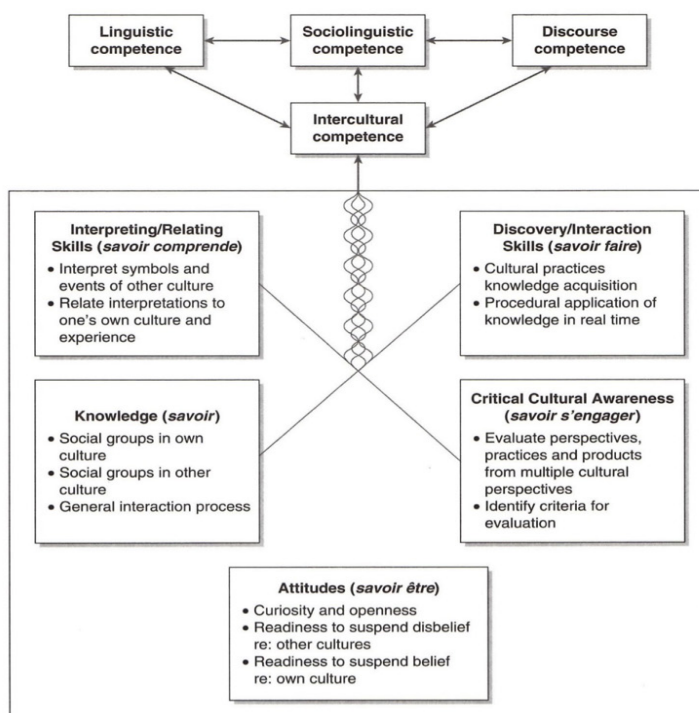


Figure 1 Byram's ICC Model

Previous research on ICC in Thai workplaces has consistently shown its central role in facilitating communication across cultures (e.g., Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Kiatkiri, 2019; Laohachaiboon, 2011; Mahayussnan, 2021; Winnuwat, 2011). Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020), for example, observed that hotel staff drew heavily on intercultural awareness, empathy, and flexibility when interacting with international guests, which helped them meet diverse expectations in service encounters. In multinational companies, Kiatkiri (2019) pointed out that staff often needed to adjust their communicative styles when working with foreign colleagues; this ability to negotiate meaning directly reduced conflict and improved cooperation. Laohachaiboon (2011) also noted that professionals who were able to manage cultural distance were more successful in maintaining long-term international business relationships. In the educational sector, Mahayussnan (2021) showed that ICC was crucial in international schools where teachers and staff regularly mediated between students and parents from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Similarly, Winnuwat (2011) highlighted how service workers who applied ICC strategies could handle cultural diversity more effectively, which in turn led to better customer satisfaction. However, limitations of ICC include superficial understanding of its components, inconsistent competence across different skills, and a lack of formal training (Inkaew, 2015; Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). Many employees also face challenges due to limited language proficiency and inadequate cultural knowledge, which can hinder effective communication despite positive attitudes or motivation.

For this study, Byram's ICC model (1997) was adopted as the primary theoretical framework because it provides a comprehensive and widely recognized approach to understanding how individuals communicate across cultures. Unlike earlier models that focused primarily on linguistic ability, Byram's framework incorporates five interrelated components: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). These elements align closely with the communicative demands of Thai non-academic staff, who are required to use English effectively and to engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in professional service encounters. The model was therefore considered particularly suitable for this study as it moves beyond language proficiency to emphasize the intercultural sensitivity, adaptability, and critical reflection necessary for effective workplace communication in internationalized higher education contexts.

### **Research objectives and questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore the work-based English skills and beliefs about ICC among Thai non-academic staff working at the educational workplace in Bangkok, Thailand. Specifically, the study aims to identify the important English skills in their workplace, compare their perceived skills with their self-assessed proficiency, examine their beliefs about ICC, and compare these beliefs with their perceived level of competence. The two proposed research questions are stated below.

1. How do work-based English skills perceived by Thai non-academic staff differ from their perceived existing English proficiency?
2. How do beliefs about ICC perceived by Thai non-academic staff differ from their perceived existing level of competence?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Participants of the study

The population of this study included 46 non-academic staff members working at the Faculty of Education in a large-size public university in Bangkok, Thailand. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) guidelines for determining sample size in research, the study should comprise at least 41 participants for the quantitative phase. The invitation letter and a consent form were sent to all non-academic staff. After the invitation had been launched, all 46 staff voluntarily joined as study's participants. The participants are full-time employees working in non-academic roles, regardless of their work experience, gender, age, or contract type. The details of the participants are presented in Table 1. For the qualitative aspect, a purposive sampling approach was used to recruit five participants from different job positions. All non-academic staff at the research site received an invitation letter and a consent form to participate in the study.

**Table 1**  
**Participants of the study**

|                                                    | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b><u>Gender</u></b>                               |           |            |
| - Male                                             | 15        | 32.61      |
| - Female                                           | 31        | 67.39      |
| Total                                              | <b>46</b> | <b>100</b> |
| <b><u>Work Division</u></b>                        |           |            |
| - General administration at the department         | 10        | 21.74      |
| - Academic affairs and research                    | 6         | 13.04      |
| - Physical resources                               | 6         | 13.04      |
| - General administration at the Office of the Dean | 4         | 8.70       |
| - Student affairs                                  |           |            |
| - Information technology                           | 3         | 6.52       |
| - Human resources                                  | 3         | 6.52       |
| - Finance                                          | 2         | 4.35       |
| - Supplies                                         | 2         | 4.35       |
| - Strategic planning                               | 2         | 4.35       |
| - Quality assurance                                | 2         | 4.35       |
| - Public relations                                 | 2         | 4.35       |
| - Journal                                          | 1         | 2.17       |
| - Academic services                                | 1         | 2.17       |
| Total                                              | <b>46</b> | <b>100</b> |
| <b><u>Work Experience</u></b>                      |           |            |
| - Less than 5 years                                | 5         | 10.87      |
| - 6–15 years                                       | 6         | 13.04      |
| - 16–25 years                                      | 15        | 32.61      |
| - More than 26 years                               | 20        | 42.48      |
| Total                                              | <b>46</b> | <b>100</b> |
| <b><u>Period of English Study</u></b>              |           |            |
| - Less than 5 years                                | 10        | 21.74      |
| - 6–10 years                                       | 8         | 17.39      |
| - 11–15 years                                      | 7         | 15.22      |
| - More than 16 years                               | 18        | 39.13      |
| - Never                                            | 3         | 6.52       |
| Total                                              | <b>46</b> | <b>100</b> |

## Research instruments

This study followed a mixed-methods approach in which quantitative data were collected first through questionnaires, followed by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews to find more in-depth information to explain and expand upon the initial findings (Creswell, 2009).

The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies on English language use in professional settings and ICC (Chaiyapoo, 2017; Chamnaktan, 2022; Duisembekova, 2021; Puapuntuma, 2019; Sae-jeng, 2018). These earlier works provided tested items already shown to capture the kinds of skills, difficulties, and needs relevant to staff working in educational and international contexts. Using them as a foundation helped ensure that the instrument in this study was both contextually appropriate and comparable to existing research. At the same time, the items were adjusted to reflect the specific responsibilities of Thai non-academic staff, allowing the questionnaire to address the present research focus more directly. The questionnaire consisted of three sections including demographic information, work-based English skills, and beliefs about ICC. Additionally, a semi-structured interview, adapted from Chaiyapoo (2017) and Kiatkiri (2019), also was included to gain deeper insights into the participants' perspectives on English language use and ICC in the workplace.

Prior to data collection, the research protocol was reviewed and approved by a Human Research Ethics Committee. Before conducting the pilot study, the research instruments were reviewed by three experts to assess their Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). A pilot study was then conducted with 33 non-academic staff working at a public university in Thailand. Once responses were collected, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using SPSS and Cronbach's alpha. This analysis helped identify which items were to be retained or eliminated. Following Taber (2018), an alpha value of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable. Items falling below this threshold were removed. As presented in Table 2, the initial Cronbach's alpha scores for the two main domains of the questionnaire exceeded 0.70. When examining each component within the domains, all alpha values also met the minimum reliability threshold. As a result, no items were removed from the instrument.

**Table 2**  
**Questionnaires: Cronbach's alpha score**

| Domain                             | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha Score |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| <b>Work-related English Skills</b> | <b>32</b>       | <b>0.991</b>           |
| Listening                          | 9               | 0.988                  |
| Speaking                           | 10              | 0.977                  |
| Reading                            | 6               | 0.974                  |
| Writing                            | 7               | 0.976                  |
| <b>Beliefs about ICC</b>           | <b>23</b>       | <b>0.982</b>           |
| Attitudes                          | 9               | 0.967                  |
| Knowledge                          | 4               | 0.917                  |
| Skills                             | 7               | 0.976                  |
| Awareness                          | 3               | 0.960                  |

## Data analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. Following the interpretation framework suggested by Chyung et al. (2017) and Nyutu et al. (2021), where scores between 1.00 and 1.80 were interpreted as Very Low, 1.81 to 2.60 as Low, 2.61 to 3.40 as Moderate, 3.41 to 4.20 as High, and 4.21 to 5.00 as Very High.

For the qualitative data, interview recordings were transcribed and translated from Thai to English, with the translations reviewed by an expert for accuracy. Thematic content analysis was employed to identify patterns, themes, and meanings of the participants' perspectives (Berg & Lune, 2017) on work-based English skills and ICC in the workplace. Initial codes were then generated to capture recurring words, phrases, and ideas that reflected the participants' experiences and concerns. These codes were compared, refined, and grouped into broader categories. From these categories, themes were developed to represent the underlying patterns across the dataset. Throughout this process, attention was given not only to what the participants explicitly stated but also to the context in which their responses occurred, allowing for deeper interpretation.

## RESULTS

### RQ1: How do work-based English skills perceived by Thai non-academic staff differ from their perceived existing English proficiency?

This section presents a comparison between the level of importance assigned to various English skills and the staff's self-assessed current proficiency. The findings, summarized in Table 3, highlight noticeable gaps between perceived importance and actual ability across overall English skill areas in four main domains, offering insight into areas where professional development may be most needed.

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of perceived importance and existing levels of overall work-based English skills**

| Work-based English Skills | Level of Importance |      |                | Level of Perceived Existing Skills |      |                |
|---------------------------|---------------------|------|----------------|------------------------------------|------|----------------|
|                           | Mean                | S.D. | Interpretation | Mean                               | S.D. | Interpretation |
| Listening skill           | 3.94                | 0.75 | High           | 2.21                               | 0.74 | Low            |
| Speaking skill            | 3.79                | 0.86 | High           | 1.96                               | 0.70 | Low            |
| Reading skill             | 3.87                | 0.83 | High           | 2.16                               | 0.87 | Low            |
| Writing skill             | 3.60                | 0.91 | High           | 1.67                               | 0.75 | Very Low       |

According to Table 3, the results indicate a clear discrepancy between the level of importance and the perceived existing proficiency in work-based English skills among Thai non-academic staff. Among the four skills, listening was rated the most important (Mean = 3.94, S.D. = 0.75), followed by reading (Mean = 3.87, S.D. = 0.83), speaking (Mean = 3.79, S.D. = 0.86), and writing (Mean = 3.60, S.D. = 0.91).

However, the self-assessed proficiency in these skills was notably lower across the board. Listening was rated the most important skill (Mean = 3.94, SD = 0.75), yet participants reported a low level of proficiency (Mean = 2.21, SD = 0.74). Reading followed closely in importance (Mean = 3.87, SD = 0.83), with a similarly low perceived skill level (Mean = 2.16, SD = 0.87). Speaking was also seen as highly important (Mean = 3.79, SD = 0.86), though it received a low proficiency rating (Mean = 1.96, SD = 0.70). Writing had the lowest self-assessed proficiency (Mean = 1.67, SD = 0.75), despite still being considered important (Mean = 3.60, SD = 0.91). To further illustrate these findings, Table 4 provided comparison of perceived importance and existing work-based sub-skills within each of the four major English language domains.

**Table 4**  
**Comparison of perceived importance and existing work-based English in each skill**

| Level of Importance |      |                | Items                                                                                                                                                          | Level of Perceived Existing Skills |      |                |
|---------------------|------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Mean                | S.D. | Interpretation |                                                                                                                                                                | Mean                               | S.D. | Interpretation |
| Listening Skill     |      |                |                                                                                                                                                                |                                    |      |                |
| 4.13                | 0.69 | High           | (1) Listening and understanding greeting in English                                                                                                            | 2.61                               | 0.86 | Moderate       |
| 4.13                | 0.72 | High           | (2) Listening and understanding English in daily life conversations                                                                                            | 2.54                               | 0.86 | Low            |
| 4.00                | 0.82 | High           | (3) Listening and understanding English conversations on the telephone                                                                                         | 2.37                               | 0.88 | Low            |
| 4.07                | 0.71 | High           | (4) Listening and understanding in English general requests related to work, such as requesting various documents from foreign instructors or foreign students | 2.26                               | 0.88 | Low            |
| 4.02                | 0.80 | High           | (5) Listening and understanding English formal conversations, such as welcoming foreign guests, meetings, and seminars                                         | 2.20                               | 0.91 | Low            |
| 3.74                | 0.88 | High           | (6) Listening and understanding to take notes from listening to English                                                                                        | 1.91                               | 0.76 | Low            |
| 3.74                | 0.88 | High           | (7) Listening and understanding arguments in English                                                                                                           | 1.93                               | 0.80 | Low            |
| 3.93                | 0.93 | High           | (8) Listening and understanding the main ideas in English sentences                                                                                            | 2.13                               | 0.86 | Low            |
| 3.72                | 0.96 | High           | (9) Listening and understanding English with a variety of accents                                                                                              | 1.89                               | 0.82 | Low            |
| Speaking Skill      |      |                |                                                                                                                                                                |                                    |      |                |
| 4.07                | 0.90 | High           | (10) Introducing yourself in English                                                                                                                           | 2.67                               | 0.90 | Moderate       |
| 3.96                | 0.89 | High           | (11) Greeting and welcoming foreign instructors and students in English                                                                                        | 2.26                               | 0.88 | Low            |
| 3.67                | 0.94 | High           | (12) Brainstorming ideas and group discussions in English                                                                                                      | 1.85                               | 0.73 | Low            |
| 3.85                | 0.92 | High           | (13) Recommending and providing assistance to foreign instructors and students in English                                                                      | 2.13                               | 0.96 | Low            |
| 3.61                | 0.98 | High           | (14) Giving presentations at the meeting in English                                                                                                            | 1.67                               | 0.76 | Very Low       |
| 3.80                | 0.89 | High           | (15) Making an English conversation on the telephone                                                                                                           | 1.91                               | 0.84 | Low            |

| Level of Importance  |      |                | Items                                                                                                                                                           | Level of Perceived Existing Skills |      |                |
|----------------------|------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Mean                 | S.D. | Interpretation |                                                                                                                                                                 | Mean                               | S.D. | Interpretation |
| 3.52                 | 1.05 | High           | (16) Being a lecturer or speaker using English                                                                                                                  | 1.67                               | 0.76 | Very Low       |
| 3.70                 | 1.01 | High           | (17) Speaking and pronouncing English phonetics (rules and principles of English pronunciation) correctly                                                       | 1.72                               | 0.75 | Very Low       |
| 3.78                 | 0.97 | High           | (18) Speaking and pronouncing English with emphasis on stress words correctly                                                                                   | 1.83                               | 0.88 | Low            |
| 3.91                 | 0.92 | High           | (19) Speaking and making an English conversation grammatically correctly                                                                                        | 1.78                               | 0.79 | Very Low       |
| <b>Reading Skill</b> |      |                |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                    |      |                |
| 3.91                 | 0.89 | High           | (20) Reading and understanding various English media such as announcements, posters, brochures, magazines, and websites                                         | 2.37                               | 1.00 | Low            |
| 4.00                 | 0.92 | High           | (21) Reading and understanding various English official or work-related documents such as invitation letters, acceptance letters, forms, contracts, and letters | 2.30                               | 0.95 | Low            |
| 3.83                 | 0.88 | High           | (22) Reading and understanding announcements, regulations, and information written in English and published by KMITL or faculty                                 | 2.15                               | 0.89 | Low            |
| 3.91                 | 0.89 | High           | (23) Reading and understanding e-mail in English                                                                                                                | 2.30                               | 0.92 | Low            |
| 3.74                 | 0.91 | High           | (24) Reading and understanding various English academic articles such as journals, research articles                                                            | 1.96                               | 0.97 | Low            |
| 3.83                 | 0.95 | High           | (25) Use English reading skills and strategies correctly and accurately, such as finding the main idea, finding important words, and guessing vocabulary        | 1.85                               | 0.89 | Low            |
| <b>Writing Skill</b> |      |                |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                    |      |                |
| 3.61                 | 0.98 | High           | (26) Writing informal reports or documents in English                                                                                                           | 1.76                               | 0.85 | Very Low       |
| 3.67                 | 0.99 | High           | (27) Writing e-mails in English formally                                                                                                                        | 1.70                               | 0.81 | Very Low       |
| 3.76                 | 0.87 | High           | (28) Writing government publications or official documents in English                                                                                           | 1.67                               | 0.76 | Very Low       |
| 3.54                 | 0.96 | High           | (29) Writing formal meeting reports or project summaries in English                                                                                             | 1.59                               | 0.72 | Very Low       |
| 3.57                 | 1.07 | High           | (30) Writing a press release in English                                                                                                                         | 1.65                               | 0.77 | Very Low       |
| 3.54                 | 0.98 | High           | (31) Writing work manuals or procedures for providing services in English                                                                                       | 1.63                               | 0.77 | Very Low       |
| 3.50                 | 1.09 | High           | (32) Writing articles in English such as journals, research articles                                                                                            | 1.67                               | 0.85 | Very Low       |

The findings revealed a consistent and significant discrepancy between perceived importance of English skills and self-assessed proficiency of Thai non-academic staff across all four skill areas. While the participants rated workplace-related English tasks particularly those involving

everyday communication, document handling, and interaction with international colleagues as highly important, their reported proficiency remained notably lower in all cases.

In listening and speaking, the discrepancy was particularly evident in routine communicative functions such as greetings, daily conversations, and workplace interactions. Although these skills were perceived as essential for effective professional communication, proficiency levels ranged from moderate to low, indicating limited confidence in real-time interaction. This gap was even more pronounced in speaking accuracy and conversational ability, suggesting that staff struggled not only with understanding but also with producing English in practical contexts.

A similar pattern emerged in reading skills, where tasks such as understanding official documents, emails, and institutional materials were rated highly important, yet proficiency remained low. This suggests that while staff are regularly exposed to English texts in their work, they lack sufficient strategies and linguistic resources to process such materials efficiently.

The most critical discrepancy was found in writing skills. Despite recognizing the importance of producing formal documents, emails, and reports in English, the participants reported very low proficiency across all writing tasks. This indicates a substantial lack of confidence and competence in written communication, particularly in formal and institutional contexts where accuracy and appropriateness are crucial.

Overall, these findings pointed to a systemic gap between workplace demands and existing English language competencies. The discrepancy was not limited to a single skill but was evident across listening, speaking, reading, and especially writing, reflecting a mismatch between institutional expectations and staff preparedness. This highlights an urgent need for targeted English language training programs that are context-specific and practice-oriented, focusing on real workplace scenarios. Such training should prioritize interactive communication, document literacy, and professional writing skills to effectively bridge the gap and support staff in meeting the demands of an increasingly internationalized academic environment.

## **RQ2: How do beliefs about ICC perceived by Thai non-academic staff differ from their perceived existing level of competence?**

This section showed the comparison between the levels of perceived importance and existing ICC, the findings revealed a noticeable gap between what participants considered essential and their self-assessed current competence, as presented in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**  
**Comparison of perceived importance and existing beliefs about ICC**

| Beliefs about ICC | Level of Importance |      |                | Level of Perceived Existing Competence |      |                |
|-------------------|---------------------|------|----------------|----------------------------------------|------|----------------|
|                   | Mean                | S.D. | Interpretation | Mean                                   | S.D. | Interpretation |
| Attitudes         | 3.89                | 0.74 | High           | 3.02                                   | 0.95 | Moderate       |
| Knowledge         | 3.69                | 0.83 | High           | 2.56                                   | 0.87 | Low            |
| Skills            | 3.71                | 0.82 | High           | 2.15                                   | 0.90 | Low            |
| Awareness         | 3.75                | 0.86 | High           | 2.40                                   | 1.04 | Low            |

Thai non-academic staff perceived all components of ICC as important at high level. Among these competencies, “attitudes” received the highest rating (Mean = 3.89, S.D. = 0.74), followed by “awareness” (Mean = 3.75, S.D. = 0.86), “skills” (Mean = 3.71, S.D. = 0.82), and “knowledge” (Mean = 3.69, S.D. = 0.83), respectively.

Nevertheless, their self-perceived proficiency levels were markedly lower, with knowledge, skills, and awareness rated as low, and attitudes rated moderately. “attitudes” received the moderate level (Mean = 3.02, S.D. = 0.95), followed by “knowledge” (Mean = 2.56, S.D. = 0.87), “awareness” (Mean = 2.40, S.D. = 1.04), and “skills” (Mean = 2.15, S.D. = 0.87).

Tables 6 presented the detailed findings across the four main domains of ICC.

**Table 6**  
**Comparison of importance and perceived competence in each domain**

| Level of Importance |      |                | Items                                                                                                                                      | Level of Existing Competence |      |                |
|---------------------|------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Mean                | S.D. | Interpretation |                                                                                                                                            | Mean                         | S.D. | Interpretation |
| Attitudes           |      |                |                                                                                                                                            |                              |      |                |
| 3.89                | 0.88 | High           | (1) Valuing cultural diversity                                                                                                             | 2.93                         | 1.14 | Moderate       |
| 4.13                | 0.81 | High           | (2) Respecting people who have different cultures                                                                                          | 3.20                         | 1.12 | Moderate       |
| 3.76                | 0.82 | High           | (3) Willing to learn from people who have different cultural orientations                                                                  | 3.02                         | 0.95 | Moderate       |
| 3.98                | 0.83 | High           | (4) Willing to empathize with people who have different cultural backgrounds                                                               | 3.15                         | 1.01 | Moderate       |
| 3.87                | 1.00 | High           | (5) Enthusiastic interacting with people from different cultures                                                                           | 3.13                         | 1.09 | Moderate       |
| 3.67                | 0.87 | High           | (6) Having the mindset that communication with people from different cultures is easy                                                      | 2.70                         | 0.94 | Moderate       |
| 3.98                | 0.83 | High           | (7) Accepting the opinions of people from different cultures                                                                               | 3.24                         | 1.14 | Moderate       |
| 3.83                | 0.80 | High           | (8) Being open-minded to communicate with people who do not speak Thai                                                                     | 2.89                         | 1.06 | Moderate       |
| 3.89                | 0.82 | High           | (9) Being flexible towards cultural differences                                                                                            | 2.96                         | 1.01 | Moderate       |
| Knowledge           |      |                |                                                                                                                                            |                              |      |                |
| 3.76                | 0.79 | High           | (10) Knowing the similarities and differences between other cultures and ours, such as lifestyles, ideas, and traditions                   | 2.74                         | 0.98 | Moderate       |
| 3.67                | 0.85 | High           | (11) Being able to analyze cultural data to find the causes and origins of each culture’s behavior                                         | 2.65                         | 0.99 | Moderate       |
| 3.72                | 0.89 | High           | (12) Being able to interpret cultural information such as languages, gestures, and traditions to adapt behavior or languages appropriately | 2.46                         | 0.89 | Low            |

| Level of Importance |      |                | Items                                                                                                                                                                               | Level of Perceived Existing Competence |      |                |
|---------------------|------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Mean                | S.D. | Interpretation |                                                                                                                                                                                     | Mean                                   | S.D. | Interpretation |
| 3.61                | 0.95 | High           | (13) Being able to connect cultural information to find relationships between cultures                                                                                              | 2.39                                   | 0.88 | Low            |
| <b>Skills</b>       |      |                |                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                        |      |                |
| 3.78                | 0.87 | High           | (14) Being able to communicate in English effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds                                                                               | 2.09                                   | 0.94 | Low            |
| 3.87                | 0.89 | High           | (15) Being able to use gestures effectively with people from different cultures                                                                                                     | 2.33                                   | 1.08 | Low            |
| 3.67                | 0.90 | High           | (16) Being able to identify misunderstandings arising from language usage and gestures during English conversation                                                                  | 2.13                                   | 0.93 | Low            |
| 3.65                | 0.90 | High           | (17) Be able to compare the communication behavior of Thai speakers and other language speakers in a variety of contexts, such as family, school, and work                          | 2.09                                   | 0.92 | Low            |
| 3.67                | 0.90 | High           | (18) Being able to identify cultures that are different from mine                                                                                                                   | 2.13                                   | 0.98 | Low            |
| 3.65                | 0.88 | High           | (19) Being able to seek opportunities to interact with individuals from different cultures                                                                                          | 2.13                                   | 1.07 | Low            |
| 3.76                | 0.82 | High           | (20) Being able to use strategies of communication accurately and appropriately when interacting with people of different cultures, such as politeness, requesting, and criticizing | 2.15                                   | 1.01 | Low            |
| <b>Awareness</b>    |      |                |                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                        |      |                |
| 3.74                | 0.83 | High           | (21) Being able to understand and be aware of one's own and other people's cultures                                                                                                 | 2.41                                   | 0.98 | Low            |
| 3.74                | 0.91 | High           | (22) Awareness of the factors and causes of cultural conflict                                                                                                                       | 2.39                                   | 1.15 | Low            |
| 3.76                | 0.90 | High           | (23) Awareness of the impact of cultural conflicts created by the speaker, which will affect interpersonal and cultural conflicts                                                   | 2.39                                   | 1.09 | Low            |

The results revealed a consistent and notable discrepancy between perceived importance of ICC and self-assessed competence of Thai non-academic staff across all components. While participants highly valued attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness for effective intercultural interaction, their perceived competence in applying these components remained only moderate to low.

In the attitudinal domain, staff demonstrated strong recognition of the importance of respect, empathy, and openness toward cultural differences; however, their self-assessed ability to enact these attitudes in practice was only moderate. This suggests that while appropriate

intercultural dispositions are cognitively acknowledged, they are not yet fully internalized or consistently translated into behavior in workplace contexts.

A similar discrepancy was evident in the knowledge component. Although the participants acknowledged the importance of understanding cultural similarities and differences, interpreting cultural cues, and analyzing cultural behaviors, their competence particularly in interpreting cultural information was rated lower. This indicates a gap between conceptual awareness of culture and the ability to apply such knowledge in real-time interactions.

The gap became more pronounced in the skills component. Despite recognizing the importance of effective communication strategies, appropriate use of gestures, and English communication in intercultural contexts, the participants reported low competence across these areas. This suggests that practical communicative abilities, especially those requiring immediate interaction and adaptation, remain underdeveloped.

Likewise, in the awareness component, participants valued understanding cultural conflict, self-awareness, and the impact of intercultural interactions, yet their perceived competence was low. This reflects limited ability to critically reflect on and manage intercultural situations, particularly in resolving or anticipating cultural misunderstandings.

Overall, these findings indicate a systemic mismatch between institutional demands for intercultural competence and the existing capabilities of staff. The discrepancy was evident across all ICC dimensions but was especially critical in the areas of skills and awareness, where practical application was required. This underscores the need for targeted, practice-oriented training programs that move beyond theoretical understanding to experiential learning. Such programs should include interactive workshops, role-playing activities, real-world intercultural engagement, and reflective practices to enhance both competence and confidence. Addressing this gap is essential for enabling staff to function effectively in increasingly multicultural and internationalized workplace environments.

In addition to the questionnaire data, this study also incorporated findings from semi-structured interviews. The interview results are presented in the next section encompassing two parts namely essential work-related English skills and beliefs about ICC.

## **Results from the interviews**

### **1. Work-based English skills**

Based on interviews with five Thai non-academic staff, five major themes emerged including essential English skills, challenges in English language proficiency, strategies for coping with language difficulties, training needs and preferred formats for English skill development, and additional measures for English improvement.

### 1.1 Essential English skills

The participants identified key English skills based on their job responsibilities. Listening and speaking were essential for real-time communication, while reading and writing supported technical and administrative tasks. The staff's viewpoints are evident in the excerpts:

*Listening is the most important skill because I often work with foreigners.*

*In my work, listening and speaking are very important for real-time communication. For example, when international students or visitors come to the office and have questions about registration or campus services, I need to listen carefully and respond immediately to help them. If my listening isn't good, I might misunderstand and give them the wrong information. Speaking clearly is also crucial because many visitors are not native English speakers, so I have to explain things in a simple and polite way to make sure they understand.*

*Reading and writing skills are crucial for handling technical and administrative tasks. I regularly read detailed emails, guidelines, and application forms in English to ensure correct procedures. Writing clear, professional emails and formal documents, such as letters and agreements for student exchange programs, is also essential. Inaccurate writing could easily lead to confusion or delays.*

### 1.2 Challenges in English language proficiency

Writing was commonly mentioned as a challenge among the staff, particularly due to difficulties with grammar and sentence structure. One staff member shared, *"I am not good at writing or drafting letters, as I struggle with grammar and sentence structure,"* while another noted, *"I sometimes know what the word is, but I am unable to write it accurately."* Listening and speaking were also identified as problematic, especially due to accents and pronunciation issues. As one staff member explained, *"For listening, some accents are difficult to understand,"* and added, *"For speaking, sometimes I pronounce one sound, but the listeners understand it as a different word."*

### 1.3 Strategies for coping with language difficulties

To overcome language difficulties, the participants relied heavily on technology and peer support. They shared various strategies, such as using AI programs to check and correct documents, consulting Google Translate, and seeking help from more proficient colleagues. One participant noted, *"When I'm not sure about grammar, I paste my writing into Grammarly or ChatGPT to check before sending it out."* Another mentioned, *"Sometimes I use Google Translate, then ask a friend who's good at English to confirm if the meaning is accurate."*

### 1.4 Training needs and preferred formats for English skill development

There was strong interest in English training programs, particularly in speaking, listening, and writing skills, along with several suggestions regarding the format. One participant noted,

*"Speaking training should be prioritized because only a few non-academic staff members can speak or communicate in English."* Another emphasized the importance of writing skills, stating, *"Improving email writing or formal letter writing skills would be beneficial."* Regarding delivery formats, participants suggested that *"Writing training can be online, but speaking and listening should be onsite."* They also proposed flexible scheduling options, such as *"a weekday after work or during the lunch break... or by asking participants first through a survey."* To further enhance effectiveness, one participant recommended, *"The first session can be taught by a Thai teacher, and the second session can be taught by a foreign teacher."*

### **1.5 Additional measures for English improvement**

Suggestions for improvement focused on enhancing the English-speaking environment, encouraging informal practice, and fostering motivation through incentives and cultural awareness. One participant noted, *"Communication signs and the school's environment should be improved to promote English usage."* Another suggested, *"Small activities, such as a morning talk before starting work, could be organized to encourage staff to practice speaking English daily."* Similarly, it was recommended that *"providing daily opportunities for short conversations in English can help support our staff in building confidence."* To further motivate staff, one respondent proposed, *"Offering incentives, such as prizes, could motivate staff to use English more."* Finally, the importance of cultural awareness was highlighted with the comment, *"Incorporating cultural information into English training is essential to foster mutual respect and cultural sensitivity."*

## **2. Understanding ICC**

Based on interviews with five Thai non-academic staff, three major themes emerged including ICC as cultural awareness and mutual learning, important and challenging components of ICC, and necessity of ICC for non-academic staff.

### **2.1 ICC as cultural awareness and mutual learning**

The participants viewed ICC as the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries, fostering mutual respect and minimizing misunderstandings, especially in multicultural academic environments. One participant described ICC as *"the context in which people from different countries and races come together and interact with each other."* Another emphasized the importance of cultural awareness in communication, stating, *"By understanding their cultural backgrounds, we can better comprehend the content or context of our communication."* Participants also highlighted that *"it is the differences in culture... These differences lead to various ways of speaking and thinking."* Moreover, ICC was seen as a two-way learning process, as one participant explained, *"It allows me to learn, comprehend, access, and understand the culture of each country... while also helping people from different cultural backgrounds learn more about our culture."*

## 2.2 Important and challenging components of ICC

There was no single consensus among the participants on the most important component for effective intercultural communication. Some participants favored attitudes for fostering openness, others emphasized knowledge to avoid misunderstandings, and some highlighted awareness as the foundation for developing the other components. As one participant noted, *"If we are open-minded, the other elements will naturally follow,"* while another stressed, *"Effective communication cannot happen without adequate knowledge."* A third participant added, *"Awareness is essential because it ensures that individuals understand the importance of communication."*

However, many also agreed that attitudes were the most challenging to develop, particularly among those resistant to change or lacking exposure to diverse cultures. As one remarked, *"Some people are not open-minded. This mindset is difficult to change,"* while another explained, *"Changing an attitude that does not accept differences is very hard."* Additionally, it was noted that *"People are often not as interested in different cultures unless they are directly related, which makes these elements harder to practice."*

## 2.3 Necessity of ICC for non-academic staff

All participants agreed that ICC is essential for staff interacting with international students and lecturers, as it helps ensure respectful, effective communication and reduces cultural conflict. One participant emphasized, *"We must communicate with them kindly and respectfully. Understanding their cultural backgrounds will enable smoother communication and help reduce the chances of cultural misunderstandings."* Another added, *"ICC is crucial in a globalized world to prevent misunderstandings... If someone uses a slang word that is not appropriate in general communication, it could lead to misunderstandings."* Participants also highlighted the importance of adaptability, with one noting, *"Developing ICC helps in adapting skills and knowledge for effective collaboration,"* and another stating, *"ICC is significant for communicating effectively with the growing number of international students."* However, some participants observed that ICC might be less critical for staff with limited international engagement, though it remains valuable for overall workplace harmony. As one participant commented, *"ICC is important for staff who handle foreign-related tasks but may not be as crucial for those who do not interact with foreigners."*

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal critical discrepancies between perceived importance of English language skills and ICC, and actual self-assessed proficiency levels among Thai non-academic staff. These gaps are not only statistically significant but also indicative of deeper and systemic issues in workplace preparedness for internationalization.

The consistently high ratings across all four English skills particularly listening and reading underscore the participants' recognition of these competencies as vital for effective job performance. Listening and reading skills were rated as the most important by Thai

non-academic staff in an international workplace likely because these skills are foundational to understanding and completing daily tasks in a multilingual, globalized environment. Listening was essential for accurately receiving instructions, responding to inquiries from international students or faculty, and participating in meetings or training conducted in English. The findings reflect the high-stakes nature of staff roles, where even minor misunderstandings can affect the quality of services delivered to international students and academic partners. As one staff member might experience, *"If I can't fully understand what international students or lecturers are saying, I risk giving the wrong information or appearing unhelpful."* Reading, on the other hand, is crucial for written communication such as emails, official documents, forms, guidelines, and academic correspondence. Many non-academic tasks require careful attention to detail in reading texts that are often formal and context-specific. In this sense, reading becomes more than a passive skill; it is a gatekeeping tool that determines whether staff can access, interpret, and act on institutional information effectively. Moreover, these skills are often passive and less socially risky compared to speaking and writing, which involve more visible production and can evoke fear of making mistakes (Asrimawati & Margan, 2020; Pérez-Segura et al., 2020). Therefore, listening and reading are not only practical but also psychologically safer for staff who may have limited confidence in their productive language skills. Their prioritization reflects both the demands of their roles and their comfort levels within those demands.

However, the very low self-assessed proficiency, especially in writing (Mean = 1.67), signals a mismatch between workplace demands and existing language training opportunities. This mismatch points to a structural issue in professional development, where writing despite being a core requirement for producing formal documents, institutional reports, and correspondence—remains under-supported in training programs. These gaps align with earlier studies (e.g., Chamnaktan, 2022; Sukprasert, 2016), which reported similar patterns among Thai non-academic staff, especially in listening and speaking skills, due to a lack of workplace-specific training and minimal real-life exposure.

The qualitative data reinforces this, revealing that many participants feel unprepared for real-time communication tasks and struggle with formal writing, often resorting to translation tools or peer support. One participant noted, *"I sometimes know what the word is, but I am unable to write it accurately,"* emphasizing the disconnect between passive vocabulary recognition and productive writing skills. This reliance on external aids such as online translators highlights an underlying issue of linguistic insecurity, which in turn undermines staff's professional identity and autonomy in their roles. The reliance on external support reflects low confidence, which, as Chaiyapoo (2017) pointed out, is a major barrier to language application in workplace settings.

In terms of ICC, while the participants rated all four components (attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness) as highly important particularly attitudes, their self-perceived competence remained low. This is consistent with findings by Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020), who reported that Thai employees often possess positive intercultural attitudes but lack the experiential learning needed to turn those attitudes into action. The current study echoes this: one participant noted, *"Changing an attitude that does not accept differences is very*

*hard,”* which may reflect the challenge of unlearning deeply embedded ethnocentric views in a homogeneous cultural context. In this regard, ICC does not fail because of conceptual misunderstanding but because of the difficulty in transforming values into practice when staff have limited contact with diverse cultural groups.

A key explanation for the limited ICC competence lies in the participants’ limited intercultural exposure. As noted in the interviews, many staff members engage minimally with foreigners or do so under constrained and formal conditions, limiting opportunities for spontaneous cultural learning. Byram’s (1997) ICC model emphasizes discovery and interaction skills as critical for building awareness and knowledge—two components that received the lowest self-assessed ratings. Without practical experience, even well-intentioned attitudes remain underdeveloped. This suggests that ICC training cannot be purely theoretical but must be coupled with authentic, interactive experiences that expose staff to real cultural diversity.

Moreover, the nature of professional roles may influence the gap. Staff members whose duties involve routine administrative or technical tasks may prioritize accuracy and clarity over fluency and intercultural awareness, thus leading to underdeveloped communication confidence despite recognizing the importance of these skills. This echoes observations by Inkaew (2015), who found that front-desk employees in Thai hotels, while regularly engaging with foreign guests, lacked the training and institutional support to develop cross-cultural communication strategies.

Another plausible factor is the influence of Thai cultural values, for example, *‘kreng jai’* (deference to authority and avoidance of confrontation), which may suppress the development of assertive communication or spontaneous interaction, both central to ICC (Derrah et al., 2024). In educational workplaces with hierarchical cultures, staff may hesitate to initiate conversations with foreign faculty or students, limiting practical opportunities for skill application. This cultural factor highlights that institutional training alone may not be enough unless it also addresses broader cultural norms that shape workplace communication. Finally, while the staff expressed strong interest in professional development, the preferred methods such as hybrid training by both Thai and native-speaker instructors, flexible scheduling, and culturally infused content suggest that effective training must be both contextually sensitive and pedagogically varied. As one participant stated, *“Writing training can be online, but speaking and listening should be onsite,”* indicating that language skills must be situated in authentic, interactive contexts to yield meaningful improvement.

In summary, the gaps found in this study are not only quantitative but qualitative in nature. They stem from lack of targeted training, cultural norms (reluctance to engage across hierarchies), and pedagogical gaps (insufficient practical exposure). Addressing these requires a multi-pronged strategy: curriculum redesign that incorporates real-life tasks, ICC workshops grounded in Byram’s model, and an institutional culture that encourages open, respectful intercultural engagement. Only by bridging these gaps can Thai non-academic staff be empowered to participate confidently in increasingly internationalized academic environments.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Data were collected through self-assessment questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, offering valuable insights but also presenting limitations. Self-assessments may lack accuracy, as participants might over- or underestimate their English proficiency and IC due to limited self-awareness or subjective interpretations. Unlike standardized tests, self-reported data cannot yield precise measurements. Additionally, the findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable to all Thai non-academic staff. Future research should consider combining self-assessments with objective language tests and expanding the sample to staff from diverse institutions across Thailand to improve validity and generalizability.

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