
An Exploration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) among Thai Internship Students for Intercultural Communication Course Design

การสำรวจความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาฝึกงานเพื่อการออกแบบรายวิชาการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม

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Abstract

This study explored the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of Business English internship students at a university in Roi Et Province, Thailand. ICC is crucial for working in hospitality settings, especially when interacting with international guests. A questionnaire was designed to measure ICC in four dimensions: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. The questionnaire was administered online through Google Forms to 31 purposively selected undergraduate internship students who had direct interaction with foreign guests during their internships in hospitality enterprises. The results revealed that the internship students in the study have a low level of ICC, particularly in the attitudinal dimension. They were also found to have limited knowledge regarding processes of social interaction at both individual and societal levels. However, the results showed that the students demonstrate a high level of adaptability skills and critical cultural awareness. The findings are valuable for designing courses aimed at enhancing students' ICC, enabling them to gain greater benefits from their internships and better preparing them to work effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds after graduation.

Keywords: intercultural communication (IC), internship students, intercultural communicative competence (ICC), IC course design

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ ของมหาวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งในจังหวัดร้อยเอ็ด ซึ่งความสามารถนี้มีความสำคัญต่อนักศึกษาที่ฝึกงานในบริบทการบริการและการโรงแรม โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งการมีปฏิสัมพันธ์กับลูกค้าชาวต่างชาติ งานวิจัยนี้ใช้วิธีวิจัยแบบสำรวจ โดยใช้แบบสอบถามที่ออกแบบขึ้นเพื่อวัดทัศนคติ ความรู้ ทักษะ และความตระหนักรู้ทางวัฒนธรรมเชิงวิพากษ์ ผู้วิจัยได้เก็บข้อมูลผ่านแบบสอบถามออนไลน์ด้วย Google Form จากนักศึกษาฝึกงานระดับปริญญาตรีจำนวน 31 คน ซึ่งเป็นการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจง โดยพิจารณาจากนักศึกษาที่มีการปฏิสัมพันธ์โดยตรงกับลูกค้าชาวต่างชาติระหว่างการฝึกงานในสถานประกอบการด้านการบริการ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า นักศึกษาฝึกงานมีจุดอ่อนในด้านทัศนคติ นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่า นักศึกษามีระดับความรู้ด้านกระบวนการปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมทั้งในระดับปัจเจกบุคคลและระดับสังคมต่ำ อย่างไรก็ตาม นักศึกษามีความสามารถในการปรับตัวและความตระหนักรู้ทางวัฒนธรรมเชิงวิพากษ์ อยู่ในระดับสูง ผลการวิจัยนี้สามารถใช้เป็นแนวทางในการออกแบบรายวิชาการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม เพื่อช่วยพัฒนาความสามารถในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษา ให้ได้รับประโยชน์สูงสุดจากการฝึกงาน และมีความพร้อมในการทำงานร่วมกับบุคคลจากหลากหลายวัฒนธรรมหลังสำเร็จการศึกษา

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Introduction

Intercultural communication is very important in today's globalized world, as individuals from various cultural backgrounds increasingly interact across cultures. In such interactions, effective communication involves not only verbal and non-verbal communication but also intercultural communicative competence. Developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) requires the enhancement of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. Intercultural attitudes—such as respect for others' cultural norms, beliefs, and values (Deardorff, 2004), as well as openness and curiosity toward cultural differences (Byram, 1997)—are essential for effective intercultural engagement.

In addition, effective intercultural encounters require an understanding of people from different cultural backgrounds through the acquisition of culture-specific knowledge (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994), deeper cultural knowledge (Deardorff, 2004), as well as knowledge of processes of interaction at the individual and societal levels (Byram, 1997). The development of intercultural skills is also necessary. These include the ability to analyze, interpret, and relate cultural perspectives; discovery and interaction skills; listening and observing skills; and flexibility and adaptability in communication across diverse cultural contexts and unfamiliar intercultural environments (Dimitrov et al., 2014). Furthermore, intercultural communication enhances self-awareness, encouraging learners to reflect on their emotional responses, biases, and potential for discriminatory attitudes.

In the context of Thailand, intercultural communication is of growing importance due to the increasing number of international hospitality enterprises. Since Thailand continues to attract visitors as a major destination for European and Asian travelers (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2025), service

personnel and internship students are required to interact with guests from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to serve global guests effectively, reduce misunderstandings, and enhance service quality (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017; Inkaew, 2015; Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). To meet this need, lecturers should make deliberate efforts to develop students' ICC, which includes attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness.

Although steps have been taken to integrate language and intercultural competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, existing studies have mainly focused on classroom-based pedagogical practices, including project-based learning, role-plays, discussions, songs, movie clips, and intercultural communication tasks designed to enhance students' intercultural awareness and communication skills (Ayuthaya, 2018; Barr & Chinwonno, 2016; Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Phongsirikul & Thongrin, 2018; Witayarat & Bunnjaweht, 2024). In addition to classroom settings, some studies have examined Thai students' intercultural interactions with foreigners in workplace contexts, particularly hospitality internships where students are required to communicate with international guests (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017; Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). However, with comprehensive research on intercultural communication competence (ICC) deficiencies among internship students in domestic hospitality settings being limited, a gap persists between classroom-based ICC learning and real-time intercultural interaction. To bridge this gap, the present study investigates the ICC of Business English internship students at Roi Et Rajabhat University who completed internships in various hospitality enterprises. The findings are expected to offer pedagogical implications for intercultural communication course design, preparing undergraduate students for intercultural interaction in globalized professional environments.

Therefore, this study addresses two research questions: 1) To what extent have internship students established their intercultural communicative competence? and 2) What components of intercultural communicative competence remain deficient among internship students from a public university in Northeastern Thailand?

Literature Review

The Conceptualization of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) integrates communicative competence and intercultural competence. The concept of communicative competence was originally introduced by Hymes (1972) to describe the abilities that speakers have in their first language. This concept was later expanded within the field of foreign language teaching (Canale & Swain, 1980; van Ek, 1986) through the inclusion of sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, socio-cultural competence, and social competence. Nevertheless, these models were primarily developed within native-speaker-oriented communication contexts and gave limited attention to intercultural interaction among individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997).

As hospitality enterprises increasingly involve intercultural contact, communicative competence alone is no longer sufficient for successful intercultural interaction. Consequently, scholars increasingly conceptualized intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as an integration of communicative competence and intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness for effective and appropriate intercultural interaction (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2004; Barrett & Byram, 2022).

ICC Framework of Analysis

Since no single ICC framework fully captures intercultural interaction in hospitality internship settings, this study integrates the concepts proposed by Byram (1997), Deardorff (2004), and Barrett and Byram (2022), as shown in Figure 1. Byram's model and the framework proposed by Barrett and Byram are particularly relevant to foreign language education, as they provide explicit conceptualizations of ICC components—attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness—thereby offering guidance for questionnaire construction and interpretation in language learning contexts. Meanwhile, Deardorff's (2004) model contributes a process-oriented perspective emphasizing adaptability, flexibility, an ethnorelative orientation, and empathy as outcomes of intercultural learning. Furthermore, the model's development through Delphi research involving intercultural scholars and practitioners strengthens its empirical foundation. Combining these frameworks enables the present study to examine ICC from both pedagogical and empirically grounded perspectives.

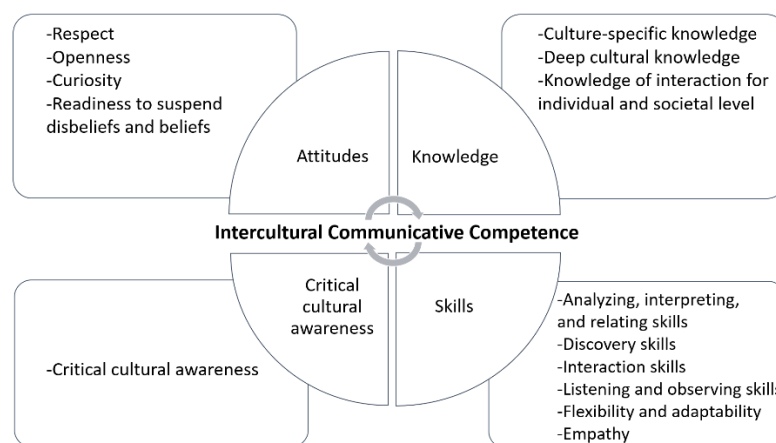


Figure 1: Framework of analysis used in this study, adapted from Byram (1997), Deardorff (2004), and Barrett and Byram (2022)

Attitudes

Based on the literature review focusing on ICC, the attitude components consist of respect, openness, curiosity, and a readiness to suspend disbeliefs about other cultures and beliefs about one's own (Barrett & Byram, 2022; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2004), as shown in figure 1. Barrett and Byram (2022) define respect as acknowledging and appreciating other people's identities. When interacting with people from different groups, individuals demonstrate respect by acknowledging others' identities and understanding the importance they attribute to those identities. In terms of openness, Byram (1997)

defines openness as “the willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or to profit from others” (p. 57). Drawing on this conceptualization, the present study adopted Byram’s ICC framework to construct the questionnaire items that emphasize students’ equal relationships and daily experiences during their internships.

Byram (1997) further conceptualizes curiosity as an interest in discovering different perspectives for interpreting both familiar and unfamiliar phenomena within one’s own and other cultures. Accordingly, the questionnaire item assessing students’ curiosity reflects positive intercultural attitudes, indicating their willingness to explore other cultural perspectives without prioritizing their own cultural norms over those of others. At the same time, Byram (1997) proposes that individuals need to be equipped with “attitudes of readiness to suspend disbeliefs and judgements with respect to others” (p. 34). These attitudes discourage individuals from assuming that familiar cultural practices shared between themselves and others are interpreted in the same way. In this study, this component was treated as a negative attitude indicator to investigate students’ lack of readiness to suspend disbeliefs and their beliefs about their own and other cultures, which may lead to ethnocentric perspectives.

Knowledge

ICC knowledge refers to an individual’s ability to understand the world from multiple perspectives, particularly their own and those of people from different cultural backgrounds. ICC knowledge is described in culture-specific knowledge (Byram, 1997; Barrett & Byram, 2022; Deardorff, 2004), deep cultural knowledge (Barrett & Byram, 2022; Deardorff, 2004), and knowledge of interactions at individual and societal levels (Byram, 1997). In this study, culture-specific knowledge is acquired through socialization—both primary (family) and secondary (formal education), including cultural narratives, historical interpretations, and social norms. Another kind of culture-specific knowledge proposed by Barrett and Byram (2022) is a critical understanding of language and communication. It is important to emphasize that people from other cultural backgrounds may interpret and use verbal and non-verbal communication differently, even when sharing the same language (Barrett & Byram, 2022).

Deep cultural knowledge is categorized as a key dimension of ICC knowledge necessary for understanding the underlying values, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and thought patterns that shape individuals’ behaviors within a particular cultural context. The knowledge of other countries, as well as the beliefs, meanings, and behaviors attributed to an interlocutor, is relational and connected to the knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels. An individual who understands how their social identities are formed, how these identities construct their perceptions of others within their group, and how they view interlocutors from different groups, gains a foundation for effective interaction (Byram, 1997).

Skills

Within the framework of ICC, skills refer to the ability to perform a particular task, including analyzing, interpreting, and relating skills; discovery skills; interaction skills; listening and observing skills; flexibility and adaptability; and empathy (see figure 1) The discovery skill requires knowledge and an understanding of

cultural beliefs, meanings, and behaviors, particularly in situations where prior knowledge is limited. Interaction skills are crucial for obtaining new cultural knowledge and handling intercultural challenges, such as time pressure and differences in perception during communication. Listening and observing skills involve not only attending to what is said, but also how it is conveyed through tone, pitch, gesture, and silence (Barrett & Byram, 2022). Moreover, flexibility and adaptability require individuals to adjust their communication styles and behaviors effectively in unfamiliar intercultural situations (Barrett & Byram, 2022). Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and respond to others' thoughts, emotions, and experiences within their cultural contexts (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). It plays a key role in promoting mutual understanding and resolving conflicts.

Critical Cultural Awareness

Critical cultural awareness refers to the ability to critically understand and evaluate perspectives, practices, and products within one's own culture and those of others using explicit criteria (Byram, 1997). Critical cultural awareness requires the evaluative analysis of documents and events, guided by clearly explicit perspectives and values (Byram, 1997). Barrett and Byram (2022) emphasize that even individuals who are open-minded, curious, and respectful of cultural differences may experience resistance or discomfort due to their deeply embedded cultural assumptions.

Methodology

This survey research study was designed as a preliminary investigation to gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of undergraduate Business English internship students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The findings may serve as a guideline for designing an intercultural communication course that addresses students' needs in intercultural settings.

Participants

The participants in this study were 31 Business English students selected via purposive sampling, all of whom were undertaking an internship during their final year of university study.

Instrument

The instrument used in the study was a questionnaire divided into two sections: 1) the demographic profiles of the participants, and 2) their levels of ICC. The first section collected participants' background information. In the second part, the questionnaire was divided into four primary domains with 34 items that addressed attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness based on the definitions and specific objectives proposed by Byram (1997) and Barrett and Byram (2022). The Index of Congruence (IOC) was employed to evaluate the content validity of the questionnaire. Five experts in intercultural communication and English language teaching assessed the questionnaire. A pilot test was then conducted with non-sample students to check the clarity of each item. Finally, the reliability of the questionnaire was tested and confirmed at 0.84 through Cronbach's Alpha.

Research Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed and administered online to 31 internship students from a university in Roi Et Province, Thailand. The data collected from the questionnaire was then analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequency and mean scores, were used to examine the students' intercultural communicative competence, specifically attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness, based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Results

The results from the questionnaire are presented into two parts: the demographic background of the participants and the four core components of intercultural communicative competence.

Demographic Background

The results revealed that all the students (100.00%) were twenty to twenty-five years old. Most of them were female (83.87%). It was also found that during the internship, all the students (100.00%) interacted with foreign guests. The results showed that most respondents' positions (93.6%) required frequent interaction with foreign guests. However, the rest of the respondents (6.45%) were provided with limited opportunities to interact with foreign guests. Furthermore, it was found that most students in the current study (93.55%) lacked international exposure. Only two of them (6.45%) annually visited foreign countries for travelling. Their destinations included Singapore (3.23%) and Laos (3.23%). The results revealed that only 25.81% of the students had the opportunity to participate in an intercultural communication course, whereas the majority (74.19%) had not attended such a course.

The Four Components of Intercultural Communicative Competence

The results of the students' ICC level in terms of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness are discussed as follows.

Attitudes

In this study, the attitude component was assessed through respect, openness, curiosity, and a willingness to suspend judgement during intercultural interactions. The students' ICC level of attitudes relevant to ICC is summarized in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1: Internship Students' ICC Attitudes

ICC Attitudes	Mean	S.D.	ICC Level
1. While I was in the internship, I met various kinds of people. I respect their beliefs, perspectives, and experiences.	4.65	.61	Very high
2. When I talk to a foreign guest, I tend to touch them, and I found that some stepped away from me and some did not. I understand that each individual requires different personal space.	3.58	1.34	High
3. When I communicate with foreigners in English, I would rather speak to native speakers than non-native speakers.	2.81	1.33	Moderate

Table 1: (Continued)

4. I am interested in the distinctions between Thai culture and the cultures of other countries. For example, I am interested in how an arranged marriage in India is similar to or different from such a marriage in Thailand.	3.71	1.40	High
5. I'm worried when seeing children of foreign guests playing unsupervised by their parents.	2.29	1.13	Low
Total	3.41	.51	High

As presented in Table 1, the internship students were found to hold a positive attitude towards foreign guests while they were in the internship ($M = 3.41$, $S.D. = .51$). The research results revealed that the students in the study were well-equipped to respect and value cultural differences ($M = 4.65$, $S.D. = 0.61$). Also, the students demonstrated a strong curiosity and eagerness to learn ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.40$) and openness ($M = 3.58$, $S.D. = 1.34$).

On the other hand, the research results indicate that the students showed a low level of ICC in terms of a readiness to suspend disbeliefs and beliefs about other cultures and those of their own culture ($M = 2.29$, $S.D. = 1.13$). Furthermore, their attitudes toward building equal relationships with both native speakers and non-native speakers were also limited ($M = 2.81$, $S.D. = 1.33$).

Knowledge

The questionnaire assessed respondents' culture-specific knowledge, deep cultural knowledge, and understanding of interactions at both individual and societal levels. Table 2 presents the students' ICC levels in terms of their intercultural knowledge.

Table 2: Internship Students' ICC Knowledge

Knowledge	Mean	S.D.	ICC level
6. I have knowledge about important historical events, festivals, people, and the political and economic issues of other countries.	3.00	.82	Moderate
7. I know and utilize the online channel to connect with foreigners, such as Line, WhatsApp, and Messenger.	4.23	.76	Very high
8. I know how to communicate with foreigners by using appropriate verbal and non-verbal language.	3.90	.83	High
9. I know that every country has different superstitions.	4.61	.56	Very high
10. I know that in every country there are different perspectives on the educational system and religious beliefs.	4.61	.72	Very high
11. I know how to communicate with Thais and foreigners and understand there are individual differences regarding social status, ethnicity, gender, occupations, and religion.	4.16	.73	High
Knowledge	Mean	S.D.	ICC level

Table 2: (Continued)

Knowledge	Mean	S.D.	ICC level
12. I know cultural differences in terms of prejudice at school, cultural assimilation, and acculturation. Therefore, I can explain and discuss these topics with foreign guests.	3.68	1.05	High
13. I respect cultural differences and can adapt myself to their norms. For example, if I work with Americans, when I have finished my assignment, I can leave the workplace on time. I don't have to stay and help others until they have finished their jobs because I understand American working culture.	1.77	1.02	Very low
Total	3.75	.37	High

According to Table 2, the overall findings indicate that the students showed a high level of ICC knowledge ($M = 3.75$, $S.D. = 0.37$). The internship students consistently demonstrated that people from different cultures hold various superstitious beliefs ($M = 4.61$, $S.D. = 0.56$) and that views on educational systems and religious beliefs differ between Thai culture and other countries ($M = 4.61$, $S.D. = 0.72$). In addition, the results demonstrated that the internship students were very proficient in using online communication tools to connect with people from other countries ($M = 4.23$, $S.D. = 0.76$).

On the other hand, the results revealed that the internship students lacked knowledge about working culture as well as an understanding of social interaction practices in intercultural settings ($M = 1.77$, $S.D. = 1.02$). At the same time, the results revealed that the internship students possessed a moderate ICC level in regard to knowledge about important historical events, festivals, notable people, and political and economic issues in other countries ($M = 3.00$, $S.D. = 0.82$).

Skills

The findings regarding internship students' intercultural communication skills are exhibited in Table 3 as follows.

Table 3: Internship Students' ICC Skills

Skills	Mean	S.D.	ICC level
14. I can communicate with people from different cultures verbally and non-verbally in both formal situations, such as giving a presentation, writing emails, and attending business meetings, and informal situations, such as socializing.	3.77	.76	High
15. I can evaluate the cultural and linguistic differences between Thai people and the foreigners with whom they currently interact. I can spontaneously adapt myself to interact with foreigners.	3.81	.79	High
16. I can spontaneously utilize knowledge, skills, and attitudes to mediate any misunderstandings between myself and foreigners.	3.77	.84	High
17. I can speak, write, and interpret English language content with foreigners by utilizing standard English.	3.52	.93	High

Table 3: (Continued)

Skills	Mean	S.D.	ICC level
18. When I communicate with foreigners, I can use acceptable English language that conveys the correct meaning.	3.32	.94	Moderate
19. I can comprehend and analyze English articles written from different perspectives, such as articles regarding abortion and cohabitation issues.	3.23	.92	Moderate
20. I usually pay close attention when people are talking about their conflicts by observing their tone of voice, gestures, and pauses in their conversations.	3.84	.86	High
21. After listening to someone speak, I typically summarize what they said and confirm with them whether my understanding is accurate.	3.74	1.00	High
22. I usually observe and check if listeners clearly understand what I have said.	4.32	.75	Very high
23. I value other people' experiences and explicitly show them that I understand their thoughts.	4.35	.80	Very high
24. I can recognize stereotypes in media, such as those presented in newspapers, online media, or in political speech.	3.81	.95	High
25. I can identify the root cause of misunderstandings and mistakes in responding to unfamiliar gestures. I can also explain the mistakes and the causes by utilizing corresponding cultural knowledge.	3.32	.70	Moderate
26. I can resolve misunderstandings and problems by considering different perspectives.	3.71	.82	High
27. I can use questioning techniques to clarify meaning when communicating with others, such as from the head of a department or customers.	4.42	.72	Very high
28. I can identify how Thais and foreigners use English in communication, recognizing social differences in various contexts, such as school, family, and the workplace.	3.81	.91	High
29. I understand historical, social, economic, and political relations between Thailand and other countries. I research these relationships further using books, newspapers, historical evidence, and online media.	3.55	.93	High
30. I am ready to adapt myself and learn new things from my internship experiences.	4.87	.34	Very high
31. I often greet foreign guests with a “wai” as it is the greeting in Thai culture.	4.16	1.04	High
Total	3.93	.43	High

With respect to ICC skills, Table 3 showed that ICC skills ranked as the second highest among the four dimensions ($M = 3.93$, $S.D. = .43$). It was found that the participants are able to adjust themselves to new experiences and new learning environments ($M = 4.87$, $SD = .34$). The students are also well equipped to use

questioning techniques to clarify meanings and elicit key concepts and values ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .72$), and they have empathy for people from diverse cultural backgrounds ($M = 4.35$, $SD = .80$).

On the contrary, the respondents have a moderate ability to comprehend and analyze English articles discussing various perspectives ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .92$). They also show a fair level of sociolinguistic ability in using acceptable English to convey accurate meanings that can be understood by both native and non-native English speakers ($M = 3.32$, $SD = .94$). In parallel, the students demonstrate a moderate ability to analyze and interpret the original causes of misunderstandings related to unfamiliar gestures and explain these mistakes using relevant cultural knowledge ($M = 3.32$, $SD = .70$).

Critical Cultural Awareness

The results of the internship students' critical cultural awareness are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Internship Students' Critical Cultural Awareness

Critical Cultural Awareness	Mean	S.D.	ICC level
32. I can analyze and identify the underlying values and beliefs of my own and foreign cultures.	3.81	.75	High
33. When I have a conversation with foreigners, I am aware of and understand my own and other's values and beliefs towards politics and religious issues. I can evaluate such situations by searching for additional information from	3.77	.88	High
34. I am aware that my values and beliefs may differ from those of people from other cultures. I am also confident in my ability to negotiate these differences to avoid conflict.	4.39	.80	Very high
Total	3.99	.66	High

As revealed in Table 4, the internship students have a high level of critical cultural awareness ($M = 3.99$, $S.D. = .66$). Most of the students are well-equipped with the ability to interact and mediate conflicts arising from cultural differences ($M = 4.39$, $SD = .80$). Furthermore, the findings also showed a high level of awareness in identifying and interpreting the underlying values and beliefs in their own and foreign cultures ($M = 3.81$, $SD = .75$). Consistently, the results revealed a similarly high level of competence in conducting evaluative analyses of intercultural situations ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.88$).

Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that the students demonstrated relatively high levels in all ICC dimensions. However, two attitude components were revealed as notable ICC deficiencies. First, Item 5 of the questionnaire, which reflects ethnocentric perspectives, was found to be the lowest-scoring item within this dimension; this suggests that, despite generally proper attitudes toward cultural diversity, some students still interpreted intercultural situations through their own cultural lens (Byram, 1997). Second, Item 3, pertaining to openness to relationships of equality (Byram, 1997), showed a comparatively low score, indicating that the internship students had a limited degree of openness toward

establishing equal relationships with both native and non-native English speakers. This behavior indicates native-speakerism by the students in the study (Holliday, 2006; Kongkerd, 2013), reflecting an underlying bias and prejudice related to speaker status and cultural hierarchy. In terms of ICC knowledge, the students demonstrated an overall high level. Nevertheless, a noticeable gap was found in Item 13, which addresses knowledge of the interaction process at both individual and societal levels. This suggests that students have limited deep knowledge about other cultural norms in social contexts such as the workplace (Byram, 1997). This finding suggests that students need to be equipped with not only declarative knowledge but also procedural knowledge to apply appropriate communicative and intercultural skills in specific situations (Byram, 1997).

In contrast, a very high level of adaptability skills was reflected in Item 30 in the current study. Students are likely to be well-prepared for new working environments (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017). Despite limited international exposure among most students, they demonstrated strong adaptability skills, suggesting the ability to develop ICC through domestic workplace interaction with foreign guests rather than through overseas experience alone. In addition, the ability to manage intercultural conflict effectively, as reflected in Item 34, was found to be at a high level of critical cultural awareness. The findings of this study align with Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020), who found that the internship students in their study demonstrated strong critical cultural awareness when they had practical opportunities for real-time interaction with foreign guests in hospitality settings. This might be because before attending their internship experiences, the students joined a preparatory course designed to equip them with practical communication strategies and adaptive skills necessary for working with people from different cultures (Witayarat & Bunnjaweht, 2024), as well as the ability to reflect on intercultural situations, properly evaluate differing perspectives, and appropriately apply conflict management strategies in real-time interactions (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017). This indicates that preparatory courses are useful as a core component of the curriculum to support the development of adaptability and conflict management skills. However, ethnocentric perspectives, cultural bias and prejudice, and a limited understanding of interaction processes at individual and societal levels still hinder their intercultural communicative competence.

Conclusion

This study explored intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among Thai undergraduate students from a university in Roi Et Province who joined an internship before they graduated. The students demonstrated several strengths in ICC, particularly critical cultural awareness and adaptability. However, deficiencies remain in some key areas of intercultural communication, namely attitudes of openness and readiness to suspend disbeliefs about other cultures and beliefs about their own, which reflect bias, prejudice, and ethnocentric perspectives. In addition, the students appeared to have insufficient knowledge of the processes of social interaction in other countries, indicating a gap between classroom-based learning and real-time interaction during internships. Therefore, placing more emphasis

on integrating these intercultural communication components into existing preparatory courses or developing a new and updated intercultural communication course or materials is likely to enhance students' ICC and help prepare them for real-world intercultural interactions during their internships. The following section discusses the pedagogical implications of an intercultural communication course in addressing the aforementioned challenges and improving students' readiness for intercultural communication in the workplace.

Pedagogical Implications and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study offer crucial guidance on how to help Thai undergraduate internship students enhance their ICC. Firstly, intercultural communication courses for Thai internship students should more effectively address topics such as ethnocentrism, bias, prejudice, and native-speakerism by integrating critical reflection through explanations and activities, such as discussions of critical incidents, guided intercultural dialogue (Besley, Peters & Xiaoping, 2011), reflective journaling (Maria, 2014), and World Englishes perspectives (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2020). Moreover, the intercultural communication course should improve students' intercultural knowledge related to workplace interaction using comparative cultural frameworks in learning activities, scenario-based tasks, problem-based learning, simulations, and role-plays to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-time workplace communication. These activities can be supported by carefully selected and well-designed teaching materials and supplementary resources that provide students with concrete examples of intercultural interactions (Jain, 2024; Rumpapetch & Rimkeeratikul, 2025). For this reason, the students need additional instruction and training to improve their problem-solving, analytical, and communication skills in intercultural communication, decision-making, and conflict management within teams (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017; Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). The present study should be regarded as a preliminary investigation into internship students' intercultural communicative competence in hospitality settings. The findings provide initial insights into students' ICC strengths and deficiencies during workplace interaction and may serve as a foundation for further needs analysis and intercultural communication course development.

Limitations of the Study

The research results contribute to identifying directions for improving students' ICC through the development of intercultural communication courses and instructional materials at the tertiary level. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the participants were drawn from a small sample at a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings and could lead to an overestimation of the ICC level results. Furthermore, as the findings were not triangulated with in-depth interviews or observations, the results should be interpreted with caution. However, they may serve as a preliminary basis for designing intercultural communication courses or instructional material, especially for students at the university in the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study puts the emphasis on the ICC components and ICC deficiencies of internship students at a university in Roi Et Province, Thailand. Future research should reconfirm the findings using larger populations with more diverse samples and apply more advanced statistical techniques, such as ANOVA or t-tests. Future research could also examine in greater detail how students respond to real-time intercultural challenges during internships. Finally, future research should incorporate needs analysis done with stakeholders of the course, namely internship students, workplace mentors, and intercultural communication lecturers, to identify specific intercultural communication needs across different intercultural settings.

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