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**DEVELOPING CHINESE EFL LEARNERS' INTERCULTURAL  
COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH A  
PEDAGOGICAL MODEL INTEGRATING LANGUAGE  
AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE**



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## Abstrak

Kepesatan globalisasi dan pengantarabangsaan yang pesat, pembangunan Kecekapan Komunikatif Antara Budaya (*ICC*) menjadi objektif utama dalam pendidikan bahasa asing. Di China, *ICC* dimasukkan ke dalam piawaian kurikulum kebangsaan merentasi semua peringkat pendidikan. Walau bagaimanapun, model pedagogi yang efektif untuk memupuk *ICC* dalam bilik darjah bahasa asing masih tidak diterokai sepenuhnya. Kajian ini bertujuan mencadang dan menilai model pedagogi empat fasa yang direka untuk memupuk *ICC* dalam kalangan pelajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing (*EFL*) di China. Model ini terdiri daripada empat fasa: pemerolehan antara budaya, perbandingan antara budaya, penglibatan antara budaya, dan refleksi antara budaya yang berdasarkan model *ICC* Byram dan prinsip pengajaran bahasa komunikatif antara budaya (*ICLT*) oleh Newton et al. Pendekatan kajian kaedah campuran digunakan dalam kajian ini melibatkan 319 pelajar *EFL* dan dijalankan dalam tiga fasa: Fasa kualitatif awal meneroka peranan kecekapan bahasa dalam pembangunan *ICC*; fasa kuantitatif menilai perubahan dalam *ICC* berikutan campur tangan pengajaran; dan fasa kualitatif akhir meneroka persepsi peserta tentang keberkesanan model. Dapatan menunjukkan kecekapan bahasa adalah penting kepada *ICC*, memudahkan pembangunan pengetahuan, sikap, kemahiran dan kesedaran. Model pedagogi secara signifikan meningkatkan *ICC* pelajar serta melaporkan pengalaman pembelajaran yang positif, pemahaman antara budaya yang lebih besar, dan penglibatan yang lebih kuat dalam tugas komunikasi. Penemuan ini mencadangkan kecekapan bahasa dan kecekapan antara budaya harus disepadukan dengan lebih sistematik dalam reka bentuk kurikulum dan amalan bilik darjah untuk meningkatkan pembangunan *ICC*. Kajian ini memberikan gambaran lebih lanjut tentang model Byram dengan menunjukkan secara empirikal bagaimana kecekapan bahasa berinteraksi secara rumit dalam pembangunan dimensi *ICC* yang menyumbang kepada konseptualisasi *ICC* yang lebih bersepadu. Secara praktikal, model pedagogi menyediakan rangka kerja berstruktur yang menyatukan kecekapan berbahasa antara budaya, menawarkan objektif, prosedur dan aktiviti pengajaran yang konkrit untuk membimbing amalan bilik darjah yang berkesan.

**Kata kunci:** Kecekapan Komunikatif Antara Budaya (*ICC*), kecekapan bahasa, Pengajaran Bahasa Komunikatif Antara Budaya (*ICLT*), model pedagogi

## Abstract

With the rapid acceleration of globalization and internationalization, the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become a central objective in foreign language education. In China, ICC is explicitly incorporated into national curriculum standards across all educational levels. However, effective pedagogical models for fostering ICC in foreign language classrooms remain insufficiently explored. This study aimed to propose and evaluate a four-phase pedagogical model designed to foster ICC among Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The model comprised four phases: intercultural acquisition, intercultural comparison, intercultural engagement, and intercultural reflection, which was grounded in Byram's ICC model and Newton et al.'s principles of intercultural communicative language teaching (ICLT). A mixed-methods approach adopted in the study involved 319 senior EFL learners and was conducted in three phases: The initial qualitative phase explored the role of language competence in ICC development; the quantitative phase assessed changes in ICC following instructional intervention; and the final qualitative phase investigated the participants' perceptions of the model's effectiveness. The results revealed that language competence is integral to ICC, facilitating the development of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness. The pedagogical model significantly enhanced students' ICC, with participants reporting positive learning experiences, greater intercultural understanding, and stronger engagement in communication tasks. These findings suggest that language competence and intercultural competence should be more systematically integrated into curriculum design and classroom practice to enhance ICC development. This study provides further insight into Byram's model by empirically demonstrating how language competence intricately interacts with the development of other ICC dimensions, contributing to a more integrated conceptualization of ICC. Practically, the pedagogical model provides a structured framework that unifies language and intercultural competence, offering concrete teaching objectives, procedures, and activities to guide effective classroom practice.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), language competence, Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) , pedagogical model

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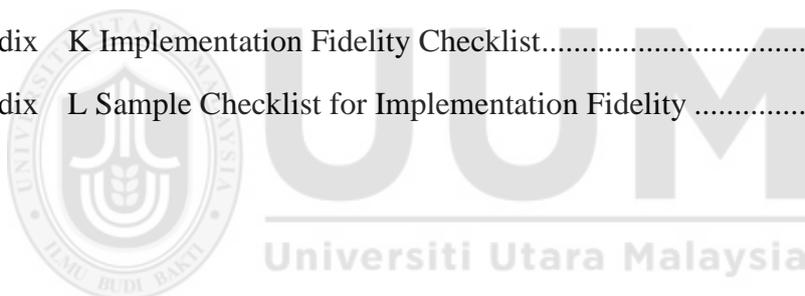
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## List of Abbreviations

ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
ICLT	Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
MOE	Ministry of Education
CECR	College English Curriculum Requirements of China



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

With globalization and internationalization in the 21st century, the world has become more interconnected, interdependent and culturally diverse. Exchanges and interactions between countries are becoming increasingly important for the political and economic stability of nations. Few countries can isolate themselves from the rest of the international community, regardless of their size, economic or political agenda. For individuals, abundant intercultural encounters are prevalent in their daily life, such as tourism, youth exchanges, studying and working abroad, trade and so on. Despite the growing interconnectedness among countries, communities, and individuals, miscommunications and conflicts persist both between and within societies. This underscores the necessity of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and calls for heightened sensitivity to cultural differences and diversity (Yousef, 2024).

ICC is defined as “the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one’s own” (Byram, 2000, p. 297). It has become both a national and international necessity, as well as a crucial skill for individuals across the globe (Deardorff, 2023; Fantini, 2021). Jackson (2020) examined eight imperatives for emphasizing the significance of studying ICC: globalization; internationalization; advances in transportation and communication technologies; changing demographics; the rise in populism, localism, and xenophobia; conflict and peace; ethics; and personal growth

and responsibility. The importance of ICC spans across various domains. Moreover, the significance of ICC is also underscored by the influential supranational institutions such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the Council of Europe, etc. In 2009, UNESCO recognized ICC as part of a broader toolkit for lifelong learning. Subsequently, it developed an ICC framework in 2013 and introduced the “Story Circles” intercultural tool in 2020. The OECD’s global competence framework, implemented through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), also emphasized the importance of ICC. Similarly, the the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), first introduced in 2001 and expanded in the 2020 Companion Volume, established foundations and goals for ICC and offered guidelines for language instructions.

These prestigious international organizations have established frameworks and methodologies for discussing, assessing and testing ICC. They have also offered many insightful ideas and guidance on the educational policies and teaching practice to the entire world. Simpson and Dervin (2019) stated, “Considering the supremacy of these institutions worldwide, they represent a clear global default approach in the way intercultural communication education is constructed” (p. 673). Consequently, ICC has become a “declared educational goal” (Dlaska, 2000, p. 248).

### **1.1.1 ICC in Foreign Language Teaching Abroad**

Language education and ICC are inextricably linked (Fantini, 2021). As Sercu (2005, p. 1) puts it, “foreign language education is, by definition, intercultural”. ICC has garnered attention in the field of foreign language education since the 1990s (Byram, 1997, 2000; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Corbett, 2003; Kramsch, 1993; Meyer, 1991). Kramsch (1993) calls for the recognition of language teaching as social action and the teaching of language as an educational objective not just to acquire communicative competence but also to foster intercultural awareness and self-realization.

Byram et al. (2002) articulate a comprehensive view of the goal of language teaching.

They assert that language teaching is:

To help language learners to interact with speakers of other languages on equal terms, and to be aware of their own identities and those of their interlocutors.

It is the hope that language learners who thus become ‘intercultural speakers’ will be successful not only in communicating information but also in developing a human relationship with people of other languages and cultures (p. 4).

They emphasize the goal of fostering “intercultural speakers” among language learners. Language teaching serves the purpose of equipping learners not only with linguistic competence for effective communication in speaking and writing but also with the essential skill of intercultural competence. This broader competence allows learners to navigate cultural differences, comprehend diverse perspectives, and establish

meaningful connections with individuals from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This holistic approach underscores the interconnectedness of linguistic and intercultural competence in the language teaching process.

Other scholars also claim to develop learners' ICC through foreign language education (Crozet, et.al., 1999; Crozet & Liddicoat, 2000; Deardorff, 2006; Liddicoat et al., 2003; Newton, et al., 2010). Skopinskaja (2003) articulates the advantages of incorporating intercultural aspects into foreign language teaching in terms of gaining access to more diverse ways of seeing the world, providing a better understanding of the first culture, as well as becoming less ethnocentric and more culturally relativist. As a result, a new approach to intercultural communicative language teaching (ICLT) has emerged, which seeks to impart language education from an intercultural perspective (Liddicoat et al., 2003; Newton et al., 2010).

In addition to scholarly perspectives, the emphasis on ICC in foreign language education has surged at the policy level globally over the past few decades. In North America, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) developed the "5C" standards, which emphasize communication, culture, connection, comparison, and community (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996). More recently, Can-Do Statements have been introduced to guide learners in developing ICC (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017). These statements outline specific skills and competencies that learners should be able to demonstrate in various contexts. They serve as a vehicle for establishing objectives and assessing ICC,

providing examples and scenarios that illustrate how learners apply the target language and cultural understanding to demonstrate their ICC.

Similarly, countries such as Germany, the UK and New Zealand have introduced a broader approach to intercultural teaching and learning within the foreign language education context to develop ICC. For instance, the Kultusministerkonferenz 1996 (Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs) in Germany recommended that the principles of intercultural learning and education be included as a universal requirement in the teaching of any subject at any education level throughout the country. Various language courses in Germany stipulated that developing ICC in the target language is the overarching achievement objective.

In the UK, the British Department for Education and Skills has emphasized the notion of intercultural understanding in its National Languages Strategy. British policymakers acknowledged that developing cultural awareness is an essential component of education for all individuals. The strategy explicitly states that “language competence and intercultural understanding are not optional extras; they are an essential part of being a citizen in the knowledge society of the 21st century” (Department for Education and Skills, 2002, p. 5).

Moreover, both New Zealand and Australia have taken significant steps to integrate ICC into their national education curricula. In 2007, the New Zealand education department revised its national curriculum to include ICC as a central aspiration within the country’s school language curriculum. Similarly, Australia has incorporated

intercultural understanding as a general capability in its national curriculum, as outlined by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority in 2010.

These examples highlight the fundamental changes in the perception and practice of foreign language education since the 1990s, with many countries recognizing the significance of ICC in language instruction. As a result, ICC has become not only an essential element but also a core objective of foreign language teaching worldwide.

### **1.1.2 ICC in Foreign Language Teaching in China**

In China, since the beginning of the new century, foreign language teaching has been gradually reframed to integrate intercultural dimensions with language teaching. Sun (2016) contended that foreign language education is essentially humanistic education, specifically intercultural humanistic education. Zhang (2012) and Zhang and Yao (2020), building on Zhang's earlier work, stated that schools serve as the primary implementers of intercultural education, and foreign language instruction stands out as one of the most effective and crucial arenas within intercultural education. The essence of foreign language education is, therefore, intercultural education, aimed at developing students' ICC (Dai, 2019; Ge & Wang, 2016; Hu, 2013; Sun, 2016; Zhang & Wu, 2022). Over the past decades, ICC as a teaching content and objective, has been explicitly integrated in the national guidelines and curriculum standards at all levels of foreign language teaching in China (Wang & Kulich, 2015; Zhang & Wu, 2022) (refer to Table 1).

Table 1

*ICC Requirements in Foreign Language Teaching in China (MOE)*

Learner groups	National curriculum	Years	Key emphasis on ICC
English majors	National English-Teaching Syllabus for English Majors	2000	Intercultural sensitivity, tolerance, and flexibility in intercultural contexts
Foreign language majors	China's National Criteria of Teaching Quality for Undergraduate Foreign Language Majors	2018	Cultural diversity, intercultural empathy, critical cultural awareness; effective communication
Non-English majors	Chinese College English Curriculum Requirements	2004	ICC as important as English knowledge and proficiency
		2020	Understanding culture difference, ability to compare; developing ICC
High school students	Chinese High School English Curriculum Standard	2004	Cultural knowledge, awareness, and skills; cultural awareness; ability to compare;
		2022	Developing ICC; culture confidence
Primary and junior high school students	Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standard	2011	Cultural knowledge, cultural understanding; communication
		2022	Understanding culture difference; ability to compare to learn, communication, culture confidence

Table 1 shows the ICC requirements in the national curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in China across various educational levels, highlighting the evolving emphasis on cultural understanding, comparative skills, communication, and cultural confidence etc. Since the beginning of 2000, the *National English-Teaching Syllabus for English Majors* has required English majors not only to know how to use English language accurately, but also to possess intercultural sensitivity, tolerance, and flexibility in real intercultural contexts for the first time. More recently, *China's national criteria of teaching quality for undergraduate foreign language majors* (2018) and the newly launched *College English Curriculum Requirements of China* (CECR) provide more detail requirements on the cultivation of students' ICC. CECR stated:

One of the important tasks of college English teaching is to carry out intercultural education. Specially, students need to understand foreign society and culture, improve their understanding of different cultures, foster the awareness of the similarities and differences between Chinese culture and foreign cultures, and develop ICC (College Foreign Language Teaching Steering Committee, 2020, p. 2).

The latest version of the *Chinese High School English Curriculum Standard* (HSECS) expounded that the aim of English education in high schools should:

Embodies the unity of instrumentality and humanism, cultivate students' cultural awareness and ability to compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures. In addition, develop the ability of ICC and culture exchange, establish an international perspective, and strengthen cultural confidence (MOE, 2022, p. 5).

As noted from the review above, ICC has been incorporated into the educational reform policies and curriculum standards of foreign language teaching especially English teaching, at all levels in China. ICC is “no longer a mere aspiration but a ‘must have’ skill for the young generations” (Wang & Kulich, 2017, p. 120). Under the guidance of these policies and standards, teachers of a wide range of foreign language courses and programs across China are expected to develop learners' ICC through their teaching practice.

However, while the objectives and principles concerning ICC are acknowledged in the official documents, the curriculum standards and pedagogical guidelines lack concrete and operationalized directives for implementation. For instance, the CECR (2020) does not delineate the aspects for cultural instruction or assessment, nor does it provide any theoretical or practical guidance for teachers on how to teach or assess learners' ICC (Gu & Zhao, 2021). This lack of specificity has resulted in many foreign language instructors feeling uncertain when implementing intercultural teaching in their classrooms. Consequently, this uncertainty impedes teachers' ability to fully realize the educational value that intercultural teaching should provide (Zhang & Wu, 2022).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

There is an increasing recognition of the essential role of incorporating ICC into foreign language instruction both in China and abroad. However, “one of the challenges facing this integration has been to move from recognition of the need for an intercultural focus in language education to the development of practice” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 7). A review of the literature reveals a lack of pedagogical models to guide the ICC teaching processes and practices (Aski et al., 2023; Lee, 2023; Peng et al., 2020; Shaules, 2016; Tran & Duong, 2018; Wimontham et al., 2024). ICC does not “just happen for most individuals” (Huang, 2021, p. 55), instead, it is a competence that needs to be systematically taught, consciously fostered, and gradually internalised by language learners (Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017).

Previous studies have found that teachers lacked confidence and curricular support in integrating ICC into language courses (Bal & Savas, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021; Nindya et al., 2022; Roiha, 2021). A similar situation is evident among teachers in China (Gu, 2016; Wang & Pan, 2019), who face multiple challenges in implementing ICC. These challenges include insufficient pedagogical skills for teaching ICC, uncertainty about how to balance language instruction with ICC development within limited class time, and limited opportunities for interaction with diverse student groups (Mu & Yu, 2021, 2023; Zhang & Yao, 2020; Zhou & Burhanudeen, 2023). According to Liao and Li (2023a), a critical issue for Chinese EFL instructors is creating an intercultural English pedagogy relevant to the local context, thereby maximizing the use of available resources when foreign cultural encounters are infrequent.

Additionally, empirical studies indicate that Chinese EFL learners generally demonstrate medium or below levels of ICC (Mu & Yu, 2021; Li, 2021; Yin, 2020; Zhang, 2023), revealing significant room for improvement. Gu and Zhao (2021) emphasized that “the current challenges call for action by scholars and educators to provide examples of classroom-based ICC development teaching so as to empower teachers to confidently design lessons in the Chinese context” (p. 242). However, Shi and Zhu (2015) found that only 2.8% of intercultural teaching studies in China were empirical. Nearly a decade later, such research remains limited (Gui, 2024), and many existing studies adopt a single analytical approach and lack robust theoretical foundations (Su, 2023). Consequently, there is a pressing need for more comprehensive empirical research that employs diverse analytical approaches and is

grounded in robust theoretical frameworks to advance the development of pedagogical models for ICC in the Chinese context.

Theoretical models of ICC expand the concept and define its educational goals (Hoff, 2014, 2020; Safa & Tofghi, 2022), providing a foundation for designing lessons aimed at ICC development. Various models propose important dimensions of ICC such as knowledge, attitudes, skills, awareness, motivation, and empathy (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2012; Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2011). However, despite these comprehensive frameworks, many of them tend to pay inadequate attention to the critical role of language competence in ICC. Fantini (2009) critiques this imbalance, noting that many researchers and educators focus on how people perceive, behave, and interact interculturally, often overlooking the crucial role of language competence in such encounters. This gap is evident in many ICC models, educational programs, and assessment tools (Fantini, 2012, 2020).

Nonetheless, language competence is fundamental to ICC development, enabling individuals to acquire symbols, construct meanings, and effectively express ideas (Fantini, 2020, 2021; Jackson, 2020). Byram (2021) further emphasizes that language competence is closely linked to intercultural competence and forms a foundation for developing intercultural understanding. Despite its centrality, language competence remains underrepresented in existing ICC frameworks, and empirical research on its role in ICC development is limited (Feng et al., 2024; Miauw & Guo, 2021). This study aims to fill this gap by empirically examining the significance of language competence

in fostering ICC, thus providing evidence-based support for integrating language competence into ICC pedagogy.

Although theoretical models of ICC play a crucial role in formulating the objectives of ICC in teaching and learning, they often remain abstract, and exhibit a disconnect from practical language teaching (Diaz, 2013; Hoff, 2020; Shaules, 2016). Pedagogical models that translate ICC theoretical models into structured teaching processes remain underexplored, particularly in the Chinese EFL context (Peng et al., 2020; Zhang & Yao, 2020). Notable foreign-developed models over the past two decades include Moran's (2001) Cultural Knowing Framework, Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) interacting processes, Shaules' (2016) Developmental Model of Linguaculture Learning, and Tran and Duong's (2018) ICLT model. These models provide clear stages and pedagogical procedures to facilitate ICC integration in foreign language education. However, their applicability across diverse educational contexts warrants further investigation, as ICC development is context-dependent (Byram, 2021; Nadeem et al., 2020). Many of these models emphasize authentic intercultural experiences, which are limited in China due to fewer opportunities for multicultural interaction. Consequently, effective ICC teaching in China requires adaptation to local educational conditions, underscoring the need for contextually relevant pedagogical approaches.

Compared with these foreign models, existing Chinese ICC pedagogical models tend to focus on broad teaching principles and general recommendations (Kong & Luan,

2012; Peng et al., 2020; Zhang & Yao, 2020), but lack specific teaching stages and practical procedures. Consequently, teachers often experience uncertainty in applying these models in practical classroom settings. Additionally, these frameworks provide limited emphasis on the integrated development of language competence alongside intercultural competence. Given that Chinese EFL learners' intercultural communication relies heavily on language competence (Feng et al., 2025), even a high level of intercultural competence alone does not guarantee effective interaction (Fantini, 2020; Feng et al., 2024). While the first gap lies in the limited attention paid by theoretical frameworks to language competence, this highlights a second research gap: the lack of a practical pedagogical model tailored to Chinese learners that integrates language and intercultural competence development.

Byram's (2021) ICC model and Newton et al.'s (2010) ICLT principles provide a strong theoretical foundation for intercultural language education. However, these frameworks have seldom been translated into concrete classroom practices that respond to the needs of Chinese learners. Guided by these two theoretical perspectives, the present study seeks to address two interrelated gaps: First, it empirically investigates the role of language competence in ICC development. Second, it develops a pedagogical model that offers clear instructional objectives, structured procedures, and practical classroom activities, thereby integrating language and intercultural competence development within the Chinese EFL context.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The overarching objective of this study is to design and implement an ICC pedagogical model that systematically enhances the ICC of Chinese EFL learners. A central focus is placed on the integral role of language competence in ICC development. Recognizing the complexity and long-term nature of language competence (Fantini, 2012), this study narrows its assessment to speaking competence within a one-semester intervention, as it represents a key indicator (Soozandehfar, 2010) of language competence.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

Research objective 1: To explore how Chinese EFL learners perceive the role of language competence in developing ICC.

1a: To explore learners' perceptions of the impact of language competence on their intercultural engagement.

1b: To identify specific aspects of language competence learners consider essential for effective intercultural communication.

Research objective 2: To assess the effectiveness of the pedagogical model in enhancing ICC.

2a: To measure changes in EFL learners' intercultural competence.

2b: To measure changes in EFL learners' speaking competence.

Research objective 3: To examine Chinese EFL learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of the pedagogical model.

3a: To examine Chinese EFL learners' perceptions of the model's effects on their

intercultural competence.

3b: To examine learners' perceptions of the model's effects on their speaking competence.

3c: To examine EFL learners' attitudes and suggestions regarding the pedagogical model.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

Based on the above objectives, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do Chinese EFL learners perceive the role of language competence in developing ICC?

1a: How do EFL learners perceive the impact of language competence on their engagement in intercultural communication?

1b: What specific aspects of language competence do EFL learners consider crucial for effective intercultural communication?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What is the effect of the ICC pedagogical model in the development of ICC among Chinese EFL learners?

2a: To what extent does EFL learners' intercultural competence change?

2b: To what extent does EFL learners' speaking competence change?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do Chinese EFL learners perceive the effectiveness of the pedagogical model?

3a: How do EFL learners perceive the effects of the pedagogical model on their intercultural competence?

3b: How do EFL learners perceive the effects of the pedagogical model on their speaking competence?

3c: What are the attitudes and suggestions of EFL learners toward the effectiveness of the pedagogical model?

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework is a logically constructed and connected set of concepts and premises, developed from one or more theories, that a researcher creates to scaffold a study (Varpio et al., 2020, p. 2). It explains how the theoretical perspective informs and guides the design and direction of the study. Building ICC pedagogical models based on theoretical frameworks is crucial for effective teaching and learning, as it provides a solid foundation for designing interventions and assessing ICC development systematically.

Byrams' s (2021) ICC model and Newton et al.'s (2010) ICLT principles (see Figure 1) serve as the theoretical framework of this study. The former provides the foundation for establishing instructional objectives and outcomes related to the ICC pedagogical model, while the latter offers practical implementation principles and guidance for designing classroom activities to realize these objectives and outcomes. Byram's ICC model and Newton et al.'s ICLT principles complement and reinforce one another, collectively, they offer a coherent theoretical and practical foundation for this study.

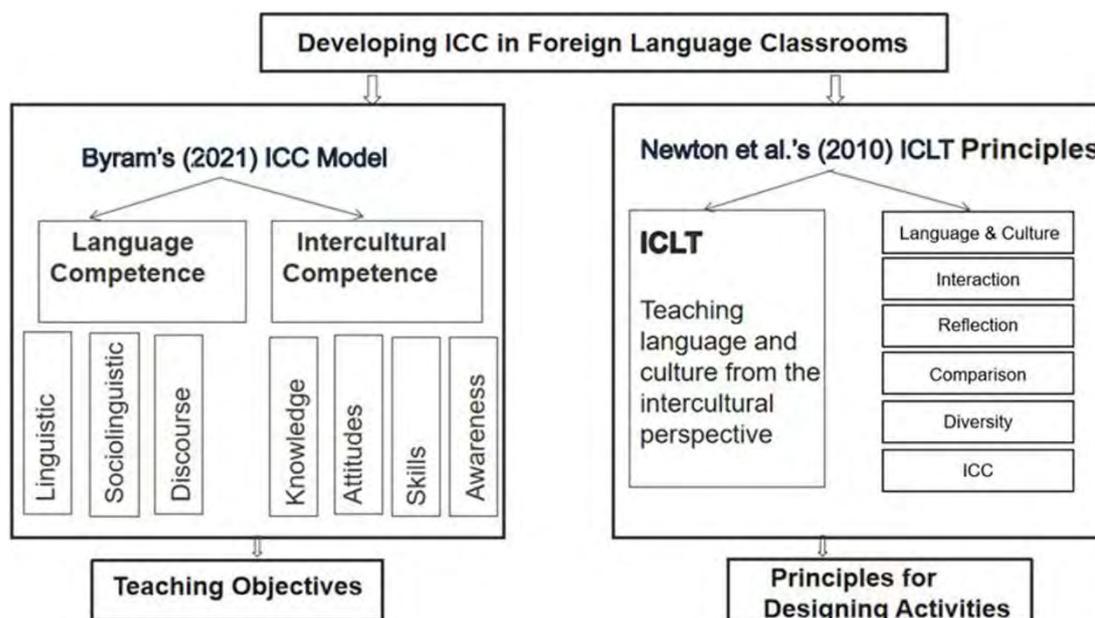


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework of This Study

### Byram's (2021) ICC model

Byram's (2021) ICC model, originally introduced in 1997, was updated in 2021 to incorporate recent research and critiques, maintains its core dimensions and content. This model is widely recognized as one of the most influential and comprehensive framework for developing and evaluating learners' ICC in various contexts (Tran & Seepho, 2016; Wang & Teo, 2024). It has significantly impacted foreign language teaching and intercultural training and continues to be relevant in ICC research (e.g. Liao & Li, 2023b; Mu & Yu, 2023; Peng et al., 2015; Tran & Seepho, 2016). Drawing on data collected from Chinese university students, Wang and Teo (2024) employed a structural equation modelling approach to examine the interrelationships among the core components of Byram's ICC model. The findings support the model's theoretical validity and practical applicability within the context of Chinese foreign language education.

Byram (2021)'s ICC model is one of the few that highlights the significance of language competence in developing ICC. It consists of two lists: language competence and intercultural competence. With the inclusion of language competence, intercultural competence evolves into intercultural communicative competence (ICC), a composite ability that integrates both linguistic and intercultural dimensions, which is illustrated in Figure 2.

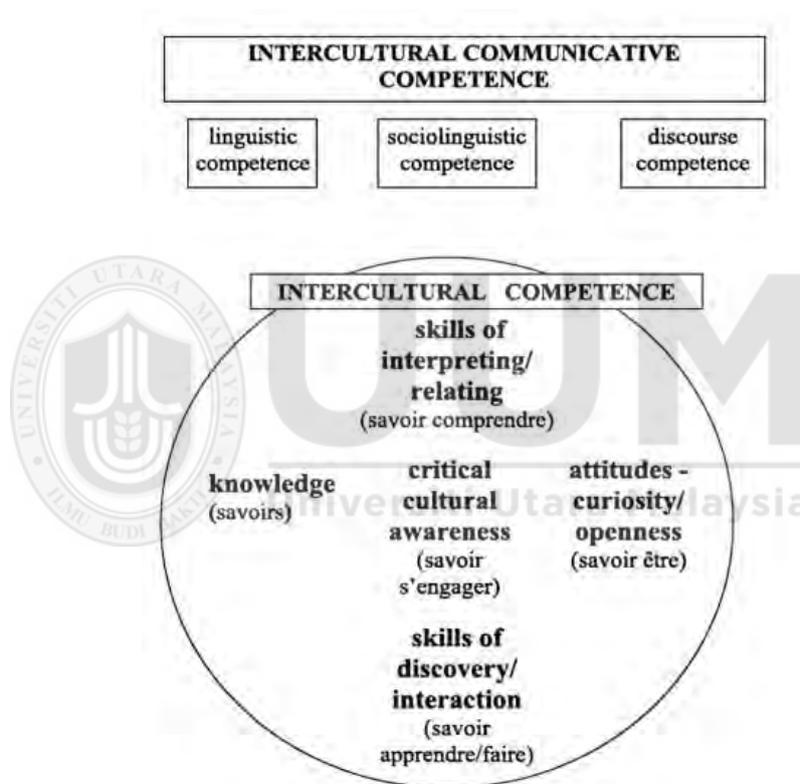


Figure 2 Intercultural Communicative Competence Model (Byram, 2021)

By highlighting language competence, the model ensures that learners acquire the practical communication skills necessary to engage in meaningful intercultural interactions. The model makes up for the previous absence of cultural teaching in the language teaching and the neglect of language competence development in

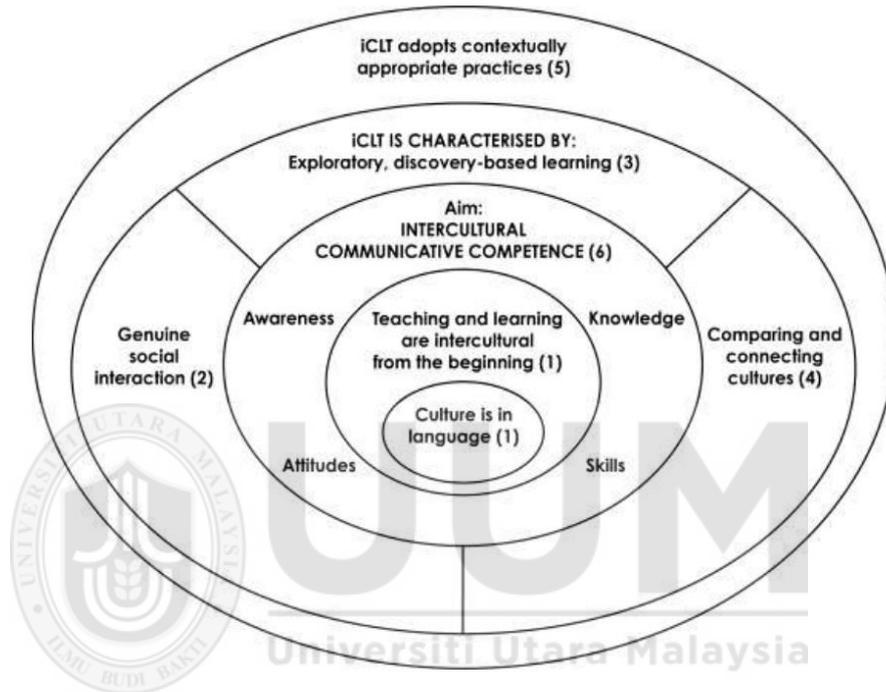
intercultural communication studies (Yao, 2021). Moreover, it broadens the ICC framework by outlining various competences, thereby enhancing the comprehensive understanding of ICC (Gao, 2014).

Another notable aspect of Byram's model is its strong pedagogical focus, making it especially appropriate for formal language education (Wang & Dai, 2023). The model provides a clear outline of objectives related to knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness (Dervin, 2010; Feng et al., 2025; Shaules, 2016), which is specific and coherent in guiding teachers in planning lessons and assessing ICC in foreign language education (Hoff, 2020). Thus, Byram's model serves as a valuable guide for formulating the ICC development objectives and for providing a basis to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed ICC pedagogical model of this study.

#### **Newton et al.'s (2010) ICLT principles**

ICLT is a highly recommended approach for enhancing ICC in language education. It advocates teaching language and culture from the intercultural perspective, which is different from the traditional language teaching in that it treats ICC and communicative competence as the core (Liddicoat, 2009). ICLT is grounded in the belief that language and culture are interdependent and that learning a language involves learning the cultural norms, values, and beliefs that shape its use. According to Newton et al. (2010), "Openness to diversity, willingness to engage with others and moving away from ethnocentrism in identity construction would all be valid and valued outcomes of ICLT" (p. 40).

Newton et al. (2010) proposed six principles of ICLT, a framework aimed at guiding teachers in integrating ICC into language instruction, promoting intercultural understanding, and enhancing language learning outcomes. These principles are organized into a five-layered framework, as shown in Figure 3.



*Figure 3* Five-layered Framework of the Six ICLT Principles (Newton et al., 2010)

At the innermost two circles, the model establishes two fundamental principles: “Culture is in language” and “Teaching and learning are intercultural from the beginning.” These statements emphasize that language and culture are inseparable, and intercultural aspects should be embedded into language instruction from the outset, rather than being introduced separately or later in the learning process (Newton et al., 2010). The third circle defines the aim of ICLT as the development of intercultural competence, with four key dimensions: awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills. These dimensions align with Byram’s (2021) model of ICC. This consistency

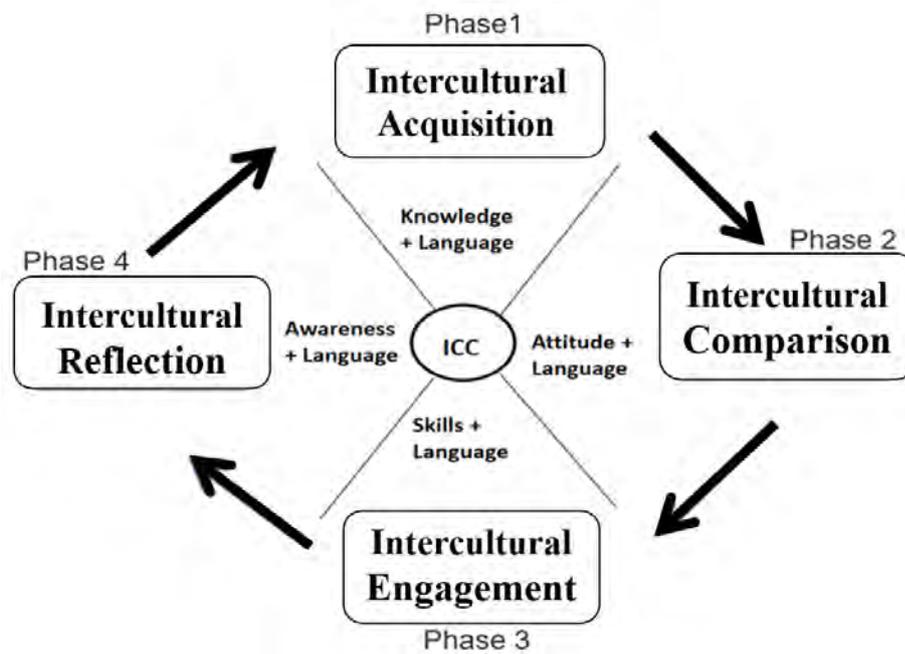
underscores the theoretical foundation of ICLT in existing ICC frameworks, reinforcing its emphasis on both linguistic and intercultural development in language education. The fourth circle presents the principles of ICLT, which outline the pedagogical approaches essential for fostering intercultural competence. These principles include: exploratory and discovery-based learning, genuine social interaction, as well as comparing and connecting cultures. The outermost fifth circle contains the statement: “ICLT adopts contextually appropriate practices”. This suggests that while ICLT provides a structured theoretical framework, its application should be flexible and adapted to different cultural and educational contexts (Newton et al., 2010).

The ICLT principles are well-suited for constructing ICC pedagogical models due to their alignment with the goals of intercultural communication and language learning. Moreover, ICLT highlights the importance of learner autonomy, and the activities of comparison and connection, interaction, reflection and critical thinking in cultural teaching, all of which are concrete and applicable in formal language learning contexts. Finally, ICLT emphasizes “explicit instruction”. Newton et al. (2010) argue that the intercultural issues should be dealt with directly and openly in explicit instruction, rather than assuming that learners will acquire them through exposure and experience alone. This study focuses on enhancing EFL learners' ICC in the foreign language classroom through implementing an ICC pedagogical model aligned with the explicit instruction emphasized in ICLT principles. Therefore, Newton et al.'s ICLT principles play a crucial role in guiding both the theoretical foundation and practical

implementation of the ICC pedagogical model. They inform the selection of appropriate teaching strategies and activities, ensuring that the model effectively fosters learners' intercultural competence through a balanced integration of explicit instruction, learner autonomy, cultural comparison, interaction, reflection, and critical thinking.

## **1.6 Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework provides the theoretical grounding and methodological orientation for a study by synthesizing what is already known, identifying gaps in current knowledge, and offering a structured approach to address those gaps (Varpio et al., 2020). It clarifies why the present research is necessary and how it contributes to extending existing understanding. Additionally, a robust conceptual framework reflects the researcher's comprehension of the most appropriate pathway to investigate the research problem, the logical progression of inquiry, and the interrelationships among the variables under investigation (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Building on these functions, the conceptual framework of this study is presented below.



*Figure 4* ICC Pedagogical Model of This Study

This study builds on the growing body of ICC research emerging since the 1990s (Byram, 1997, 2000; Kramsch, 1993; Corbett, 2003). However, many existing models still insufficiently address language competence (Fantini, 2012, 2020; Byram, 2021), revealing two key gaps. The first is an integration gap, reflected in the limited theorisation of how linguistic and intercultural learning interact and mutually reinforce each other. The second is a process gap, which refers to the lack of clear guidance on how sequential classroom activities can effectively support learners in progressing from initial knowledge acquisition to deeper intercultural reflection. These observations underscore the need for a pedagogical model that conceptualizes ICC development as both an integrated and cyclical process, in which language competence and intercultural competence remain in continuous dialogue.

The conceptual framework of this study is the ICC pedagogical model proposed and implemented in the research. As shown in Figure 4, the model presents ICC development as a dynamic and cyclical process that integrates both intercultural and linguistic dimensions. The outer circle of the model consists of four interrelated phases: intercultural acquisition, intercultural comparison, intercultural engagement, and intercultural reflection. These phases form a continuous pedagogical sequence informed by Newton et al.'s (2010) ICLT principles and Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) intercultural teaching process.

Each phase contributes uniquely to learners' development: Intercultural acquisition introduces cultural and linguistic knowledge; intercultural comparison cultivates respect for cultural differences while reinforcing language competence; intercultural engagement facilitates the application of both intercultural and linguistic skills in authentic communicative scenarios; and intercultural reflection promotes intercultural awareness, critical thinking and deeper understanding of intercultural experiences.

Within the inner circle, the model incorporates the four core ICC dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness, as conceptualized by Byram (2021), with each dimension explicitly integrated with language competence. Language competence is addressed through progressive attention to linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse aspects of communication, enabling learners to use language both appropriately and effectively for intercultural understanding. This integration emphasizes that effective intercultural communication requires not only cultural

understanding, but also the ability to express that understanding effectively and appropriately through language use. Rather than following a linear progression, the model illustrates a recursive relationship between the phases and the ICC dimensions, allowing for iterative learning. In doing so, it reconceptualizes ICC as a process in which language learning and intercultural learning are mutually reinforcing, addressing the integration gap noted earlier and aligning with current calls in the literature for more holistic models.

The conceptual framework also serves as the methodological foundation of the study. The research design and implementation are directly informed by the structure of the pedagogical model. The path of inquiry follows the four-phase structure, with instructional interventions aligned to each phase. The implementation of the pedagogical model serves as the independent variable, while the dependent variables comprise the five dimensions of knowledge, attitudes, skills, awareness, and language competence. Multiple sources of data, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observation checklists, and student study records, are systematically integrated to ensure comprehensive triangulation of evidence regarding students' ICC development.

By making the relationships among pedagogical structure, learning objectives, and observed outcomes explicit, this conceptual framework provides a coherent and transparent foundation for both the implementation and analysis of the study. It satisfies the criteria proposed by Varpio et al. (2020) and Grant and Osanloo (2014)

for a robust conceptual framework, while directly addressing the theoretical and pedagogical gaps previously identified. In doing so, it contributes to a clearer understanding of how language competence can be embedded within ICC development and to the broader discourse on intercultural pedagogy.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study encompasses both theoretical and practical dimensions, highlighting its contribution to academic advancements and its applicability in real-world educational contexts.

### **1.7.1 Theoretical Significance**

This study contributes to the existing literature by applying and validating Byram's (1997, 2021) ICC model within the Chinese context. Although Byram's model is widely recognized in the field of intercultural communication, it has been "rarely applied or validated in the Chinese context" (Liao & Li, 2023b, p. 3). By empirically examining the interconnectedness between language competence and other dimensions of ICC, this study not only applies but also builds on Byram's model. It reveals how language competence can enhance various aspects of intercultural competence, and more importantly, how the integration of language competence with intercultural competence development can lead to more effective improvement in ICC. This contribution offers a more comprehensive understanding of ICC development in EFL contexts, particularly within the Chinese educational setting.

Additionally, this research enhances the practical application of Newton et al.'s (2010) ICLT principles, which provide a valuable framework for integrating language and culture in language education but have rarely been implemented in practice. This limited implementation can be attributed to insufficient teacher training and the lack of effective tools or models for putting ICLT into practice (Lee et al., 2023; Oranje, 2016; Tran & Duong, 2018). By applying these principles, such as beginning with language and culture integration, promoting interaction, encouraging exploration and reflection, and making explicit cultural comparisons, this study demonstrates their effectiveness in fostering ICC in classroom settings. It offers concrete examples of implementation and highlights how these principles can deepen cultural understanding and support language development. In doing so, the study provides practical guidance for incorporating ICLT into EFL teaching, advancing a more integrated and effective approach to intercultural language education.

Finally, this study advances existing ICC theoretical models by explicitly positioning language as a core component of ICC development. By conceptualizing ICC as a dynamic and cyclical process that integrates both intercultural and linguistic dimensions, this research provides new insights into the simultaneous development of language competence and intercultural competence. As Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) notes, there needs to be further exploration of the relationship between language and intercultural competence, and this study contributes to that ongoing discourse while encouraging additional research on the interrelationships between these key competencies.

### **1.7.2 Practical Significance**

First, these findings provide empirical support for an integrated approach to ICC instruction, where language competence and intercultural competence are developed within a unified pedagogical framework rather than treated as separate domains. This design ensures both linguistic and cultural responsiveness by embedding language learning in authentic intercultural contexts, enabling learners to acquire linguistic resources alongside cultural knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity. In this study, language is not merely a medium or tool for conveying intercultural content but functions as a “catalyst” (Feng et al., 2024) that accelerates and deepens the co-development of linguistic and intercultural abilities. By structuring learning activities where linguistic expression and intercultural engagement are mutually reinforcing, the model demonstrates how targeted integration (Byram, 2021; Fantini, 2020) can produce more sustainable and transferable ICC.

Second, the study bridges the gap between theoretical frameworks and their classroom application (Diaz, 2013; Shaules, 2016) by constructing a systematic pedagogical framework. This framework specifies clear developmental objectives, learning outcomes, and assessment indicators aligned with ICC dimensions, offering educators a practical guide for curriculum design that integrates linguistic and intercultural learning goals. Such operationalization supports consistent and purposeful instructional planning across diverse educational contexts.

Third, the research offers a concrete and actionable teaching model, addressing the lack of practical teaching models (Aski et al., 2023; Lee, 2023; Peng et al., 2020; Shaules, 2016; Tran & Duong, 2018; Zhang & Yao, 2020), by detailing specific procedures, instructional content, and classroom activities. The model's coherent process ensures that learners systematically build both intercultural and language competences. Its clarity and adaptability make it a valuable framework for educators aiming to foster effective ICC in foreign language teaching contexts.

### **1.8 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study centers on a classroom-based teaching intervention aimed at designing and implementing an ICC pedagogical model that integrates both intercultural competence and language competence. This model is structured into four phases that form a continuous, cyclical process. It systematically incorporates teaching objectives, procedures, and activities to provide specific guidance and support for teachers in fostering ICC development in foreign language classrooms.

The pedagogical model is developed to account for the specific characteristics of the Chinese educational context, including challenges such as a relatively homogeneous student population, low self-efficacy in English speaking, and limited opportunities for intercultural interaction in the classroom. In designing this model, the study also examines learners' perceptions of language competence and its influence on their engagement in intercultural communication. This approach not only addresses the contextual particularities of the Chinese setting but also provides insights for the

effective intercultural teaching and learning strategies tailored to this context. The model is evaluated through questionnaires and interviews in terms of changes in students' ICC, including both intercultural competence and language competence.

Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of language competence—which includes linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences, as well as the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and recognizing its long-term developmental trajectory (Fantini, 2012)—this study specifically focuses on speaking competence. Speaking is a productive skill commonly used to evaluate language learning effectiveness (Sarmiento-Campos, 2022) and is widely considered the most critical indicator of language competence (Soozandehfar, 2010). Chinese EFL learners, particularly in the context of large classes and examination-focused education, often demonstrate limited speaking competence (Ma & Wang, 2021; Wang & Yuan, 2018; Zhang et al., 2017), which poses challenges for real-time intercultural communication. Therefore, the one-semester intervention focuses on assessing and developing students' speaking competence rather than overall language competence.

A total of over 300 Chinese undergraduates majoring in foreign languages (excluding English) participated in the study. All participants, in their twenties, are native Mandarin speakers who have studied English for an average of eight years, corresponding roughly to the B2 level of the CEFR (based on CET-4 comparisons). This sample reflects the typical characteristics of Chinese EFL learners in higher

education, including their linguistic background and classroom experiences, which inform the design and implementation of the pedagogical model.

The study was conducted at a local non-key university in southern China. The target course, taught by the researcher, is an elective language and culture course for third-year students, offered in two 45-minute sessions per week across 17 weeks. This course is part of the college English curriculum and aims to enhance students' cultural knowledge and ICC. The teaching intervention implementing the pedagogical model took place throughout the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, providing a direct practical application of the model.

### **1.9 Definition of Key Terms**

The list that follows contains operational definition of key terms pertinent to the current study.

#### **Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)**

ICC is defined as “the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one’s own” (Byram, 2000, p. 297). It encompasses both language competence and intercultural competence, which together contribute to successful intercultural communication (Byram, 2021).

#### **Intercultural competence**

Intercultural competence is a key component of ICC in Byram’s (2021) model. It encompasses attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. According

to Byram (2021, p. 96), it refers to “the ability to interact in one’s own language with people from another culture.”

### **Language competence**

According to Byram (1997, 2021), language competence is an element of ICC and encompasses linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences. The construct draws on language based framework proposed by van Ek (1986) and the Council of Europe (2001). Pedagogically, it can be operationalised as “communicating in speaking and writing, formulating what they want to say/write, in correct and appropriate ways” (Byram et al., 2002, p. 5).

### **Speaking competence**

Speaking competence is the oral component of language competence, encompassing linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse aspects (Byram, 2021).

### **Pedagogical model**

Pedagogy encompasses both “what is taught” and “how it is taught” as well as how these elements combine to help educators purposefully design learning experiences and environments (LaVelle, 2020, p. 2). Pedagogical models, also known as instructional models or teaching models, provide structured frameworks for designing and implementing instruction. According to David Merrill, a pedagogical model is “a specification of the methods and processes of instruction designed to achieve the desired learning outcomes” (2002, p. 25).

## **Intercultural (communicative) language teaching (ICLT)**

ICLT is an approach that highlights the interconnection between language and culture and integrates language learning with the development of ICC. According to Liddicoat (2004), “intercultural language teaching places the need to communicate in the first place and seeks to teach language/culture in a way which develops intercultural communicative skills at the same time as developing language skills” (p. 2).

## **Key/non-key universities**

Meng et al. (2017) and Gao (2016) classified Chinese universities into three categories: 985 Project universities, 211 Project universities, and provincial/local universities. The 985 and 211 Project universities, known as key universities, are highly selective and research-intensive institutions that receive substantial government funding and prioritize academic excellence. In contrast, provincial/local universities, classified as non-key universities, primarily focus on undergraduate education and serve regional student populations. In the context of this study, the selected university is a local university, which falls under the category of non-key universities.

## **College English Test (CET)**

The College English Test (CET) is a standardized English proficiency test in China, designed for non-English majors. It consists of two levels: CET-4 and CET-6. CET-4 assesses students' ability to use English in daily communication, academic studies, and professional settings, while CET-6 evaluates their ability to engage with English in

more advanced academic, international, and business contexts. A minimum score of 425 out of 710 is required to pass both levels.

For more details, refer to the official website of the National Education Examinations Authority (NEEA) at <https://www.neea.edu.cn/>.

### *Clarification*

*While many researchers treat intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and intercultural competence as synonymous, this study, following Byram's (1997,2021) ICC model, distinguishes between the two. In this framework, intercultural competence is considered a distinct part of the broader concept of intercultural communicative competence.*

*In this study, “language competence” is used as a broader term encompassing overall language ability, whereas “language proficiency” refers to its measurable aspects, such as CET-4 and CET-6 scores. However, some studies use the term “language proficiency” in a way that aligns with the concept of “language competence” as defined in this study.*

### **1.10 Organization of the Study**

This thesis is organized into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the research background, outlines the problem statement, and sets out the research objectives and questions. It also explains the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of ICC, discussing key concepts,

theoretical frameworks, and previous empirical studies. This chapter further introduces the pedagogical model proposed in this study. Chapter 3 details the research methodology, which adopts a mixed methods approach to ensure a comprehensive analysis. It describes the research design, participants, data collection methods, and analytical procedures. Additionally, it addresses the study's validity and reliability. Chapter 4 presents the study's results. It first reports the findings from the initial qualitative phase, focusing on the role of language competence in ICC development. This is followed by the quantitative results, which examine changes in both intercultural competence and speaking competence. Finally, the chapter reports the findings from the final qualitative phase, which explores participants' perceptions of the pedagogical model's effectiveness. Chapter 5 discusses the research findings, integrates the qualitative and quantitative results, and outlines both theoretical and practical implications. It concludes by addressing research limitations and offering recommendations for future studies.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews both theoretical perspectives and empirical research related to ICC. It begins by introducing the key concepts and dimensions of ICC, establishing the conceptual foundation for this study. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks that underpin the research, namely Byram's model of ICC and Newton et al.'s ICLT principles. The chapter then reviews previous empirical research on ICC within the context of foreign language education, along with several well-established pedagogical models that have informed intercultural teaching practice. The final section presents the ICC pedagogical model developed for this study.

#### **2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)**

This section presents the definition and dimensions of ICC, including both its fundamental dimensions and the often overlooked dimension of language competence.

##### **2.2.1 Definition of ICC**

The concept of ICC dates back to the 1970s when scholars suggested various theories or concepts that were related to ICC (Hammer et al., 1978; Hymes, 1972; Ruben, 1976). Over the past three decades, several terms have emerged in the field, including global competence, international competence, intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural competence, intercultural effectiveness, global citizenship, among others. While some

researchers equate intercultural communicative competence (ICC) with intercultural competence, this study follows Byram's (2021) model, which consistently uses the term "intercultural communicative competence (ICC)" and views intercultural competence as a part of ICC.

Byram (2000) defines ICC as "the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one's own" (p. 297). Bennett and Bennett (2004) describe it as "the ability to communicate effectively in intercultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" (p. 149). Similarly, Fantini (2006) defines ICC as "a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (p. 12). These definitions emphasize two key principles conducting intercultural communication "appropriately" and "effectively". In this context, "effective" means "the ability to achieve one's goals in a particular exchange", while "appropriate" means "the ability to do so in a manner that is acceptable to the other person" (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017, p. 9).

Deardorff (2006) conducted a seminal study to identify the definition and suitable evaluation techniques for ICC that were accepted by a panel of internationally renowned intercultural scholars. The results found that intercultural scholars and higher education administrators did not define ICC in relation to "specific dimensions" (i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes). Instead, most of them preferred definitions that were "broader in nature" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 253). Namely, just as the definitions

reviewed, a more general definition of ICC was preferred by scholars because it can be used in a variety of contexts and continues to evolve over time.

### **2.2.2 ICC Dimensions**

Theoretical models of ICC “constitute the foundation for how ICC is understood as an educational goal” (Hoff, 2014, p. 508). These models provide a framework for identifying the dimensions that influence or contribute to ICC, helping individuals effectively interact with people from different cultures (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). A thorough understanding of these dimensions enables educators to establish targeted ICC development objectives and offers a foundation for evaluating teaching outcomes.

#### **2.2.2.1 Fundamental ICC Dimensions**

Researchers in both Western and Chinese contexts have extensively explored the dimensions that shape ICC, resulting in the development of various theoretical models.

Notable Western models include the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1993), the General Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (Gudykunst, 1993), the Pyramid model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006), the Intercultural Competencies Dimensions Model (Fantini, 2009), and the Intercultural Communicative Competence Model (Byram, 1997, 2021). Over the past 30 years, Chinese scholars have also contributed significantly to ICC models (e.g., Gao, 2014; Gu, 2017; Jia, 1997; Kong & Luan, 2012; Peng et al., 2020; Xu & Sun, 2013; Yang & Zhuang, 2007; Yuan, 2021; Zhang & Yao, 2020). For instance, Jia (1997) developed the Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication, Gao (2014)

introduced the Knowing and Doing Model of ICC, and Gu (2017) proposed the Interactive Theory Model of ICC. However, there is no consensus among scholars on the construct of ICC.

Table 2 presents an overview of the dimensions of ICC, as proposed by various scholars in Western and Chinese contexts, categorized into knowledge, attitude, skill, awareness, language, and other factors. Some scholars, including Deardorff (2006), Gu (2017), and Zhang and Yao (2020), suggest that ICC comprises knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Others, like Fantini (2009, 2020) and Peng et al. (2020), expand this view to include a heightened awareness of cultural nuances. Additionally, some scholars introduce further dimensions to the construct of ICC. These include motivation (Gudykunst, 1993), behavior (Lustig & Koester, 2006), empathy (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005), and critical thinking skills (Gao, 2014), contributing to a more nuanced understanding of ICC.

Table 2

*Overview of ICC Dimensions in Western and Chinese ICC models*

Context	Scholars	Dimensions of ICC					
		Knowledge	Attitude	Skill	Awareness	Language	Others
Western context	Gudykunst (1993)	√		√			√
	Deardorff (2006)	√	√	√			
	Fantini (2009, 2020)	√	√	√	√		
	Byram (1997, 2021)	√	√	√	√	√	
	Arasaratnam & Doerfel (2005)	√	√	√			√

	Lusting & Koester (2006)	√		√		√
	Gao (2014)	√	√	√	√	√
	Gu (2017)	√	√	√		
Chinese context	Peng et al. (2020)	√	√	√	√	
	Zhang & Yao (2020)	√	√	√		

These diverse perspectives on ICC dimensions highlight its evolving nature, as scholars seek to capture the richness and complexity of intercultural interactions. Most scholars agree that ICC comprises cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017), which encompass the foundational elements of knowledge, attitude, and skills.

In addition to these three dimensions, awareness has also been recognized as essential for developing ICC. Many interculturalists, including Byram (1997, 2021), Bennett (2009), and Baker (2012, 2015), argue that self-awareness and awareness of others are key to successful intercultural interaction. Scholars have contended that teaching ICC requires the development of critical cultural awareness, as merely possessing cultural knowledge is insufficient, students need to engage in critical examination of culture, moving beyond mere accumulation of facts and knowledge (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Wickline et al., 2024).

Byram (1997, 2021) and Fantini (2009, 2020) place awareness at the core of their ICC models, highlighting its critical role in facilitating meaningful engagements. According to Byram (2021), critical cultural awareness represents the educational

dimension of language teaching, enabling learners to critically evaluate their own and others' cultural perspectives. Although people can acquire language and intercultural competence without awareness, having awareness allows for a deeper understanding and more effective application of these abilities. By fostering critical awareness, learners are better equipped to critically reflect on their own identities, navigate complex intercultural situations, make considered judgments, and integrate new perspectives into their personal and educational development. In this way, critical awareness is closely interdependent with other ICC dimensions, supporting learners' holistic intercultural competence (Byram, 2021).

Similarly, Fantini (2012) asserts that, “awareness differs from knowledge in that it is always about the “self” vis-à-vis everything else in the world (other things, other people, other thoughts, etc.), and ultimately helps to clarify what is deepest and most relevant to one’s identity” (p. 283). That suggests that awareness differs from knowledge as it focuses on the self in relation to everything else in the world, and it helps individuals to recognize and understand the cultural differences that exist between themselves and others. By being aware of these differences, individuals can navigate intercultural interactions better and avoid misunderstandings or conflicts. In line with this theoretical perspective, many scholars and educators have implemented ICC teaching and assessment based on the four core dimensions, knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness, demonstrating the practical relevance and applicability of awareness in fostering holistic intercultural competence (Huang, 2021; Li, 2021; Mu & Yu, 2021, 2023; Tran & Duong, 2018; Wimontham et al., 2024).

In brief, the review of fundamental ICC dimensions highlights its multifaceted nature. While definitions and emphasis may differ among scholars, ICC generally encompasses knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness, which collectively facilitate effective intercultural communication. However, communication is inherently tied to language, and language competence serves as the foundation through which these dimensions are enacted. Despite its significance, as shown in Table 2, many Western and Chinese ICC models have paid inadequate attention to the role of language competence in ICC.

#### **2.2.2.2 Overlooked Language Competence**

Byram (1997, 2021) defines language competence as comprising of three sub-dimensions: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence. These sub-dimensions collectively form communicative competence, as outlined in the CEFR framework. Specifically, Byram et al. (2002) describes language competence as “the ability to communicate in speaking and writing, and to formulate what they want to say/write in correct and appropriate ways” (p. 5). Language competence serves as the foundational element of effective communication, encompassing both the structural accuracy of language use and the appropriateness of expression within social and cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, while language competence underpins all forms of communication, it has received relatively limited attention in intercultural communication research and pedagogy. Fantini (2012) observes that many scholars and educators in the field of

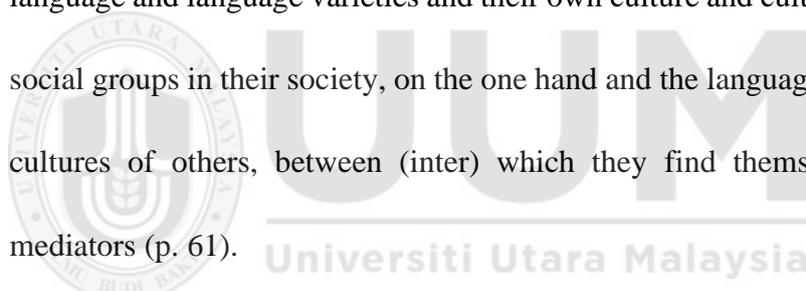
ICC tend to downplay its significance, often assuming that language competence falls exclusively within the domain of language teachers. Consequently, ICC training models, educational programs, and assessment tools rarely integrate language competence as an essential component.

This lack of emphasis can be attributed to several factors. First, many theoretical models and conceptualizations of ICC have been developed within Western-dominated academic contexts (Feng et al., 2025; Dalib, 2019), where scholars from linguistically dominant groups rarely experience language barriers themselves. Consequently, language is often taken for granted and receives limited attention in discussions of its role in intercultural communication (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2012, 2020; Yuan, 2021; Dalib, 2014). Second, there is a persistent separation between language education and ICC development in educational programs (Fantini, 2012; Feng et al., 2024; Gu & Zhao, 2021). This divide can be traced to traditional views that regard language learning primarily as the acquisition of linguistic forms and communicative skills, while intercultural competence is positioned within broader social or cultural education. As a result, the integration of linguistic and intercultural objectives is often overlooked, leading to fragmented curricula that fail to reflect the inherently intertwined nature of language and culture in communication. Third, the complexity of language competence contributes to its underrepresentation. Language competence is a multifaceted construct, involving not only grammatical accuracy and vocabulary but also sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects (Byram, 2021). The challenge of assessing and evaluating these diverse dimensions in intercultural

contexts makes it difficult to systematically integrate language competence into educational practices and empirical research.

However, scholars increasingly recognize that language and ICC are intrinsically interconnected. Byram (2009) and Fantini (2012) highlight that ICC inherently involves communication between individuals who are both linguistically and culturally different. As Byram (2003) argues that the most competent intercultural mediators are:

Those who have an understanding of the relationship between their own language and language varieties and their own culture and cultures of different social groups in their society, on the one hand and the language (varieties) and cultures of others, between (inter) which they find themselves acting as mediators (p. 61).



Byram emphasizes that the most competent intercultural mediators are those who possess not only an awareness of their own language and culture but also an understanding of the languages and cultures of other groups. This cross-linguistic and cross-cultural knowledge enables them to navigate intercultural interactions effectively. Similarly, Fantini (2012) questions, “How intercultural competent can one be without (at least some) ability in the host tongue?” (p. 278). This highlights that language competence is not just a tool for communication but a key facilitator of intercultural understanding.

Empirical studies further underscore the crucial role of language in ICC development. Studies consistently find that language competence enhances individuals' ability to engage in meaningful intercultural interactions (Dalib et al., 2019; Feng et al., 2025; Nadeem et al., 2022; Sarwari & Abdul Wahab, 2018). For instance, Dalib et al. (2019) demonstrate that proficiency in a foreign language improves one's capacity to comprehend different cultural perspectives and express ideas clearly, thus fostering ICC. Similarly, Feng et al. (2024, 2025) identify language competence as a catalyst for ICC development, showing a significant correlation between language proficiency and ICC scores. Language competence even influences students' confidence and mindset toward intercultural communication.

In conclusion, this section highlights the critical yet often-overlooked role of language competence in ICC. While ICC research and education have traditionally placed less emphasis on language competence, growing evidence suggests that it is an essential factor in fostering effective intercultural engagement. Understanding its role enables individuals to act as proficient intercultural mediators, bridging linguistic and cultural gaps in diverse communicative settings. The current study contributes to this conversation by exploring the role of language competence from the perspective of Chinese EFL learners, offering insights into how it shapes their intercultural interactions and supports the development of ICC.

### 2.3 Byram's ICC Model

Building on the introduction to the theoretical foundation of Byram's ICC model presented in Chapter 1, this chapter further elaborates on the model by providing detailed explanations of its core dimensions, a critical appraisal, and pedagogical objectives.

Byram distinguishes between "intercultural communicative competence" and "intercultural competence." He defines intercultural competence as "the ability to interact in one's own language with people from another country and culture." In contrast, intercultural communicative competence "involves the performance of a foreign language" (Byram, 2021, p. 97), enabling individuals to communicate with people from diverse cultures while serving as mediators between people from different cultural backgrounds.

Byram's ICC model comprises both the "cultural part" (knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness) and the "linguistic part" (linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence) (Risager, 2007, p. 224). The linguistic part, which focuses on language competence, and the intercultural part, which centers on the five *savoirs* that define intercultural competence. This distinction reveals the need to integrate linguistic and intercultural dimensions rather than treating them as separate domains, as both are essential for achieving genuine intercultural understanding.

### 2.3.1 Linguistic Part: Language Competence

In Byram's (2021) ICC model, language competence is one of two central pillars. Drawing on van Ek's (1986) language-based model, Byram redefines language competence to underpin effective intercultural communication, organizing it into three key constructs: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence.

*Linguistic competence:* The ability to apply knowledge of standard language rules to accurately produce and comprehend both spoken and written forms of communication.

*Sociolinguistic competence:* The capacity to interpret and assign appropriate meanings to an interlocutor's language, whether they are a native speaker or not, through implicit understanding or explicit negotiation to ensure clarity.

*Discourse competence:* The ability to construct and interpret spoken or written texts that either adhere to the cultural norms of the interlocutor or are adapted as intercultural texts to achieve specific communicative objectives.

Accordingly, the three constructs of language competence assume new, dynamic functions. Linguistic competence primarily remains a formal construct, referring to the rule-based use of grammar, lexis, and phonology to produce and comprehend accurate utterances; it deliberately excludes the negotiation of meaning (Byram, 2021, p. 61). Sociolinguistic competence expands beyond context-appropriate language choice to include the ability to "discover and negotiate the taken-for-granted meanings" as well

as “new and unfamiliar meanings” (Byram, 2021, p. 61). This involves developing learners’ sensitivity to cultural nuances and their readiness to question, clarify, and adjust politeness norms, metaphors, and implicit cultural assumptions, thereby enabling language use that is culturally attuned. Discourse competence, meanwhile, moves beyond textual coherence to focus on the strategic management of interaction, such as deciding when to interrupt for clarification, when to provide additional background, or how to structure communication to foster a shared understanding rather than a unilateral monologue (Byram, 2021).

Byram modifies these constructs to emphasize the dynamic processes of discovery, interpretation, and relationship-building, which he regards as critical for intercultural speakers (Byram, 2021; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). These elements highlight the importance of engaging with cultural differences actively and meaningfully, rather than relying solely on static linguistic or sociolinguistic knowledge. The important point in all this is to note that there are connections between language competence and intercultural competence and that introduction of language competence changes intercultural competence into ICC (Byram, 2021, p. 61). Language competence provides the linguistic resources and interactional strategies, whereas intercultural competence adds the attitudinal (curiosity, openness) and cognitive (cultural knowledge, critical awareness) dimensions that motivate and guide their use.

Pedagogically, this reconceptualisation urges teachers to move beyond code transmission. Instruction must help learners discover unfamiliar meanings, negotiate

shared understanding, and co-construct relationships, thereby transforming formal accuracy into genuinely intercultural action (Byram, 2021).

### 2.3.2 Intercultural Part: The Five *Savoirs*

The core of Byram’s ICC model lies in the five *savoirs*, which define the key dimensions of intercultural competence. According to Corbett (2003), these five *savoirs* are presently “the most fully worked-out specification of intercultural competence” (p. 31), which involves knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness. (see Figure 5).

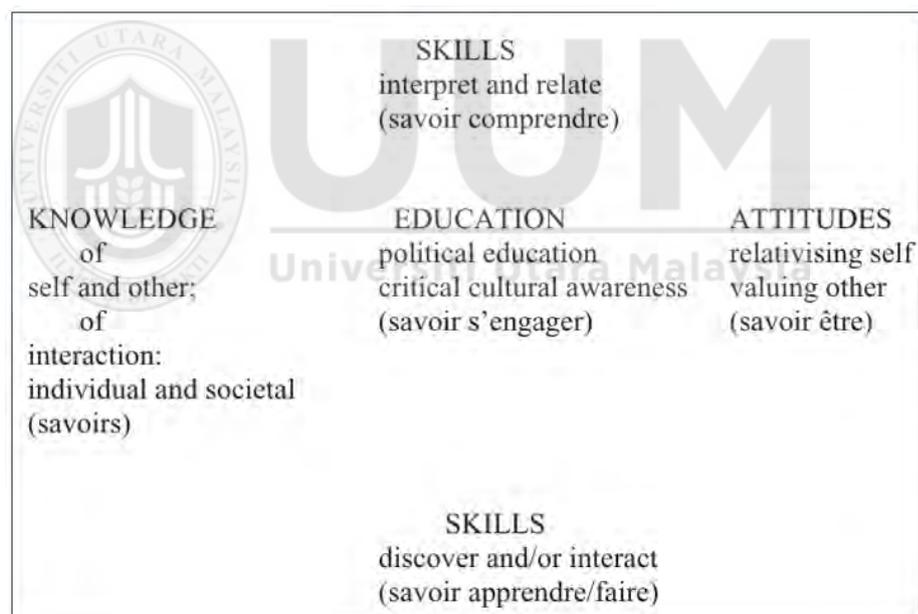


Figure 5 Dimensions of Intercultural Competence (Byram, 2021)

*Attitudes:* curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own (*savoir etre*).

*Knowledge:* of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's "interlocutor's" country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction (*savoirs*).

*Skills of interpreting and relating:* ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own (*savoir comprendre*).

*Skills of discovery and interaction:* ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*).

*Critical cultural awareness/political education:* the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries (*savoir s'engager*)

Byram (2021) emphasizes that knowledge and attitude are essential prerequisites for intercultural competence. Knowledge includes an understanding of both one's own and other cultures, as well as an awareness of interactional dynamics, such as variations in communicative norms and social behaviors across cultures. Attitudes involve a willingness to engage with different cultures, openness to diverse perspectives, adaptability in cross-cultural interactions, and respect for cultural conventions. These attributes collectively contribute to the ability to "decentre" (Byram, 2021, p. 45). Skills are divided into interpreting and relating, and discovery and interaction. The former refers to the ability to compare, analyze, and connect

cultural elements to personal experiences. The latter involves acquiring new cultural knowledge and applying knowledge, attitudes, and skills to navigate real-time intercultural interactions. Critical cultural awareness refers to the ability to assess and compare cultural values in one's own and other cultures through reflective and reasoned judgment.

Byram (2021) positions critical cultural awareness as a core element among the five *savoirs*, emphasizing its essential role in the development of intercultural competence. Its primary goal is to foster learners' ability to critically examine the values, beliefs, and behaviors of both their own and other cultures. Byram highlights the humanistic value of language teaching, arguing that critical cultural awareness encompasses key elements such as self-reflection, the ability to judge and critique, autonomy, and maturity (Lederer, 2014 as cited in Byram, 2021). He further asserts that these elements constitute "the crucial elements which make language teaching 'educational'" (Byram, 2021, p. 58).

The elaboration of these five *savoirs* within the model serves as a clear delineation of pedagogical goals, enabling foreign-language instructors to structure their teaching and evaluation methods. It facilitates the selection of appropriate teaching content, promotes a balanced integration of both linguistic and intercultural aspects in the curriculum, and supports the design of comprehensive assessment tools that evaluate students' progress across all relevant dimensions.

### 2.3.3 Critical Appraisal of Byram's ICC Model

Byram's ICC model (1997, 2021) was pioneering in shifting the field beyond communicative competence to include intercultural dimensions. It has had a profound influence on foreign-language instruction, intercultural training, and ICC research, serving as a foundational framework in numerous studies and publications (e.g. Feng et al., 2025; Huang, 2021; Liao & Li, 2023b; Mu & Yu, 2023; Peng et al., 2015; Tran & Seepho, 2016).

A notable feature of Byram's (2021) model is its pedagogical applicability in formal language-learning contexts. Its detailed and clear articulation of the objectives of each ICC component presents an ideal prototype on the development and assessment of ICC in foreign-language education. Byram (2009) described his model as "prescriptive", emphasizing its influence on the objectives and methods of cultural studies in foreign-language education, which has shaped curriculum development in a number of countries. To this day, his ICC model remains largely unchallenged by scholars (Feng et al., 2025; Hoff, 2014).

Byram's model underscores the essential role of language competence in achieving ICC. By emphasizing the importance of using language appropriately in various cultural contexts, he highlights its integral role in effective intercultural communication. As Byram (2021) states, "each component of intercultural competence is interrelated with language competence in ICC" (p. 105), and it forms a foundation for developing intercultural understanding. This insight not only reinforces

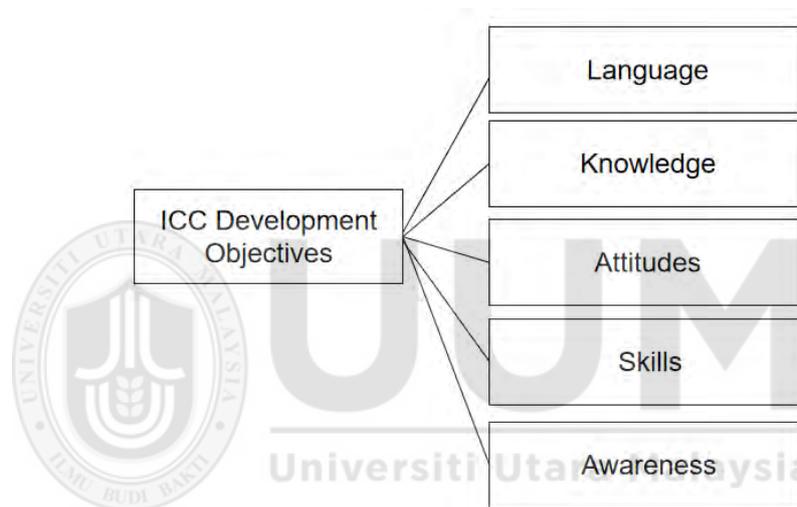
the inseparability of language and culture in communication but also provides a conceptual basis for integrating linguistic competence with cultural knowledge in ICC instruction.

However, Byram's model primarily takes the form of a "list" (Byram, 2009, 2021), encompassing language competence and intercultural competence without offering an explicit connection between language and intercultural competence. He does not "describe or prescribe relations among the subcompetences (between the two lists or within the two lists), or suggest a didactic ordering of which aspects of which competences should be taught prior to others" (Byram, 2009, p. 325). This lack of specificity poses challenges for educators aiming to design a structured approach to foster learners' ICC. Byram pointed out that "what we need is a model which shows the relationship between language competence and intercultural competence" and "it should help teachers and learners to clarify what needs to be taught and learnt" (2012, p. 7).

To address these aspects and align with the objectives of this research, this study builds on Byram's (2021) model by proposing an ICC pedagogical model. This model aims to offer clearer guidance on how the different partial competences within ICC relate to each other, helping to clarify their connections and provide practical suggestions for their integration in teaching.

### 2.3.4 Pedagogical Objectives Informed by Byram’s ICC Model

Drawing upon insights from Byram’s (2021) model and his specific illustrations of the four dimensions of ICC and the role of language competence in ICC, this study outlines the teaching objectives in foreign-language education in the Chinese context into five dimensions: language, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness (see Figure 6).



*Figure 6 Objectives of ICC Development in Foreign Language Teaching*

Given that enhancing language competence is a gradual process, as Fantini (2012) noted, “Developing language proficiency is not a quick or easy process, but takes considerable time and effort” (p. 267). As stated in Section 1.8 on the scope of this study, this research primarily focuses on improving students’ speaking competence and confidence, which are particularly critical for effective intercultural communication. The objectives related to the five dimensions of ICC are as follows:

*Language:* improve English language competence with a focus on speaking competence, building confidence in oral communication, and developing the ability to engage in effective and appropriate interactions.

*Knowledge:* develop knowledge of one's own and others' cultures, including customs, products, practices, and ways of interacting, as well as both specific and general cultural knowledge.

*Attitudes:* cultivate curiosity and openness, fostering the readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one's own, while developing the ability to 'decentre'.

*Skills of interpreting and relating:* enhance the ability to interpret and explain cultural practices of another culture and compare them with one's own.

*Skills of discovery and interaction:* strengthen the ability to acquire new cultural knowledge and practices and apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real-time communication and interaction.

*Critical cultural awareness:* promote the expansion of cultural awareness and the ability to critically evaluate the values, beliefs, and behaviors of both one's own and others' cultures.

These objectives function as both teaching goals and learning outcomes in Chinese foreign language education. Notably, the ICC development goals underscore the necessity of integrating language with intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, and

awareness. Given that limited language competence can hinder ICC development, and that intercultural competence cannot be effectively fostered without adequate language competence (Byram, 2021; Fantini, 2012, 2020), these objectives provide a more comprehensive framework for EFL instruction. By adopting this approach, teachers can create a learning environment where linguistic and intercultural competences mutually reinforce one another, fostering a more holistic and effective ICC development process.

## **2.4 Newton et al.'s ICLT Principles**

In this section, the ICLT approach is introduced, with a focus on its key concepts, beliefs, and the theoretical frameworks that support it. Following this, Newton et al.'s (2010) six ICLT principles are elaborated, offering a structured framework for designing lessons and activities that foster both intercultural and language competence development.

### **2.4.1 ICLT Approach**

The intercultural (communicative) language teaching (ICLT) approach emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the growing need for ICC in an increasingly globalized world. Unlike traditional language teaching, which often focused solely on linguistic competence, ICLT integrates the teaching of both language and culture, emphasizing their interdependence. Liddicoat et al. (2003) describe ICLT as an approach that:

Involves the fusing of language, culture and learning into a single educative approach. It begins with the idea that language, culture and learning are fundamentally interrelated and places this interrelationship at the centre of the learning process...

Intercultural language learning involves developing with learners an understanding of their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to an additional language and culture. It is a dialogue that allows for reaching a common ground for negotiation to take place, and where variable points of view are recognised, mediated and accepted. (p. 43)

Therefore, ICLT is different from the traditional language teaching which focused mainly on linguistic competence and neglected the cultural dimensions of language learning. It is grounded in the belief that language and culture are interdependent and that learning a language involves learning the cultural norms, values, and beliefs that shape its use. ICLT seeks to develop learners' ICC at the same time as developing language competence. Embracing diversity, fostering a willingness to connect with others, and shifting away from an ethnocentric approach to identity formation are all recognized and valued outcomes of ICLT (Newton, et al., 2010).

ICLT draws on constructivism theory, which is a theory that emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their understanding and knowledge based on their experience and interactions with the world around them, while teachers serve as a facilitator, guiding learners in their exploration of the language and culture (Vygotsky,

1978). Additionally, constructivism highlights the importance of comparison and reflection in the learning process. Through comparing new information with existing knowledge, learners can identify similarities and differences, and integrate new knowledge into their existing mental frameworks. Reflection, on the other hand, involves thinking about one's own thinking and learning process, which can enhance understanding and lead to deeper learning. ICLT approach encourages learners to perceive culture not merely as a collection of static facts about different people and their behaviors, but as a contextual framework that shapes how individuals exchange meaning and comprehend their own social environment during communication (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

#### **2.4.2 Newton et al.'s ICLT Principles and ICC**

Building on the ICLT approach, Newton et al. (2010) proposed six core principles to guide the integration of ICC and language teaching. The six principles are outlined in Table 3 (the relationships between these principles are presented in Figure 3).

Table 3

*Six Principles for ICLT (Newton et al., 2010)*

Intercultural communicative language teaching and learning (iCLT):

1. integrates language and culture from the beginning
2. engages learners in genuine social interaction
3. encourages and develops an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and culture-in-language
4. fosters explicit comparisons and connections between languages and cultures
5. acknowledges and responds appropriately to diverse learners and learning contexts
6. emphasises intercultural communicative competence rather than native-speaker competence.

### **Principle 1: ICLT integrates language and culture from the beginning**

ICLT puts emphasis on the interdependence of language and culture, with the main objective of fostering individuals who are capable of communicating effectively across cultures. This teaching approach recognizes the complex relationship between language and culture, where they shape and influence each other (Kramersch, 2014). The term “culture-in-language” captures this idea and culture is not static but dynamic, and in dynamic interplay with language (Carr, 2007). This integration ensures that language learning goes beyond grammatical accuracy, equipping learners with ICC necessary for effective communication in diverse global contexts.

### **Principle 2: ICLT engages learners in genuine social interaction**

Language learning, as Vygotsky (1978) posits, is inherently social, intertwining language and culture through interactive experiences. ICLT approaches foster interaction in two main ways. The first type of interaction is direct, which is with native speakers of the target language, as contact and interaction with these individuals greatly enhances the process of acquiring interculturality. The second form is indirect

interaction, which involves engaging in exploratory talk and interaction with teachers and peers, especially through task-based activities and role plays (Morgan, 1993), offers significant opportunities for learners to observe and explore the interplay between culture and language. These interactions also aid in the development of flexibility and communicative awareness. Additionally, through activities like reading books or other materials, learners can gain an intercultural perspective. Interaction, in this context, serves not only as a means to enhance fluency but also as a platform for learners to confront their culturally constructed worlds, challenge cultural assumptions, and gain a deeper understanding of themselves.

**Principle 3: ICLT encourages and develops an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and culture-in-language.**

Culture includes more than just visible aspects like arts, practices, and institutions. Much of culture is invisible and consists of values, beliefs, and thought patterns. ICLT responds to this issue by shifting emphasis from transmitting objective cultural knowledge to learner exploration and encouraging learners to delve into the visible and invisible aspects of culture, with a particular emphasis on understanding the connections between culture and language. The process of exploring culture engages learners in constructing knowledge through their own experiences and reflections. It involves observing and analyzing what Byram (1997) refers to as “social processes and their outcomes” (p. 19). In essence, learners develop a critical understanding of their own society and other societies, gaining awareness of the dimensions of culture and how it influences behavior and language use for everyone. In ICLT, reflection is

actively encouraged, allowing learners to comprehend how their culture shapes their language usage and how their communicative interactions reflect their cultural background. This serves as a crucial initial step towards developing intercultural competence (Kramersch, 1993, 2006a).

**Principle 4: ICLT fosters explicit comparisons and connections between languages and cultures**

Kramersch's statement of the well-known truth that "it is through the eyes of others that we get to know ourselves and others" (1993, p. 222). Comparing languages and cultures is an essential process within the realms of intercultural language learning and teaching. Language teaching that emphasizes comparing cultures has a useful purpose. It aims to help learners develop more complex understandings of culture, and it challenges the idea that cultural values are unchangeable and reduces prejudices between different cultures. Instruction that focuses on raising awareness of culture and creating links between them aims to produce what Byram (2006, p. 4) refers to as "intercultural speakers." Namely, people who have the ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries. It is crucial to address intercultural issues explicitly and openly rather than leaving learners to navigate them on their own.

**Principle 5: ICLT acknowledges and responds appropriately to diverse learners and learning contexts**

This principle recognizes that learners have different language abilities, learning styles, cultural experiences, and personal circumstances that affect their learning. ICLT

emphasizes the importance of understanding and valuing the learners' diversity and encourages teachers to make the most of diversity in the classroom to adapt teaching strategies, materials, and assessments. This is particularly important in multi-ethnic classrooms.

Markey et al. (2021) highlight that effective intercultural teaching requires educators to embrace cultural diversity as a strength and incorporate students' cultural identities and educational backgrounds into the learning process. These insights align with the ICLT approach, which promotes inclusive teaching by leveraging student diversity as a resource for learning. Instead of treating cultural differences as barriers, ICLT encourages teachers to create learning experiences that incorporate students' backgrounds and perspectives. By respecting and affirming students' cultural and gender identities, teachers foster an inclusive learning environment that enhances engagement and learning outcomes.

### **Principle 6: ICLT emphasizes ICC rather than native-speaker competence**

The last principle deals with the objective of teaching and learning a language. It questions the common practice of measuring a learner's proficiency or advancement based on the assumed proficiency of a native speaker and suggests that ICC should be the more practical objective of language instruction (Byram, 2021; Fantini, 2021).

In summary, Newton et al.'s (2010) ICLT principles provide a valuable framework for language education by highlighting the interdependence of language and culture, the importance of authentic social interaction, the value of exploratory and reflective

approaches, the need for explicit cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparisons, and responsiveness to diverse learners and contexts. These principles not only offer practical directions for designing classroom activities but also resonate with Byram's (1997, 2021) model of ICC. Newton et al. define the goal of ICLT as the development of intercultural competence across four dimensions: awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills, which directly correspond to those articulated in Byram's framework. This consistency reinforces the theoretical grounding of ICLT within established ICC scholarship and demonstrates its dual emphasis on linguistic and intercultural development.

In summary, Newton et al.'s (2010) six ICLT principles provide a structured framework for integrating language and culture in classroom instruction, directly supporting the development of Byram's (1997, 2021) four dimensions of ICC as well as communicative competence. Principle 1, integrating language and culture from the outset, fosters learners' knowledge and awareness by enabling them to understand cultural values, norms, and practices. Principle 2, engaging learners in genuine social interaction, primarily develops skills and attitudes through authentic communicative practice. Principle 3, encouraging an exploratory and reflective approach, enhances awareness and skills by prompting learners to reflect critically on their own cultural perspectives and communicative behavior. Principle 4, promoting explicit comparisons between languages and cultures, strengthens attitudes as learners recognize similarities and differences between their own and other cultures. Principle 5, responding to diverse learners and learning contexts, advances attitudes and skills

by encouraging respect for diversity and adapting learning experiences to individual needs. Finally, Principle 6, emphasizing ICC rather than native-speaker competence, reinforces communicative competence and attitudes by focusing on effective intercultural communication rather than linguistic perfection, thereby supporting learners in engaging confidently and appropriately across cultural contexts.

Collectively, these principles operationalize Byram's ICC framework in practical teaching, offering concrete pedagogical guidance for developing learners' awareness, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and language competence in intercultural communication. However, their implementation in practice remains limited due to insufficient teacher preparation and a lack of effective pedagogical tools (Lee et al., 2023; Oranje, 2016; Tran & Duong, 2018). To address this gap, the present study proposes a classroom-based pedagogical model that integrates Newton et al.'s ICLT principles with Byram's ICC framework, systematically fostering students' intercultural competence in the Chinese EFL context.

## **2.5 Studies and Practices on ICC Development in Foreign Language Teaching**

This section offers a comprehensive review of prior research on ICC development in foreign language teaching. It starts by examining studies that focus on the role of language competence in ICC and related fields. Following this, it explores challenges specific to ICC development within the Chinese context. Finally, the section analyzes ICC teaching practices both domestically and internationally.

### **2.5.1 Studies on Exploring the Role of Language Competence**

Empirical research related to language competence has primarily focused on examining the factors that influence ICC, with a number of studies highlighting language as a crucial element in facilitating effective interactions (Huang, 2021; Mu & Yu, 2021; Sercu, 2023; Wu et al., 2025; Zhou & Burhanudeen, 2023). However, few studies have specifically investigated the direct relationship between language competence and ICC (Feng et al., 2024; Kohli Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020; Miauw & Guo, 2021).

Mu and Yu (2021) conducted a study examining the current status, barriers, and potential solutions related to the development of ICC among Chinese college students. The findings indicated that students were generally dissatisfied with their self-reported ICC levels. Interview data revealed that most students who had some experience communicating with English speakers attributed their difficulties to communicate effectively to low language competence and a lack of confidence. Regarding their expectations for language and cultural learning, students expressed a strong desire to improve their speaking competence, communicate with greater confidence, and expand their cultural horizons by acquiring more cultural knowledge.

Wu et al. (2025) conducted a study on the acquisition of ICC among international and domestic students in China through the Internationalization at Home programme. The study utilized reflexive journals and semi-structured interviews to examine the goals, progress, and challenges faced by 10 international and 20 domestic students in their

engagement with the programme. The findings revealed that Chinese students encountered several challenges while interacting with peers from different countries, including insufficient foreign language competence, limited social and cultural background knowledge, low intercultural awareness, and underdeveloped intercultural communication skills. A significant portion of these difficulties was attributed to their limited language competence, which led to a lack of confidence and courage in intercultural communication.

Dalib et al. (2019), through a qualitative study exploring Malaysian students' perceptions of ICC, found that language competence plays a crucial role in interactions between local students and their foreign counterparts. The findings revealed that spoken language was perceived as the most prominent aspect of the participants' competence. The study suggests that enhancing students' language and communication skills is essential for fostering greater ICC.

These studies collectively highlight that language competence plays a crucial role in enhancing ICC, as it directly influences confidence, intercultural awareness, and the ability to engage in meaningful interactions. However, while language competence is a recognized influencing factor in these studies, none of them explicitly investigate the direct relationship between language competence and ICC.

Some studies have examined the relationship between language competence and ICC, yielding mixed results. While several studies report a significant positive correlation between language competence and ICC (Sarwari & Abdul Wahab, 2018; Sobkowiak,

2019), others suggest that the relationship is more complex and mediated by additional factors (Ghasemi Mighani et al., 2020; Weng, 2018). These findings indicate that although language competence plays a role in ICC, its effects may not always be direct or uniform across different contexts.

Despite the growing body of research highlighting the importance of language competence, there remains limited exploration of how language competence contributes to ICC development at a deeper level. Specifically, existing studies have not sufficiently examined how language competence interacts with ICC sub-competencies such as knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness, nor have they identified which specific aspects of language competence are most essential for effective intercultural interactions. These gaps in the literature are particularly relevant to the context of intercultural education (Deardorff, 2006; Kohli Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) further pointed out that the scarcity of research in this field complicates the ability to draw definitive conclusions, underscoring the need for further studies. Therefore, a more in-depth investigation into the mechanisms by which language competence shapes ICC in the foreign language context is necessary to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its role.

### **2.5.2 Challenges of ICC Development in China**

In the following section, the challenges faced by educators when developing ICC in foreign language classrooms in China is explored. Understanding these challenges is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the current state of intercultural teaching

in Chinese foreign language education, aligning with the research objectives of this study.

Zhang (2012), is one of the pioneers in identifying the challenges in intercultural teaching in foreign language education in China, argued that the two weaknesses are: (1) the affiliated role of ICC teaching to foreign language education; and (2) unclear aims and less systematic content in ICC teaching. Based on a nationwide study on ICC attitudes and behaviors in Chinese colleges, Gu (2016) observed that instructors often lack a systematic foundation for ICC development and have unclear training goals. They only carry out cultural teaching when time permits, and pay attention to fragmented cultural knowledge. He pointed out that many teachers “equate intercultural teaching with cultural teaching in which culture is treated as a static, fixed body of knowledge of the cultures associated with English-speaking countries” (2016, p. 263).

These observations reflect a broader issue in traditional foreign language instruction in China, which tends to separate language and culture in several ways. Teachers often focus on linguistic elements such as grammar rules, vocabulary acquisition, and sentence structures, while cultural aspects are either briefly mentioned or completely omitted. When culture is included, it is typically treated as isolated factual knowledge, such as customs, festivals, or historical traditions, rather than as part of meaningful and situated communication (Gu & Zhao, 2021). Language is frequently taught as a neutral and decontextualized system, disconnected from its social and cultural use

(Feng et al., 2024; Tang, 2022). As a result, students may acquire linguistic competence but lack the intercultural sensitivity and communicative ability needed for authentic intercultural encounters.

In addition to the lack of systematic integration and clear objectives within foreign language education, some scholars pointed out that the limited opportunities for authentic intercultural interaction as another challenge for ICC development in China.

Liu et al. (2014) highlighted that, in contrast to the United States, Australia, and various other countries where university students come from diverse backgrounds globally, the majority of students in Chinese universities and colleges are Chinese. As a result, EFL learners have less frequent communication with foreigners and insufficient intercultural experiences. Similarly, Zhou and Burhanudeen (2023) highlighted the limited opportunities for intercultural experience and practice as significant challenges for EFL undergraduates. They identified the lack of frequent communication with native English speakers and insufficient exposure to English-speaking cultures as the primary factors contributing to these limitations, further hindering the development of ICC.

Furthermore, Chinese teachers traditionally, have been accustomed to preparing students primarily for standardized national language exams (e.g., CET 4 and 6) over the past three decades. While they express a willingness to adopt an approach centered on ICC, many foreign language teachers struggle due to a lack of clear understanding of ICC and its pedagogy. This confusion extends to what should be taught, assessed,

and how to carry out these tasks, resulting in a gap between intent and action (Gu, 2016; Gu & Zhao, 2021; Wang & Kulich, 2015). Regrettably, the curriculum requirements such as the CECR in China does not outline specific aspects of cultural teaching or assessment. It also does not offer theoretical or practical guidance to aid teachers in teaching or evaluating ICC. Wagner et al. (2017) stated that foreign language teachers in China now face the challenge of acquainting themselves not only with the new concepts and ICC frameworks but also with the underlying skills and strategies that their students are expected to acquire.

Overall, the current development of ICC in foreign language teaching in China is far from its intended goals and objectives (Gu, 2016; Gu & Zhao, 2021; Han, 2014; Wang & Pan, 2019; Zhang & Wu, 2022; Zhang & Yao, 2020). In light of these ongoing challenges, it is crucial for scholars and educators to take proactive measures by providing clear teaching objectives and concrete examples of classroom-based instruction, thereby empowering foreign language teachers to confidently design and implement lessons that effectively foster ICC development.

### **2.5.3 Practices and Strategies of ICC Development**

Scholars in China and abroad have conducted various studies on developing learners' ICC in foreign language teaching. Some studies have emphasized exposure to authentic cultures (Barili & Byram, 2021; Oguro, 2017; Zuo & Hu, 2022), such as through intercultural service learning, international student internships, and study abroad programs. Among these, study abroad programs have gained more attention,

with researchers focusing on the intercultural learning gains of students enrolled in such programs (Jaiswal et al., 2024, Lee & Song, 2019; Zuo & Hu, 2022). Bean and Boffy-Ramirez's (2019) study indicated that overseas experience plays a significant role in the development of ICC.

Recent ICC research has increasingly focused on the application of modern information technologies to foster ICC development. Sun (2025)'s study examines the impact of an AI-enabled Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) program on the ICC of Chinese English majors. Findings show that the experimental group demonstrated significant improvements in attitudes, intercultural communication skills, and awareness, with AI tools and virtual collaborative activities playing key roles in fostering intercultural understanding and personal development. These results highlight the potential of AI-supported programs in cultivating global citizenship and promoting inclusive educational practices, offering valuable insights for future intercultural learning initiatives. Other researchers have also emphasized the role of technology in cultivating students' ICC (Hirotani & Fujii, 2019; Shadiev et al., 2024; Shen, 2021; Tecedor & Vasseur, 2020; Üzümlü et al., 2020), exploring technological tools such as tele-collaborative projects, social media-assisted learning, and video conferencing, among others.

These computer-based digital technologies not only provide learners with opportunities for authentic language learning but also facilitate intercultural interaction with people from different cultures. These technological tools can serve as an effective

supplement to classroom teaching, supporting autonomous and after-class learning. However, their implementation is not without challenges. Factors such as technological limitations, high implementation costs, and increased learning burdens may hinder their effectiveness (Shadiev & Dang, 2022; Shadiev & Yu, 2024).

Meanwhile, similar to technology-assisted intercultural teaching, study abroad programs also have inherent limitations. Not all institutions or students have the opportunity to participate in such programs. For the majority of students who remain on campus, classroom teaching remains the primary avenue for developing ICC within the Chinese context (Gui, 2024). Fortunately, Byram (1997) emphasized that classroom-based training is just as important as “experiential [going abroad]” learning. ICC develops gradually over time through both structured classroom instruction and real-world experiences. Moreover, classroom teaching is characterized by its accessibility and adaptability, allowing it to be applied across diverse academic disciplines (Krebs, 2020).

Apart from the abroad immersion programs and computer-assisted ICC development discussed above, various teaching approaches, such as classroom activities, culture-based teaching materials, and specific teaching strategies, have been proposed in the literature to enhance students’ ICC. Culturally-based materials, such as literature (Feeney & Gajaseni, 2020; Rezaei & Naghibian, 2018), culture stories (Chi et al., 2022), folktales (Magos, 2018), movies (Pinzón, 2020), and self-produced coursebooks (Yang, 2019), have been recognized for their potential to foster ICC by

providing authentic, context-rich resources that allow learners to engage with diverse cultural perspectives.

Activities such as collaboration-oriented reflection (Nguyen, 2022), cultural simulation games (Bücker & Korzilius, 2015), critical incidents (Dong et al., 2022; Tran et al., 2019), collaborative activities (Hei et al., 2020), and tandem learning (Koh et al., 2020) are valued for creating meaningful opportunities for intercultural engagement, enabling learners to bridge cultural differences and cultivate mutual understanding.

Moreover, specific strategies, including the integration of metacognitive strategies in instruction (Huang, 2023), assessment-driven intercultural learning (Emerson et al., 2024), content and language-integrated learning (Li et al., 2023), and problem-based intercultural learning (Busse & Krause, 2015), provide flexible tools for educators to select and adapt according to the context and needs of the students, enabling more tailored and effective intercultural teaching.

While these diverse approaches significantly enrich the repertoire of intercultural teaching practices, many remain fragmented, focusing on isolated skills, materials, or activities without addressing the interconnected nature of ICC development. Pedagogical models, by contrast, offer a coherent and process-oriented structure that links instructional goals with carefully sequenced activities (LaVelle, 2020), ensuring that multiple dimensions of ICC are developed in tandem. Such models not only facilitate the integration of diverse strategies, materials, and tasks into a unified

framework but also provide educators with a guiding logic for progression, reflection, and assessment. Therefore, pedagogical models address the limitations of fragmented approaches by fostering a balanced, sustained, and context-sensitive development of learners' ICC.

#### **2.5.4 Existing ICC Pedagogical Models**

A pedagogical model can be a framework that provides a structured approach to planning, implementing, and evaluating instruction. It provides step-by-step guidelines for structuring the lessons and organize learning activities to realize the teaching objectives outlined in theoretical ICC models. Upon reviewing the literature, it emerges that there are few pedagogical models available to guide the teaching process and practice (Shaules, 2016; Gu, 2017; Tran & Duong, 2018; Peng et al., 2020; Lee, 2023). The following sections offer an overview of four pedagogical models derived from foreign contexts and two from Chinese contexts. This summary delves into their teaching process, distinguishing features, and constraints.

##### **2.5.4.1 ICC Pedagogical Models in Foreign Contexts**

###### **Moran (2001)'s Cultural Knowing Framework**

Moran (2001) states that cultural learning “is best seen as a lived experience, as a personal encounter with another way of life” (p. 3). He proposed the Cultural Knowings Framework and the Experiential Learning Circle to bring the experience of culture into the language classroom. The framework consists of four interconnected

learning interactions: Knowing About, Knowing How, Knowing Why, and Knowing Oneself (see Figure 7). Each stage addresses a unique combination of content and outcomes.

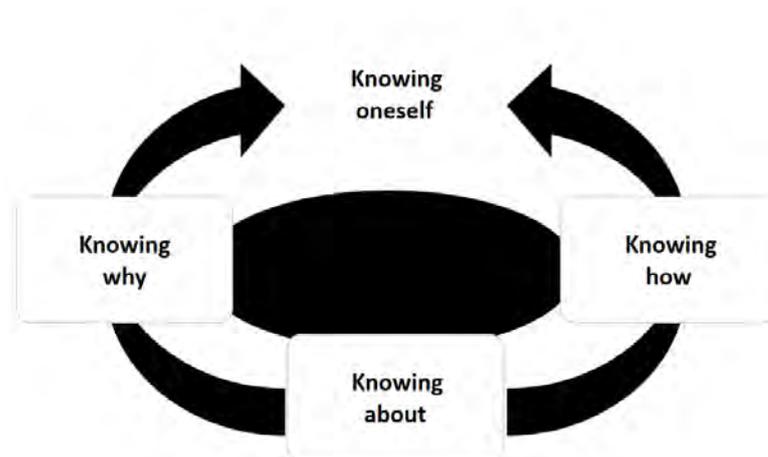


Figure 7 Cultural Knowing Framework (Moran, 2001)

*Knowing About:* This stage involves gathering and demonstrating the acquisition of cultural information, such as learning about historical events, social norms, holidays, art, literature, and other cultural artifacts.

*Knowing How:* This stage entails acquiring cultural practices, including practicing language use, participating in cultural rituals, following social etiquette, and employing non-verbal communication.

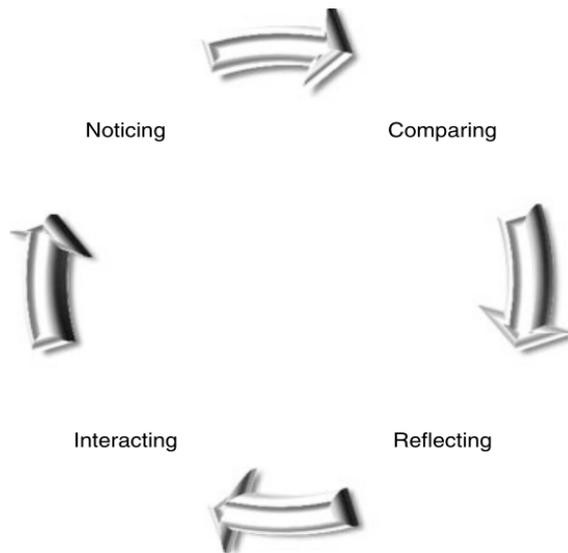
*Knowing Why:* This stage focuses on developing an understanding of fundamental cultural perspectives, including the reasons and motivations behind cultural practices and beliefs.

*Knowing Oneself:* This stage emphasizes self-awareness, reflecting on learners' values, opinions, feelings, questions, reactions, thoughts, ideas, and their own cultural values as an integral part of the cultural experience.

Moran's model offers a practical framework that highlights cultural knowledge, understanding, and experiential learning, which are essential for intercultural awareness. Importantly, it also addresses cultural practices and communication skills through the "knowing how" stage. However, the model primarily focuses on understanding the 'other' culture and the acquisition of cultural knowledge, with less emphasis on other ICC dimensions such as attitudes and the broader dynamic processes of intercultural interaction.

### **Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) Interactive Processes of Intercultural Learning**

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) presents the Interacting Processes of Intercultural Learning, which offers insights into how language learning can be perceived as an intercultural endeavor. According to Liddicoat, the practice of intercultural teaching can be comprehended as a cyclic sequence of interconnected processes, where learners engage in experiences related to languages, cultures, and their interconnections (refer to Figure 8). This perspective adopts a learner-centric approach to intercultural language teaching and learning, encompassing four key processes: Noticing, Comparing, Reflecting, and Interacting.



*Figure 8 Interacting Processes of Intercultural Learning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013)*

One possible entry of the intercultural learning may occur through processes of noticing of an intercultural difference that needs resolution. The process of noticing plays a vital role in learning, as it involves become aware of things that challenge their current assumptions. Comparing takes the form of identifying similarities and differences, the process of comparison can be seen as a way of entering into opportunities for developing greater complexity of thinking. Noticing and comparing are essential to learning, since they serve as resources for reflection, which are crucial for the development of interculturality (Svarstad & Risager, 2024). Reflection involves thinking about how one reacts, thinks, feels, and engages constructively with diversity. The outcomes of reflection should then become action, which may involve activities such as designing language performance, expressing reflections to others, and negotiating meanings and understandings of phenomena from various perspectives. These interactions, in turn, offer renewed opportunities for noticing, comparing, and

fostering the development of more intricate understandings. This process forms an ongoing cycle of learning.

Liddicoat and Scarino's significant contribution lies in their expanded view of the relationship between language and culture, advocating for language teaching and learning from the intercultural perspective. As they state, "the goal in language learning within an intercultural perspective is for learners to participate in communication to exchange meanings and to discover, in and through experiences" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 69). While their framework offers crucial insights into the processes of intercultural learning, its application in the Chinese context presents certain challenges.

Their model follows a cyclical process of noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting, which presupposes that learners have diverse intercultural experiences to draw upon for meaningful reflection. This structure is well-suited for individuals with rich intercultural exposure, such as migrants or study-abroad students. However, in the Chinese EFL context, where students often lack direct intercultural experiences, immediate reflection may be superficial or ineffective. Instead, a more suitable approach would be to first incorporate intercultural activities to provide students with concrete experiences. The activities serve as a foundation for deeper reflection, making the process more meaningful and ensuring that students engage with intercultural learning in a way that is both experiential and cognitively enriching (Kolb, 1984; Newton et al., 2010).

## Shaules (2016)'s Developmental Model of Linguaculture Learning

Another pedagogical model of integrated approach to language and cultural teaching was proposed by Shaules (2016), the Developmental Model of Linguaculture Learning (DMLL). In this model, the term “linguaculture” is employed to express the concept that language and culture are interconnected and should be viewed as an inseparable entity. DMLL suggests that linguaculture learning is experienced at four different levels: i-1 (encountering), i-2 (experimenting), i-3 (integrating), and i-4 (bridging). The symbol “i” in this context symbolizes “identity” and signifies the broader concept of an evolving sense of self that often accompanies language and cultural learning (refer to Figure 9).

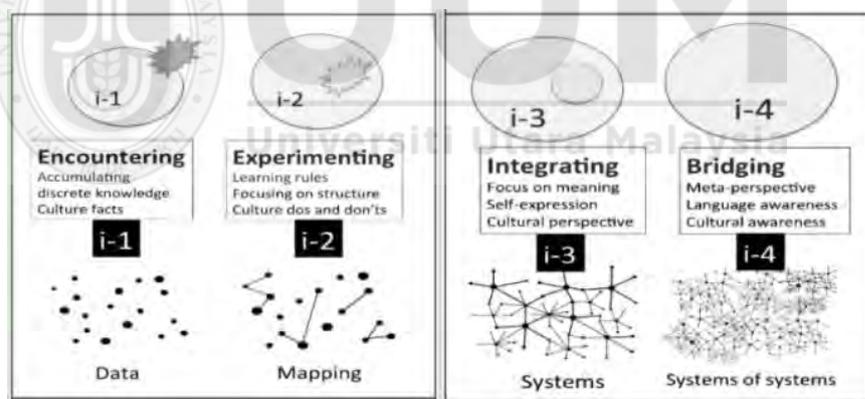


Figure 9 Developmental Model of Linguaculture Learning (Shaules, 2016)

The initial stage of learning involves encountering unfamiliar patterns. At the i-1 level, learning is perceived as a progression of accumulating isolated knowledge and cultural facts. In the second stage, experimentation becomes more contextualized and situational. Learners are prompted to recognize their individual learning styles and strategies in order to enhance their skills. They begin to conceptualize foreign cultures

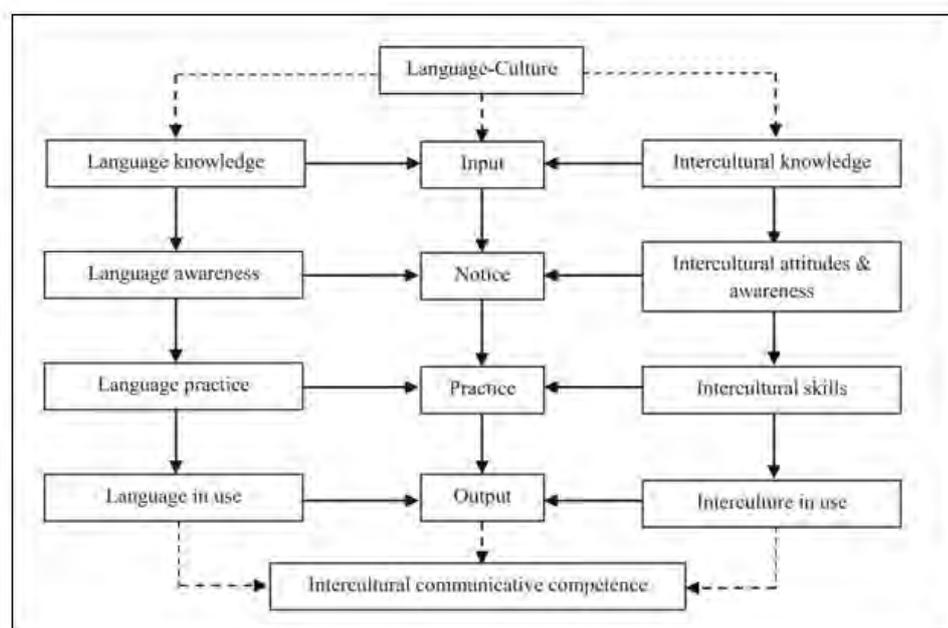
in terms of rules and guidelines, understanding what is acceptable and what is not. At the integration level, language learners gradually get a sense for using language to communicate, and express their own cultural perspectives. Progressing from i-2 to i-3 allows learners to transition towards a more ethnorelative perspective. At the i-3 level of cultural understanding, cultural relativism becomes prominent. Advancing further to the i-4 level of cultural awareness goes beyond comparing two contrasting cultural worldviews. It involves seeking overarching principles to comprehend cultural patterns at a meta-level. As learners advance through these stages, they not only gain greater linguistic competence but also witness the development of their intercultural awareness and intercultural identity.

Shaules (2016) presents a model consisting of four levels of DMLL that outline a path towards personal growth through language learning and cultural exploration. This model offers a roadmap for cognitive development, illustrating the progression of language and cultural knowledge towards increasing sophistication as time goes on. Shaules argues “language and culture learning are much more than a set of skills or a way to get a job. Linguaculture learning can lead to a transformative experience and an expansion of the self” (p. 15). This perspective highlights that learning a language is not merely about acquiring communicative competence but also about engaging with different cultural worldviews, which can shape one’s identity and way of thinking. This model’s key contribution lies in its emphasis on cognitive development and the formation of intercultural identity. These thoughts are significant, however, the

developmental model of linguaculture learning remains largely theoretical. A more detailed explanation is needed, particularly regarding its practical application and strategies for effectively integrating language and culture in classroom teaching.

### **Tran and Duong's (2018) Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (ICLT) model**

Tran and Duong's (2018) ICLT model represents a continuous process of acquiring ICC. It comprises three components (see Figure 10): Language-Culture, the primary training process involving Input, Notice, Practice, and Output, and the systematic integration of ICC. The second component, which is the focal point, encompasses four teaching steps aimed at facilitating learners' development of ICC. Each step corresponds to a phase in the scaffolding and construction of knowledge, thereby aiding learners in their ICC growth. Language and culture are intricately connected and serve as the fundamental basis for the ICLT model.



*Figure 10 ICLT Model (Tran & Duong, 2018)*

According to Tran and Duong (2018), the purpose of the input step is to offer learners language knowledge and intercultural understanding by exposing them to a diverse range of authentic texts and sources, including oral, written, and visual materials, which revolve around language and various cultures. During the notice step, learners are prompted to draw upon their existing knowledge of language and intercultural aspects. They are encouraged to observe and compare unfamiliar features with those they are already familiar with. In the practice phase, learners are presented with a range of opportunities to engage in short, supported, and guided communicative tasks related to the newly acquired knowledge from the previous teaching steps. These tasks are designed to provide learners with hands-on practice and reinforce their understanding of the subject matter. During the output stage, learners are capable of generating the language and intercultural features encountered in the earlier input phase. They are also able to reflect on the effectiveness and appropriateness of their produced output.

Overall, this model integrates multiple theories, including Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, Long's Interaction Hypothesis, and Swain's Output Hypothesis, forming a comprehensive learning pathway from input to output. Its framework clearly structures the language and cultural learning process while addressing both linguistic and intercultural competence development. However, the distinction between the "Practice" and "Output" stages could be further clarified, as the "supported intercultural tasks" in the Practice stage and the "independent application tasks" in the Output stage sometimes appear to overlap in actual teaching

contexts. Additionally, the model might benefit from a clearer alignment between its four stages and the developmental goals of ICC, which could help teachers more effectively monitor students' progress in ICC. Although it acknowledges key components such as intercultural knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness, the model does not provide detailed guidance on how these abilities are expected to develop at each stage.

In conclusion, the development of ICC pedagogical models is still insufficient when compared to the study on ICC theoretical models. The four foreign context-based studies conducted by Moran (2001), Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), Shaules (2016) and Tran and Duong (2018) provide valuable enlightenment for ICC teaching practice. These models outline specific processes and elaborate the relationship of different stages, emphasizing aspects such as cultural knowledge acquisition, reflective learning, cognitive growth, and interactive practice, thereby contributing to the construction of ICC pedagogical models in the classrooms. However, they also have limitations in their applicability to the Chinese context. Moreover, their focus on intercultural experience and interaction in authentic environments poses challenges in China's predominantly monolingual teaching setting. Liao and Li (2023b) underscored the need to explore and adapt intercultural teaching theories and methodologies within China's foreign language education.

#### **2.5.4.2 ICC Pedagogical Models in Chinese Context**

In the new era, several Chinese scholars have constructed theoretical and pedagogical models of ICC in the Chinese context (Gu 2017; Kong & Luan, 2012; Peng et al., 2020; Zhang & Yao, 2020). In this section, two representative ICC pedagogical models by Gu (2017, 2021) and Peng et al. (2020) are introduced.

### **Peng et al.'s (2020) Practical Model of Intercultural Foreign Language Teaching**

Peng et al. (2020) point out that ICC consists of six primary factors: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural cognitive skills, intercultural communicative skills, and awareness in the Chinese context. Drawing on the principles of intercultural teaching proposed by Liddicoat et al. (2013), the pedagogical/practical model proposed by Peng et al. (2020) includes six dimensions: teaching principles, teaching objectives, teaching strategies, teaching procedures, teaching activities and assessment (see Figure 11).

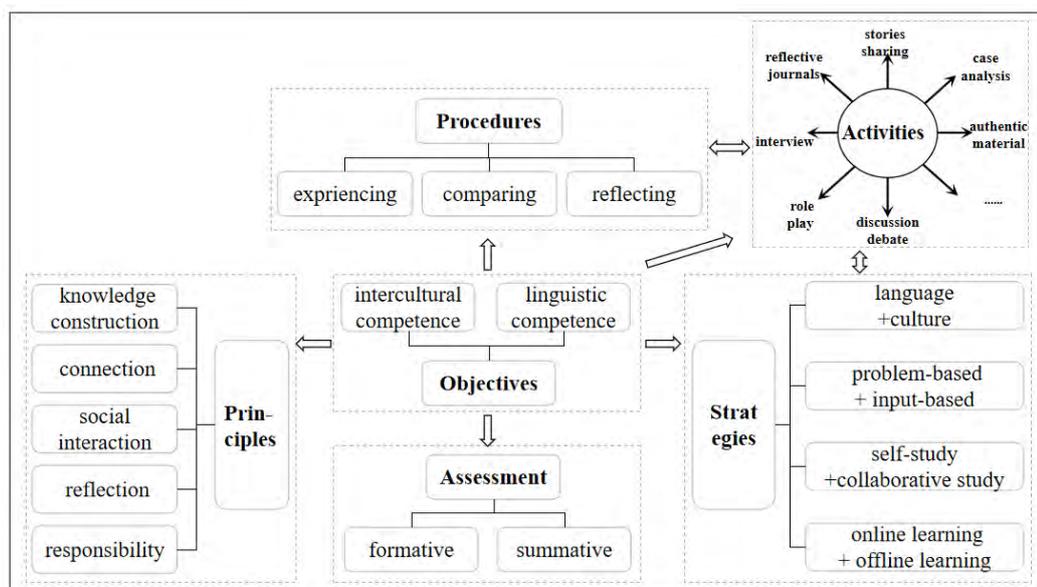


Figure 11 Practical Model of Intercultural Teaching (Peng et al., 2020)

As shown in Figure 11, the teaching objectives form the core of the practical model, with the other five dimensions (principles, procedures, activities, strategies and assessment) supporting and revolving around the teaching objectives. Teaching objectives include foreign linguistic competence and intercultural competence. The former develops students' language skills, standardizes oral and written language expressions, and enables students to use language accurately and effectively. The latter develops students' intercultural competence, so that they can treat people with different social and cultural identities equally and interact with them effectively and appropriately.

The principles of teaching and learning in this model consist of five elements: knowledge construction, connection, social interaction, self-reflection, and self-discipline. The teaching strategies cover four main areas. (1) integrating language and cultural teaching, (2) blending problem-based and input-based teaching approaches, (3) combining independent learning with collaborative learning, and (4) balancing online learning and offline learning. The instructional process involves three distinct processes: discovering and experiencing culture, comparing and analyzing culture, and critically reflecting on cultural differences. The teaching activities include cultural story sharing, case study, role-play, reflection journal writing, etc. The assessment methods involve formative and summative assessment.

This model offers general principles and broad strategies for developing ICC, allowing language teachers the flexibility to adapt these principles to their teaching practice.

However, its broad scope may limit its practicality in providing specific, step-by-step guidance for classroom instruction. Additionally, while the model outlines key aspects of ICC, it does not clearly specify how different dimensions such as knowledge, attitudes, skills, and language progress throughout the instructional process. Without concrete guidance on how these elements develop at different learning process, teachers may struggle to effectively implement the model and track students' ICC growth.

### **Gu's (2017) Process Model for ICC Development**

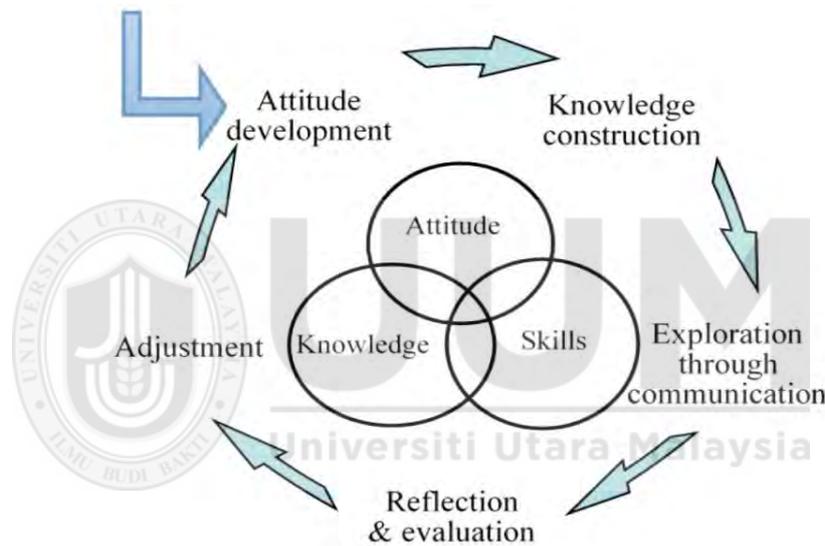
Originally proposed by Gu in 2017 and later refined in 2021, this pedagogical model identifies the core components of ICC, namely attitude, knowledge, and skills. Each of these dimensions is further divided into various sub-dimensions. However, the large number and variety of these sub-dimensions make the model difficult to apply in practical teaching. To enhance its usability, Gu and Zhao (2021) later streamlined the model by condensing the ICC components into ten key items (Table 4).

Table 4

#### *Dimensions and Components of ICC (Gu & Zhao, 2021)*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Components</b>
Attitude dimension	Lingua-cultural awareness
	Cultural relativism
	Global mindset
Knowledge dimension	Knowledge of the target language
	Knowledge of one's national and local culture
	Knowledge of world cultures
	General encyclopedia knowledge
Skill dimension	Communicative and socializing skills
	Basic cognitive skills

The dimensions and components listed in Table 4 play a crucial role in defining the objectives and assessment of intercultural teaching. Based on Liddicoat & Scarino's (2013) Model of Intercultural Learning Communication Process, Gu (2017) puts forward a five-stage ICC teaching process: Attitude Development, Knowledge Construction, Exploration through Communication, Reflection and Evaluation, and Adjustment.



*Figure 12* Process Model for ICC Development (Gu, 2017)

The five-stage progressive pedagogical model is illustrated in Figure 12, emphasizing the cyclical nature of ICC development. This model consists of two interconnected levels: the content level and the process level. At the core, the content level defines the three dimensions of ICC: knowledge, attitudes, and skills, as the fundamental teaching objectives (refer to Table 4). Surrounding this, the process level represents the five-stage ICC training process, which guides learners through structured developmental phases.

The process begins with Attitude Development, fostering cultural awareness and motivation as the foundation for intercultural learning. Next, Knowledge Construction enables learners to expand their understanding through continuous dialogue and interaction. In the Exploration through Communication stage, learners engage in communicative tasks, developing skills in interpreting and negotiating meaning. This is followed by Reflection and Evaluation, where they critically analyze their experiences, assess their progress, and identify areas for further improvement. Finally, in the Adjustment stage, learners refine their ICC frameworks and adapt their communicative strategies in response to their reflections, preparing them for further intercultural engagement. This cyclical process reinforces ICC development, ensuring continuous learning and growth.

Gu's (2017) model is essential in bridging the gap between theory and practice, especially in classroom teaching. It closely integrates teaching objectives with the theoretical framework of ICC (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) and outlines a structured teaching process, providing a concrete and practical approach that enhances its applicability for educators. However, the ten sub-components of ICC objectives are overly broad, such as global mindset, encyclopedic knowledge, lack clear instructional pathways, which may hinder effective implementation. Additionally, the model mentions language in some parts, but it does not specify how language is systematically development alongside knowledge, attitude, and skills. Lastly, the Reflection and Evaluation stage and the Adjustment stage both involve reviewing and modifying ICC, leading to overlapping content.

In summary, Chinese pedagogical models typically exhibit the following features and issues: First, most of these models tend to prioritize macro-level principles, content, and strategies (Kong & Luan, 2012; Peng et al., 2020, Zhang & Yao, 2020). They emphasize broad, overarching ideas about teaching and learning, which are important for guiding overall educational direction. However, they often lack specific guidance on classroom practices. Furthermore, many Chinese pedagogical models present a disjointed list of elements, without offering clear process on how to integrate these elements into actual classroom practice. This can leave teachers feeling uncertain about how to effectively implement the models in their teaching. Finally, a notable limitation of many Chinese pedagogical models (Gu, 2016; Kong & Luan, 2012; Peng et al., 2020; Zhang & Yao, 2020) is the lack of clear guidance on how to effectively integrate intercultural competence with language competence, which often resulted in these areas being taught separately.

To address these issues, it is crucial to provide more specific guidance on classroom teaching and assessment. This includes outlining clear teaching objectives, structuring well-defined teaching processes, and providing detailed examples on how to apply the model in real-world classroom settings. Importantly, the integration of language competence and intercultural competence should be emphasized, ensuring that these two key aspects are developed simultaneously rather than in isolation. Additionally, conducting empirical studies to test the effectiveness of the model in actual teaching contexts is essential. Recent literature indicates that the number of empirical studies on pedagogical applications of ICC, especially those integrating language and

intercultural competence, remains limited (Peng et al., 2020; Shi & Zhu, 2015). This study aims to address these gaps by proposing a structured, research-based pedagogical model to develop students' ICC in the foreign language classroom, with a particular focus on the integrated development of both language and intercultural competence, as well as on teaching and assessment.

## **2.6 ICC Pedagogical Model of This Study**

In light of the discussion in Section 2.5, and drawing upon Byram's (2021) ICC model, Newton et al.'s (2010) ICLT principles, as well as the pedagogical objective for ICC development outlined in Section 2.3.4, this study proposed a four-phase pedagogical model for developing ICC in foreign language classrooms, consisting of Intercultural Acquisition, Intercultural Comparison, Intercultural Engagement, and Intercultural Reflection. A brief overview to this model was provided in Section 1.6 (refer to Figure 4). The following section presents each of the four phases, outlines their corresponding objectives, discusses the relationships between these objectives, and highlights the model's contributions. Detailed implementations and specific classroom activities are elaborated in Chapter 3.

**Intercultural Acquisition:** The primary objective of this phase is to enhance students' intercultural knowledge while providing basic language support to facilitate understanding and expression, laying the groundwork for further development of ICC. As Chinese scholars Zhang and Yao (2020) noted, knowledge serves as the foundation for ICC development. Relevant surveys (Feng et al., 2024; Gao, 2016; Mu & Yu, 2021; Peng et al., 2015; Wang & Yu, 2008) have revealed that Chinese college students

typically score low on the knowledge dimension of ICC, with many identifying a lack of foreign cultural knowledge as a significant barrier to effective intercultural communication. Students often express that without sufficient cultural knowledge and language skills needed to describe cultural phenomena, their communication is restricted to superficial greetings and simple interactions. Sun (2016) emphasized that without a comprehensive understanding of the history and current situation of the target language's culture, it is impossible to grasp the deeper values, beliefs, and lifestyles of its people, limiting the potential for meaningful intercultural exchanges.

This model deliberately places intercultural knowledge acquisition as the initial stage, providing students with a solid foundation cultural knowledge, with language competence focused on vocabulary, grammar, and basic sentence construction for cultural topics. Through this phase, learners gain insights into various aspects of the target culture, such as geography, history, customs, education, religion, society, and values. This comprehensive knowledge directly addresses the needs of Chinese EFL learners, enabling them to notice cultural differences and establish a foundation that equips them for more effective intercultural comparisons, interactions, and reflections. This distinguishes this model from other models (Deardorff, 2006; Gu, 2017, 2021) that prioritize attitude development over a structured cultural knowledge foundation.

**Intercultural Comparison:** This phase aims to cultivate students' attitudes while enhancing their language skills, with particular emphasis on expressing ideas fluently and language sensitivity in intercultural interactions. Positive attitudes

towards other cultures are necessary, such as empathy, curiosity and respect (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Byram, 2021; Deardorff, 2006). By engaging in activities that involve comparing, analyzing, and relating their own culture to others, students gain a deeper understanding of cultural differences, which helps them transition towards a more ethnorelative perspective. Students challenge their existing perceptions and develop a more nuanced understanding of diverse worldviews, enhancing their cultural sensitivity (Koch & Takashima, 2021; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Newton et al., 2010). As Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) suggest, “By inviting the identification of similarities and differences, the comparison process can be seen as a way of entering into opportunities for developing greater complexity of thinking” (p. 66).

Unlike some traditional teaching approaches that lack a structured framework for intercultural comparison and primarily focus on foreign culture knowledge transmission (Lu & Yu, 2021). Ignoring the duality or plurality of cultures and equating cultural comparison with the mere infusion of foreign cultures is a major taboo for achieving equal and effective intercultural communication (Chi et al., 2022; Zhao, 2012). Learners are guided to use language that is socially and culturally appropriate: selecting vocabulary, expressions, and tones that demonstrate respect, politeness, and sensitivity. In response, this model prompts learners to engage in a more critical and reflective analysis of cultural differences, encouraging them to understand not only the target culture but also their own cultural values. By fostering deeper intercultural sensitivity, the model aims to bridge the gap between cultural

knowledge and reflective understanding, ultimately enhancing learners' inclusive attitudes.

**Intercultural Engagement:** This phase emphasizes skill development and the application of language in simulated intercultural contexts. Students participate in activities designed to strengthen their abilities in interpreting, relating, discovering, and interacting within intercultural settings. In this context, intercultural engagement involves actively seeking out and participating in intercultural interactions while working towards problem-solving. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) highlights that “Interculturality is not a passive knowing of aspects of diversity but an active engagement with diversity” (p. 67), suggesting that learners must actively engage in interactions based on their understanding of diversity to construct, communicate, explore, and reshape meanings in response to others. This model’s adjustment by placing interactions before reflection represents a thoughtful adaptation of Liddicoat & Scarino’s (2013) Interactive Processes of Intercultural Learning (refer to Section 2.5.4.2), making it more closely aligned with the intercultural learning environment of Chinese students. Furthermore, this adjustment resonates with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that learners construct knowledge through practical experiences and interactions rather than passively receiving theoretical concepts.

Scholars agree that intercultural interactions are key to optimizing cognitive, communicative, and intercultural learning outcomes (Nolan et al., 2024; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Nolan et al. (2024) found that courses with intentional cross-

cultural design significantly increased student interaction and enriched learning experiences compared to courses with a generic learning structure. Many studies focus on interactions with international students in multicultural classroom contexts (Lan, 2020; Liu et al., 2025; Zou & Yu, 2021). However, a notable challenge in the Chinese educational context is the lack of authentic experiential activities that actively engage students in the classroom. To address this issue, this phase of the model integrates a range of highly interactive learning activities, including decision-making, conflict resolution, role-play, and real-life problem-solving exercises. These are intended to build students' intercultural skills and language competence while encouraging active participation and communication.

In terms of learning objectives, this phase develops skills by enhancing students' ability to interpret, relate, discover, and interact in intercultural contexts, while also strengthening language competence through applying vocabulary and structures in interaction, adapting language to cultural norms, managing conversation flow, negotiating meaning, and clarifying misunderstandings. This phase is crucial in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge of culture and active participation in intercultural communication. Through these interactive activities and real-world scenarios, learners gain hands-on experience that enhances their ability to engage in meaningful intercultural skills and fosters a more profound intercultural understanding (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Newton et al., 2010; Shadiev et al., 2024).

**Intercultural Reflection:** This phase encourages learners to critically assess their intercultural activities and language use, which is essential for developing critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2021). Reflection plays a pivotal role in fostering interculturality by enabling learners to evaluate their interactions and develop a deeper understanding of different cultural contexts. Crane and Sosulski (2020) argue that through critical reflection, individuals are able to re-examine their existing cognitive frameworks, challenge ingrained beliefs, and thereby achieve a transformation in their thinking and understanding. This is especially important for intercultural learning and development, as it helps learners break down stereotypes and biases, fostering a more open and diverse cultural understanding. Beyond simply enhancing knowledge, reflection is deep learning that contributes to holistic growth across cognitive, emotional, and motivational dimensions. As emphasized by Young (2018), structured reflection can significantly enhance students' ability to develop critical intercultural awareness by assessing experiences and evaluating cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as to use precise language for reflection and evaluation, recognize the appropriateness of language in different cultural contexts, and produce coherent reflective texts, orally or in writing, thereby supporting meaningful and transformative learning.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) describe reflection as a process of interpreting experience, during which learners consider the significance of their observations, analyze their reactions, and explore connections between new and existing knowledge. This reflective practice encourages learners to plan future actions and deepen their

cultural understanding, linking personal experiences to broader cultural insights. Reflection is integral to the development of ICC, preparing learners for more effective intercultural interactions. Unlike some models that focus primarily on accumulating cultural knowledge and interaction without emphasizing reflection (Tran & Duong, 2018), this model highlights structured reflection to foster a transformative learning experience. By cultivating a reflective mindset, it enables students to critically evaluate their cultural assumptions and biases, promoting ongoing development, greater intercultural sensitivity, and laying the foundation for more profound and lasting intercultural engagement.

Collectively, these four phases form a cyclical and interdependent process: Intercultural acquisition and comparison provide the necessary foundation, intercultural engagement offers practical application, and intercultural reflection deepens learners' understanding and prepares them for further cycles of growth. Each phase builds upon and reinforces the others, creating a continuous cycle of development that supports learners in becoming more culturally and linguistically competent communicators. This pedagogical model not only enhances Byram's (2021) ICC model by providing a structured sequence for achieving various ICC teaching objectives and illustrating the relationships between these objectives. It also builds upon Newton et al.'s (2010) ICLT principles by offering practical strategies for implementing intercultural teaching and learning. By visualizing these principles in action, the model serves as a comprehensive and practical guide for educators,

facilitating the systematic and strategic integration of intercultural competence with language competence.

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter outlined the definitions and dimensions of ICC, emphasizing the essential role of language competence in its development and arguing that ICC objectives should integrate language, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness. It then introduced the theoretical foundations of this study, namely Byram's (2021) ICC model and Newton et al.'s (2010) ICLT principles, which together provide both conceptual and pedagogical guidance. A review of previous studies and practices, in both international and Chinese contexts, further revealed valuable insights into ICC development yet also underscored the absence of pedagogical models specifically tailored for practical classroom implementation in the Chinese EFL context. To address this gap, the chapter concluded by presenting the ICC pedagogical model proposed in this study, which serves as a contextually relevant framework for fostering ICC among Chinese EFL learners, thereby laying the groundwork for the research design discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research design and methodology used in this study. It begins by outlining the research design and justifying the choice of mixed methods design. Following this, the chapter details the study context, intervention, and the populations and samples involved. The research instruments and pilot study are then introduced. Lastly, the chapter presents the data collection and analysis procedures, along with the steps taken to establish the study's validity, reliability, and trustworthiness.

#### 3.2 Research Design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), research designs refer to types of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches that provide specific guidance for the procedures in a research study. This section outlines the rationale for choosing mixed methods approach and specifies the particular research design adopted.

##### 3.2.1 Rationale for Choosing Mixed Methods Approach

Mixed methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single study or a series of studies to provide a more comprehensive and robust understanding of a phenomenon than either method alone can offer (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The present study adopts a mixed methods design to

effectively address its dual research objectives and evaluate the pedagogical intervention.

By synthesizing quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this approach facilitates a more nuanced and holistic understanding of intercultural phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Deardorff, 2017). To achieve the study's dual objectives, namely, investigating Chinese EFL learners' perceptions regarding the role of language competence in the development of ICC and evaluating the effectiveness of the proposed pedagogical model, data were collected mainly through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Quantitative data from questionnaires provide a structured and standardized means to gather information from all participating Chinese EFL learners, enabling the identification of overall patterns in ICC development following the instructional intervention (Cohen et al., 2018). Conversely, qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews offer rich, contextualized insights into participants' attitudes, awareness, and nuanced perspectives regarding language competence and intercultural learning experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lim, 2025). Integrating these qualitative findings with quantitative results enhances the explanatory depth, validity, and contextual relevance of the study's conclusions. This integration is essential for capturing the multifaceted nature of learners' ICC and for evaluating the pedagogical intervention from both outcome- and experience-oriented perspectives.

In particular, Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) highlight mixed methods as especially appropriate for the “development, implementation, and evaluation of programs or interventions” (p. 52). This is especially relevant in the current study to assess the effectiveness of the pedagogical intervention designed to foster Chinese EFL learners’ ICC. Given the inherent complexity of evaluating educational interventions, and the multidimensional nature of ICC, which encompasses knowledge, attitudes, skills, awareness, and language competence, relying solely on quantitative measures is insufficient to capture the full scope of change. For instance, assessing attitudes and awareness poses particular challenges in quantitative assessments (Byram, 2021). Accordingly, qualitative inquiry is indispensable for capturing students’ nuanced responses to the intervention, explaining how and why changes occur, or alternatively, why they may not, thereby enabling a more comprehensive evaluation of the pedagogical impact, as well as an in-depth understanding of the learners’ ongoing learning process (Deardorff, 2017).

### **3.2.2 Intervention Mixed Methods Design**

Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) introduced three basic mixed methods research designs: convergent design, explanatory sequential design, and exploratory sequential design, as well as three advanced designs: intervention mixed methods design, social justice mixed methods design, and multistage evaluation mixed methods design. These advanced designs are essentially extensions or combinations of the basic designs.

This study adopts an intervention mixed methods design, which combines a quantitative evaluation approach with qualitative inquiry to assess the effectiveness of a pedagogical intervention (Fàbregues et al., 2023). Quantitative research designs can be classified into experimental, quasi-experimental, and non-experimental designs, depending on the extent of control over variables and the use of randomization (Cohen et al., 2018; Fàbregues et al., 2023). The present study employed one form of quasi-experimental design, namely the one-group pretest-posttest design. This design involves administering a pretest to a single group of participants, delivering an instructional intervention, and subsequently conducting a post-test with the same group.

Random assignment of students to different classes was not feasible in this context, as school regulations did not permit rearranging class compositions. In addition, the participants came from different academic majors and had varying levels of language proficiency, making it difficult to establish comparable experimental and control groups. Therefore, the one-group pretest-posttest design was adopted, as it offers a practical and widely used approach for evaluating instructional interventions under such conditions (Cohen et al., 2018).

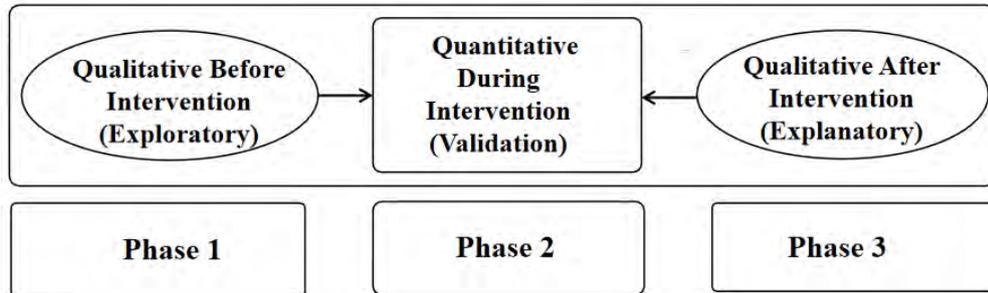
To complement the quantitative evaluation and deepen the understanding of the numerical findings, the qualitative component was integral to the intervention mixed methods framework. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), this type of design is especially useful when participant experiences and contextual factors are

essential to evaluating an intervention. This rationale aligns with the present study's aim to not only measure changes in ICC quantitatively but also explore Chinese EFL learners' perceptions and reflections on the role of language competence and the instructional process.

Philosophically, this research design is grounded in a post-positivist orientation, where the intervention phase and its measurable outcomes are emphasized. Within this orientation, researchers typically use a theoretical or conceptual framework to guide the intervention and derive meaningful deductive findings about its effectiveness (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In this study, Byram's model of ICC served as the guiding framework, shaping the instructional objectives, content, and evaluation procedures of the pedagogical intervention.

As noted by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), qualitative data can be incorporated into intervention studies at different stages, including before, during, and after the intervention, with each stage serving a distinct purpose. Data collected prior to the intervention can inform the design of relevant and engaging instructional content. Data gathered during the intervention provide insights into how participants experience the process. Post-intervention data help explain the outcomes and add depth to the interpretation of quantitative results. In this study, qualitative data were collected both before and after the instructional intervention to provide a more contextualized and comprehensive understanding of learners' experiences and the impact of the instructional model. Figure 13 presents the three-phase intervention mixed methods

design used in this research, illustrating how qualitative and quantitative components were sequenced and integrated across the study.



*Figure 13* Intervention Mixed Methods Design of This Study

The first phase involved a qualitative exploratory stage conducted prior to the intervention. Semi-structured interviews were used to investigate participants' perceptions of the role of language competence in developing ICC. Thematic analysis of the interview data provided insights into learners' understandings, challenges, and expectations. These findings informed the adaptation of instructional content and the refinement of specific activities to ensure the intervention was contextually relevant and aligned with learners' needs.

The second phase was the quantitative validation stage, during which pre- and post-intervention questionnaires were administered to measure participants' ICC levels. The instructional intervention consisted of structured teaching activities that integrated intercultural and linguistic components. These activities were shaped by insights from the first phase to enhance pedagogical relevance. Statistical analyses of the questionnaire data were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention in promoting ICC development.

The third phase involved a qualitative follow-up stage after the intervention. Post-intervention interviews were carried out to explore students' experiences with the pedagogical model and their suggestions for refining the course. Thematic findings from this phase helped interpret the quantitative results, deepened the understanding of how learners engaged with the intervention, and offered practical implications for improving future instructional design.

### **3.3 Study Setting and the Teaching Intervention**

This part of the chapter introduces the study setting and outlines the teaching intervention. It begins by providing contextual background, including the university profile, teaching environment, curriculum structure, course design, and relevant pedagogical initiatives. The section then concludes with a detailed description of the intervention implemented in the study.

#### **3.3.1 Study Setting**

The research is undertaken at a medium-sized local university in Zhejiang Province, China, a region recognized for its thriving economic activities and significant role as a national trading and export center on the eastern coast. This university, classified as a non-key institution, as elaborated in Chapter 1, Section 1.8. This institution shares some common characteristics with domestic non-key universities, including a predominantly homogenous student body without diverse ethnic representation, composed solely of native Chinese students. Additionally, limited opportunities exist

for these students to engage with international speakers. The development of students' ICC primarily takes place through classroom instruction in college English education.

At this university, all undergraduate students are required to complete a four-semester sequence of compulsory College English courses, which are designed to develop students' overall English language proficiency, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Beginning in the fifth semester, they may choose from a range of selective English courses based on their interests and academic needs. The present study was conducted within one elective course titled "*An Introduction to the Culture of the UK and USA*". The course consists of weekly sessions spanning 17 weeks in a semester, featuring a one-and-a-half-hour lecture per week. The lectures cover various cultural topics. The instructional materials for the course include a textbook, a reference book, and additional materials strategically chosen to meet the teaching objectives. The textbook and the reference book are:

Jiang X. Q. (2015). *An Introduction to British and American Society and Culture*, Beijing: Higher Education Press.

Xu, L. S. (2009). *Intercultural Communication in English (Revised edition)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Students in this program came from diverse regions of China, exhibiting varying levels of English proficiency. The cohort consisted of 319 senior EFL students, predominantly female, distributed across 5 parallel classes. Despite possessing fragmented cultural knowledge through various sources such as media, films, or books,

they do not receive prior structured teaching on ICC. The course was taught by the researcher, a female instructor with over 15 years of professional experience in intercultural language education. With a strong commitment to pedagogical innovation, she was actively involved in both the design and delivery of the intervention, ensuring consistency and alignment with the study’s objectives.

The university where this study was conducted provides opportunities to gain insights into ICC teaching and learning practices in non-key universities in China, where curriculum design and teaching contexts are largely consistent across institutions. These insights help deepen the understanding of the challenges and opportunities such institutions face in fostering ICC development among EFL learners.

### 3.3.2 The Teaching Intervention

The teaching intervention designed for this study mainly focuses on implementing and assessing the proposed ICC pedagogical model to enhance ICC among Chinese EFL learners. Chapter Two introduced the model’s theoretical underpinnings, structural design, and theoretical contributions. This section presents the detailed objectives (see Table 5) and implementation procedures.

Table 5

#### *Overview of Teaching Objectives, Activities and Learning Outcomes*

Phases	Teaching objectives	Teaching activities	Intended learning outcomes
Phase One Intercultural Acquisition	Knowledge + language	Introductory activities	<b>Knowledge:</b> demonstrate culture knowledge of own and other’s culture; acquire specific and general cultural knowledge;

			<p><b>Language:</b> gain confidence in speaking; acquire vocabulary/grammar for cultural topics; construct basic sentences and short paragraphs to describe cultural phenomena</p>
Phase Two Intercultural Comparison	Attitudes + language	Collaborative activities	<p><b>Attitudes:</b> display an open and respectful attitude toward cultural diversity through comparing, analyzing cultural phenomena;</p> <p><b>Language:</b> use appropriate tense, vocabulary to compare cultures; choose language reflecting respect, politeness; organize comparisons coherently, link ideas logically in speech</p>
Phase Three Intercultural Engagement	Skills + language	Interactive activities	<p><b>Skills:</b> apply acquired knowledge and skills to intercultural interactions; interpret, relate, and negotiate meanings across cultures; explain, evaluate and solve intercultural conflicts;</p> <p><b>Language:</b> apply vocabulary/structures in interaction; adapt language to cultural norms; manage conversation flow, negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings;</p>
Phase Four Intercultural Reflection	Awareness + language	Reflective activities	<p><b>Awareness:</b> demonstrate lingual-cultural awareness; critically evaluate values, beliefs, and behaviors of one's own and others' cultures;</p> <p><b>Language:</b> use precise language for reflection and evaluation; recognize appropriateness of language in different cultural contexts; produce coherent reflective texts, orally or in writing</p>

The model consists of four sequential phases: Intercultural Acquisition, Intercultural Comparison, Intercultural Engagement, and Intercultural Reflection. Each phase builds on the previous one, progressively developing students' language competence, cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills and awareness.

### **Phase One: Intercultural Acquisition**

The primary objective of Phase One is to enhance students' intercultural and linguistic knowledge. At the cultural level, students learn about both their own and others'

cultures, acquiring specific and general cultural knowledge. At the linguistic level, they develop confidence in speaking, learn vocabulary and sentence structures related to cultural topics, and use these forms to describe cultural phenomena clearly.

The course is conducted entirely in English, which helps improve students' overall language competence. During this phase, teaching primarily consists of instructor-led lectures complemented by student-centered sharing activities. The main activities designed for this phase are introductory activities, during which students actively respond to questions and participate in interactive exchanges.

A key activity is the “cultural show and tell,” in which a student group pre-assigned in advance presents a topic related to the weekly theme, such as cuisine, art, customs, or intercultural experiences. Students may also conduct brief interviews with foreigners or returnees and record short videos to share in class. Presentations follow a structured approach: describing the topic, comparing cultures, explaining differences, and sharing personal insights. These activities help students become independent observers of real-life cultural and language encounters (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), deepen cultural understanding, and improve English speaking confidence.

### **Phase Two: Intercultural Comparison**

Phase Two emphasizes the development of attitudes and language for comparative communication. Culturally, students cultivate open-mindedness and respect toward cultural diversity through analyzing and comparing cultural phenomena. Linguistically, they learn to use appropriate tense, vocabulary, and discourse markers to organize comparisons coherently, express respect and politeness, and connect ideas logically.

Students engage in collaborative activities, such as case analyses of videos, documents, or current events to focus on comparing Chinese, Western, and other cultures. Working in pairs or groups, students discuss cultural differences and share their findings through oral reports or brainstorming sessions on the ClassIn app. This collaborative learning fosters positive interdependence and reflection, helping students understand others' cultural perspectives and enhance their intercultural sensitivity (Hei et al., 2020).

These comparisons and interactions promote idea-sharing and deeper understanding, consistent with constructivist theory, which emphasizes knowledge construction through active participation and multiple perspectives (Saleem et al., 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). In alignment with this approach, the instructor prioritizes students' perspectives over grammatical accuracy during discussions, focusing on communication of meaning rather than form. When necessary, keyword prompts are provided to facilitate expression and encourage continued interaction, fostering a supportive and collaborative learning environment.

### **Phase Three: Intercultural Engagement**

This phase focuses on skills development and communicative competence. Culturally, students apply acquired knowledge and skills to authentic intercultural scenarios, interpreting, relating, negotiating meaning, and resolving misunderstandings or conflicts (Byram, 2021). Linguistically, they learn to adapt their language to context, manage conversation flow, and clarify meaning strategically to ensure effective interaction.

Interactive activities such as role-plays, business negotiations, decision-making exercises, and conflict resolution scenarios are designed around weekly topics. To compensate for the cultural and experiential homogeneity of the Chinese classroom, students are grouped by region and major to increase diversity in interactions (Newton et al., 2010). These activities enable learners to apply acquired knowledge, share personal experiences, communicate effectively, and reshape understandings through social interaction. Interaction in this phase is both a practice and a learning process that helps students receive feedback, assess progress, and build intercultural skills.

#### **Phase Four: Intercultural Reflection**

The final phase aims to enhance awareness through reflective analysis and precise linguistic expression. Culturally, students critically evaluate values, beliefs, and behaviors in their own and others' cultures, fostering empathy and critical cultural awareness. Linguistically, they refine their ability to use precise and contextually appropriate expressions to articulate reflection and evaluation, producing coherent oral and written reflections.

Reflective tasks, such as writing short essays or sharing oral reflections via the ClassIn app, prompt students to analyze cultural stereotypes, conflicts, and personal intercultural experiences. Using a simplified four-step reflective framework adapted from Kolb's (1985) Experiential Learning cycle, students address these guiding questions: summarize the experience, reflect on emotional impacts, gain insights relevant to international communication, and plan future actions. This reflective

process fosters cultural awareness, critical thinking, and adaptability, reinforcing the development of ICC and preparing students for mindful intercultural interactions (Byram, 2021; Newton et al., 2010).

The model adopts a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to cultivating ICC by aligning specific objectives with corresponding phases to highlight key developmental goals. However, in actual classroom practice, the cultivation of competencies is interrelated and cumulative rather than isolated within each phase. The model does not treat each phase's competencies in isolation but rather emphasizes the prioritized focus of development. Moreover, due to time constraints and the nature of instructional content and themes, the phases may sometimes overlap or be integrated during teaching.

A sample teaching plan for Unit 1 is presented below (see Table 6), while the detailed plan for Unit 1 and brief outlines for the entire semester are provided in Appendices I and J.

Table 6

*Brief Teaching Plan for Unit 1: Exploring Culture Through Metaphors*

Phase	Duration	Content & activities	Learning objectives
Intercultural Acquisition	25 mins	(Pre-assigned student presentation) Lead-in brainstorming: What is culture? What does it includes? Why do we need to learn culture of others? Teacher introduces cultural metaphors (iceberg, visible/invisible culture and finish one exercise) and key vocabulary.	Knowledge, language competence
Intercultural Comparison	25mins	Group task: Each group discusses one cultural metaphor (e.g., the water a fish	Attitude, skills, language

		swims in, onion, software of a computer, grammar of language). Group leader sharing and teacher feedback. Watch video about cultural dining misunderstandings.	competence
Intercultural Engagement	30mins	Pair discussion: analyzing differences and causes. teacher summarizes key values (face, hospitality, modesty).	Skills, attitude, language competence
Intercultural Reflection	5mins	Homework assignment: reflective essay on in class video or cultural conflict from Movie <i>The Gua Sha Treatment</i> ; interview with foreigner/returned student on culture difference.	Awareness, attitude, language competence
Class summary	5mins	Teacher revisits core metaphors and key values. Summarizes insights: Culture includes visible customs and hidden beliefs/values. Encourages applying metaphors to daily cultural observations.	All five learning objectives

### 3.4. Research Population and Sampling

This section outlines the research population and the sampling strategies used in the study. Specifically, convenience sampling was used to select students for the quantitative phase, while purposive sampling with maximum variation guided the selection of interview participants. The rationale for each approach and the inclusion criteria are detailed below.

#### 3.4.1 Research Population and Sampling Method

The research population for this study comprises Chinese university-level EFL learners. In China, ICC development is closely integrated into foreign language education, beginning with English instruction in primary school and continuing through secondary and tertiary levels. As students advance, the emphasis on ICC

increases, with university-level education serving as a critical stage for developing more advanced linguistic and intercultural skills. EFL classrooms at this level provide a unique context in which students engage with diverse cultural perspectives and apply theoretical knowledge in practice (Zhang & Yao, 2020). These settings not only foster essential intercultural abilities but also support meaningful exchanges that promote inclusivity and social cohesion (Heleta & Deardorff, 2017), highlighting the importance of cultivating ICC among university students in a globalized society.

To explore how students' ICC can be fostered through classroom instruction, the study adopted a mixed sampling approach to meet both quantitative and qualitative research needs. In the quantitative phase, convenience sampling was used to involve 319 third-year students from the researcher's culture course. Although this method was chosen for accessibility, it aligns well with the research objectives, as these students are language majors (non-English), providing insightful perspectives into the research topic. Several factors contribute to the relevance of this sample:

**Simultaneous Study of Language and Culture:** Language major students often engage in both language and culture courses concurrently. This dual focus enables them to develop a profound understanding of both domains, fostering a heightened awareness of intercultural communication dynamics and challenges.

**Exposure to Multiple Languages:** Language majors' students study multiple languages, exposing them to a variety of cultural backgrounds. This exposure enhances their comprehension of intercultural communication across diverse linguistic and

cultural contexts and deepens their understanding of the interrelationship between language and intercultural communication.

**Opportunities for Intercultural Interaction:** Language majors frequently interact with foreign instructors as part of their curriculum, offering significant opportunities for intercultural communication. These interactions allow students to offer firsthand insights into how language competence influences intercultural communication dynamics and to reflect on the effectiveness of the pedagogical model.

In the qualitative phase, 40 students were selected using purposive sampling with a maximum variation strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018), from among those who volunteered for interviews after participating in the quantitative survey. Two rounds of interviews were conducted, each involving 20 different students to ensure broad coverage and avoid duplication. Participants were chosen to represent diversity in majors, gender, language proficiency, frequency of intercultural interactions, and overseas experiences.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), maximum variation sampling involves selecting participants who represent both typical and deviant cases, which aids in identifying common patterns as well as unique themes across subgroups. Palinkas et al. (2015) emphasized that maximum variation sampling is the most effective foundational strategy for selecting participants in interview studies because it captures a broad range of perspectives and experiences, ensuring the findings reflect the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon under investigation. Guided by these

principles, the present study adopted this approach to maximize sample representativeness and capture diverse perspectives on language competence and intercultural communication, thereby enhancing the depth and credibility of the qualitative findings. Table 7 summarizes the key characteristics of the research population and the sampling methods employed in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study.

Table 7

*Research Population and Sampling Methods*

Category	Quantitative sampling	Qualitative sampling
Population	Chinese university-level EFL learners	Same as quantitative population
Sampling method	Convenience sampling	Purposive sampling
Sample size	319	40
Sampling rationale	Accessibility due to enrollment in the course	Maximum variation strategy

**3.4.2 Research Participants**

The participants in this study were all third-year EFL students enrolled in five parallel classes of a culture course. These students share several common characteristics that make them well-suited for this research.

First, they have received at least eight years of English education, and most are capable of understanding English-medium lectures. While the majority can engage in basic communication, only a few are able to communicate freely in English. Second, they have had similar learning experiences, beginning English instruction in primary school

and progressing through a standardized curriculum, with limited exposure to intercultural contexts, a profile typical of students at local Chinese universities. Third, the culture course involved in this study is the only English course they are taking during the semester, as they have already completed core English courses such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing. This ensures that their engagement with intercultural content is concentrated within this course. Finally, as third-year students, they are relatively easy to recruit, as they have not yet begun thesis writing or internship placements. These shared features provide a consistent and relevant foundation for assessing both language competence and intercultural development. Table 8 provides an overview of the different participant groups involved in the study, including sample size, selection criteria, and associated research activities.

Table 8

*Participant Groups, Selection Criteria, and Activities*

<b>Participant groups</b>	<b>Sample size</b>	<b>Selection criteria</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Intervention	319	Five parallel classes	Engaging in teaching intervention
Questionnaire (intercultural competence)	275	Same five classes	Pre-and Post-intervention questionnaires
Questionnaire (speaking competence)	289	Same five classes	Pre-and Post-intervention questionnaires
Interview (language competence)	20	Gender, language proficiency, frequency of intercultural interactions, overseas experience	Being interviewed
Interview (model effectiveness)	20	Same as above	Being interviewed

**Note.** The two interviews each involved 20 participants, with different individuals selected for each round.

The intervention participants consist of 319 EFL learners distributed across five parallel classes, with each class accommodating between 60 and 75 students. Participants are chosen due to their availability and commitment to the course, making them integral to the successful execution of the intervention.

The participants in the questionnaire group including both intercultural competence and speaking competence assessments, consisting of the same cohort of students who take part in the intervention. This deliberate inclusion ensures the homogeneity of data, given their shared enrollment in the same course and background. This approach promotes consistency and comparability in the data collected. In order to maintain consistency between pre- and post-intervention measurements, the following strategies are employed. Prior to participating in the intervention, students are informed about the longitudinal nature of the study and the importance of their continued participation in both pre- and post-intervention assessments. In addition, students are requested to provide their student IDs in the questionnaires, enabling a direct comparison of responses before and after the intervention. Finally, a small incentive in the form of a token red envelope is provided by the author to encourage students' participation in both rounds of the questionnaires.

The study conducts two rounds of interviews, selecting 20 students each time, with approximately four students chosen from each class. The selection criteria include students with varying language proficiency levels: those with relatively high proficiency who passed CET-6, those with intermediate proficiency who passed CET-4 but not CET-6, and those with low proficiency who did not pass CET-4. Additionally,

students are selected to reflect different frequencies of intercultural interactions and whether they have overseas experience or not. Although the majority of participants are female, efforts were made to include male students to capture gender-related perspectives.

### 3.5 Research Instruments

This part describes the instruments used for data collection, including student self-report questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Table 9 presents an overview of the research questions, corresponding instruments, and research purposes.

Table 9

*Alignment of Research Instruments with Research Questions and Purposes*

Research questions	Research instruments	Purposes
1: How do Chinese EFL learners perceive the role of language competence in developing ICC?		
1a. How do EFL learners perceive the impact of language competence on their engagement in intercultural communication?	Interview	Understanding impact of language competence on engagement
1b. What specific aspects of language competence do EFL learners consider essential for effective intercultural communication?	Interview	Identifying key aspects of language competence; informing future intervention activities
2: What is the effect of the ICC pedagogical model in the development of ICC among Chinese EFL learners?		
2a. To what extent does EFL learners' Intercultural competence change	Questionnaire	Measuring changes in intercultural competence
2b. To what extent does EFL learners' speaking competence change	Questionnaire	Measuring changes in speaking competence
3: How do EFL learners perceive the effectiveness of the pedagogical model after instruction?		

3a. How do EFL learners perceive the effects of the pedagogical model on their intercultural competence?	Interview	Exploring learners' perceptions of the intercultural competence change
3b. How do EFL learners perceive the effects of the pedagogical model on their speaking competence?	Interview	Exploring learners' perceptions of speaking competence change
3c: What are the attitudes and suggestions of EFL learners toward the effectiveness of the pedagogical model?	Interview	Exploring learners' attitudes and suggestions

### 3.5.1 Questionnaire

This study employs two questionnaires to assess students' development of ICC. Because most existing ICC models and assessment tools do not explicitly include language competence (Fantini, 2012; Feng et al., 2024), one questionnaire is used to measure the four commonly assessed ICC dimensions, knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills, which together represent intercultural competence, and a separate questionnaire is used to evaluate speaking competence.

#### 3.5.1.1 Intercultural Competence Questionnaire

There is a range of assessment scales available for evaluating intercultural competence, such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) by Hammer et al. (2003), the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) by Chen and Starosta (2000), and the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) by Ang et al. (2007). In this study, Wu et al.'s (2013) scales "Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS)" has been chosen.

The choice of Wu et al.'s AIC-CCS scale is grounded in two significant factors. Firstly, the AIC-CCS scale is firmly rooted in Byram's (1997) ICC model, the theoretical

model of this study. Byram's model encompasses dimensions such as knowledge, attitude, skills of interpret and skills of interact, and awareness. This alignment with Byram's model holds particular importance for this research as it guarantees that the questionnaire effectively delves into the essential dimensions central to the research questions, notably RQ2 (2a), (which investigates development in intercultural competence among Chinese EFL learners). Secondly, the AIC-CCS scale is a locally devised survey tailored to Chinese college students' intercultural communication. This localization ensures that the instrument is not only culturally relevant but also applicable to the specific context of the study, thus enhancing its validity and reliability.

The AIC-CCS scale utilized in this study comprises two sections. The first section includes six demographic items: gender, major, English language proficiency, experiences of going abroad, frequency of communication with foreign speakers, and plans for studying or working abroad. These items are designed to capture key background information relevant to intercultural competence. Response options vary depending on the item, with categorical choices provided for language proficiency, frequency of intercultural interactions, and future plans for going abroad.

The second part is 28 items on the four dimensions of ICC (see Table 10). The four dimensions are: (a) the knowledge dimension, which involves understanding national and foreign lifestyles, values, and basic concepts of cultural and intercultural communication; (b) the attitude dimension, which relates to the willingness to accept and tolerate different values, dietary habits, and taboos of foreigners; (c) the skills

dimension, which includes the ability to use nonverbal communication, avoid stereotypes, respect privacy boundaries, exhibit sensitivity to cultural differences, and employ multiple perspectives when considering politics, economy, and religion of other countries; and (d) the awareness dimension, which pertains to recognizing and appreciating the differences between one’s own cultural identity and that of others.

Table 10

*AIC-CCS Scale Dimensions and Factors (Wu et al., 2013)*

Scale	Dimension	Factor	Number of items
AIC-CCS	Knowledge	KN-A (knowledge of self)	3
		KN-B (knowledge of others)	7
	Skills	SK-A (intercultural communicative skills)	9
		SK-B (intercultural cognitive skills)	3
	Attitude	AT	3
	Awareness	AW	3
		<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

The AIC-CCS framework encompasses six factors derived from the four dimensions. These factors include Knowledge of Self (KNA), Knowledge of Others (KN-B), Intercultural Communicative Skills (SK-A), Intercultural Cognitive Skills (SK-B), Attitude (AT), and Awareness (AW). Each item is evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, which allows participants to rate their responses on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) to gauge their intercultural competence. The questionnaire used in this study is presented in English version in Appendix A. However, the Chinese version was used for data collection to ensure participants’ full comprehension by allowing them to respond in their native language.

### 3.5.1.2 Speaking Competence Questionnaire

The speaking competence self-assessment questionnaire used in this study is based on the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale, an official language proficiency framework developed by the U.S. federal government. In this study, participants evaluated their own speaking proficiency according to the ILR scale descriptors. The ILR scale has been widely adopted by language testing organizations and government agencies and has been used in the evaluation of language proficiency in over 120 languages.

The ILR scale is a standardized framework designed to measure functional language proficiency, particularly in speaking. It defines language ability across five levels, from Level 0 (No Proficiency) to Level 5 (Functionally Native Proficiency), with intermediate levels indicated by a plus sign (e.g., 2+, 3+). Each level describes specific communicative tasks and competencies associated with real-world language use.

Unlike typical Likert-scale questionnaires that require participants to indicate their level of agreement or frequency of behavior on a multi-point scale, this questionnaire uses a binary “yes/no” response format to assess whether participants can perform specific speaking tasks. The number of “yes” responses at each proficiency level is then used to determine the participant’s speaking competence level. Detailed scoring criteria are provided in the questionnaire. This approach allows for straightforward frequency analysis and comparison of participants’ self-assessed proficiency before and after the intervention. The ILR scale consists of 39 self-assessment items, divided

into five distinct proficiency tiers, from Level 1 to Level 5 (refer to Table 11), each level reflects progressively advanced speaking abilities.

Table 11

*Speaking Competence Levels and ILR Scale Item Distribution*

Level	Level characteristics	Number of statement
Level 1	Elementary proficiency: simple everyday communication skills	6
Level 2	Limited working proficiency: basic conversational and transactional skills	11
Level 3	General professional proficiency: proficient communication skills in various contexts	9
Level 4	Advanced professional proficiency: advanced communication skills in professional environments	8
Level 5	Functionally native proficiency: near-native speaking communication proficiency	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>39</b>

**Level 1 (Elementary Proficiency):** This level indicates that learners can handle simple everyday communication tasks, such as asking for directions, ordering meals, and arranging basic services. Interactions at this level are typically brief and predictable.

**Level 2 (Limited Working Proficiency):** This level indicates that learners can manage conversations on familiar topics, provide detailed personal information, and handle basic transactional tasks beyond daily routines. Interactions are more complex than those at Level 1 but remain confined to familiar contexts.

**Level 3 (General Professional Proficiency):** This level indicates that learners excel in professional discussions, can participate in complex conversations, contribute

constructive opinions, and confidently express themselves in abstract or hypothetical situations. Learners at this level can handle diverse communication scenarios with substantial language proficiency.

**Level 4 (Advanced Professional Proficiency):** This level indicates that learners can use complex language structures in communication, skillfully integrate cultural references, and effectively lead discussions in professional and social situations. While learners at this level demonstrate a high degree of fluency and accuracy, they are approaching the language proficiency of a native speaker.

**Level 5 (Functionally Native Proficiency):** This level indicates that learners' language proficiency is equivalent to that of a highly educated native speaker. They can express themselves with complete flexibility and precision in all forms of communication, including idiomatic expressions and cultural references. This represents the highest language proficiency, with virtually no linguistic limitations.

The ILR scale is recognized for its clear, detailed “Can-Do” descriptors that define progressive levels of speaking competence. The reliability and validity of the ILR self-assessment approach have been supported in previous research (Roever & Powers, 2005; Stansfield et al., 2010), making it a credible instrument for evaluating spoken language proficiency in applied contexts. Research has demonstrated the reliability of self-assessment in measuring oral proficiency over time (Ma & Winke, 2019). Therefore, the questionnaire's content is both authoritative and dependable, making it suitable for evaluating EFL learners' self-perceived speaking competence in this study.

To ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness for Chinese university students, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese. A back-translation process was conducted to ensure translation accuracy, followed by review and revisions by colleagues. A small group of students piloted the Chinese version to verify its clarity and ease of use. The final Chinese version closely reflects the original while facilitating participants' comprehension. The English version of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix C.

### **3.5.2 Interview**

As part of the research instruments, the study comprises two interviews. The first explores EFL learners' perceptions of the role of language competence in the development of ICC, and the second focuses on their perceptions of the pedagogical model's effectiveness.

According to Cohen et al. (2018), interview has three purposes:

First, it may be used as the principal means of gathering information to serve the research objectives, acquiring information on what a person is thinking, knows, likes, values and believes. Second, it may be used to test hypotheses or to suggest new ones; or to be an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships. Third, the interview may be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking...to validate other methods or to go deeper...their reasons for responding as they do (p. 508).

The interviews in this study fulfilled all three purposes outlined by Cohen et al. (2018). The first interview aimed to collect participants' views on the role of language competence in ICC, capturing their thoughts, beliefs, and values. Although language competence was conceptualized as a component of ICC in the conceptual framework (Chapter 1), the interview sought to clarify the specific nature of this relationship and to identify which particular aspects of language competence learners consider most crucial for effective intercultural communication, thus addressing the first and second purposes. The second interview, conducted after the intervention, focused on learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of the pedagogical model. These interviews provided deeper insights into participants' responses, complementing the questionnaire data and thereby enriching and validating the overall findings, fulfilling the third purpose.

There are many types of interviews, according to the research purposes, this study adopted the semi-structured interview. "In the semi-structured interview, the topics and questions are given, but the questions are open-ended and the wording and sequence may be tailored to each individual interviewee and the responses given, with prompts and probes" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 511). This approach not only encourages participants to express themselves freely but also enables researchers to delve deeper into unexpected insights and nuances, enhancing the richness of the data collected.

### **3.5.2.1 Interview on the Role of Language Competence**

To explore EFL learners' perspectives in depth, twenty participants were selected (see Section 3.5 "Participants" for detailed selection criteria) for face-to-face interviews

conducted in Chinese, allowing them to express their views comfortably and freely in their native language. The following part describes the interview protocol development, and the structure of the interview.

The interview protocol was developed based on a thorough review of key theoretical and empirical works on the relationship between language competence and ICC. Specifically, the design was informed by Byram's (2021) ICC model and Fantini's (2020) framework *Reconceptualizing ICC*. Additionally, previous empirical studies provided important guidance for designing the interview questions and covering relevant themes, including works by Feng et al. (2024), Sarwari and Wahab (2016), Sarwari and Abdul Wahab (2018), and Sobkowiak (2019). The interview protocol, detailed in Appendix E, follows Seidman's (2019) three-phase interview structure and consists of three parts: (1) icebreaker questions, (2) intercultural interaction experiences, and (3) the relationship between language competence and ICC.

### **Part 1: Icebreaker Questions**

This section aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere and gather basic background information, including participants' major, language proficiency, overseas experience, and frequency of intercultural communication.

### **Part 2: Intercultural Interaction Experience**

This part focused on participants' real-life intercultural encounters, including challenges such as misunderstandings or discomfort, and factors contributing to effective communication. It also explored traits of individuals with strong ICC.

### **Part 3: Perceptions on the Relationship Between Language Competence and ICC**

This section investigated participants' views on how language competence affects intercultural communication. It covered key linguistic and pragmatic aspects, coping strategies for language-related difficulties, and suggestions for learners aiming to improve their language competence for more effective communication.

#### **3.5.2.2 Interview on the Effectiveness of the Pedagogical Model**

The second interview examines EFL learners' perceptions of the model's effectiveness in developing their intercultural competence and speaking competence. Grounded in Byram's (2021) ICC model, the interview provides contextualized insights into how learners perceive and experience the model's impact on their intercultural and linguistic development. This interview protocol was adapted from Tran and Duong (2018) and Mu and Yu (2023), with modifications made to align with the current research context and objectives. The second interview follows the same structure as the first interview, and comprises four distinct parts, see Appendix G.

#### **Part 1: Icebreaker Questions**

This section aims to understand participants' prior experiences and expectations regarding language and culture learning. It explores whether they have previously

taken language and intercultural communication courses or training, their interest in language and cultural learning, and whether they had specific goals before joining the course. These questions help establish a comfortable atmosphere and provide contextual background for interpreting their reflections.

### **Part 2: Impact on Intercultural Competence**

This part investigates participants' reflections on their development across the four dimensions of Byram's ICC model: knowledge, attitude, awareness, and skills. Participants discuss the extent of their progress in each dimension, identify the areas where they have experienced the most and least improvement, and explain the factors influencing these changes.

### **Part 3: Impact on Speaking Competence**

This section explores whether the course has contributed to participants' confidence and competence in English speaking, improved their ability to interact with foreigners, and enhanced their awareness of cultural nuances in oral communication. Participants reflect on the specific aspects of language use that have improved, identify any persistent challenges, and discuss the factors that have influenced their progress.

### **Part 4: Overall Attitudes and Suggestions**

This final section gathers participants' overall assessment of the course's effectiveness in developing their intercultural competence and language competence. They reflect on the course's strengths and limitations, discuss how well it met their learning needs,

and provide suggestions for improvement to enhance its impact on students' ICC development.

### **3.6 Pilot Study**

In a broad sense, a pilot study encompasses both feasibility testing and the preliminary trial of research instruments. It is generally regarded as a small-scale study conducted prior to a larger one, aiming to refine various aspects of the main study, including the development and improvement of research instruments (Williams-McBean, 2019). In this study, pilot work was carried out in three areas: the questionnaire, the interview, and the intervention.

#### **Pilot Study on the Intercultural Competence Questionnaire**

The AIC-CCS scale (Wu et al., 2013), adopted in this study to assess ICC, is based on Byram's (1997) theoretical framework and was specifically developed for Chinese university students. According to Wu et al. (2013), it has demonstrated good reliability and validity through expert review, pilot testing, and exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses conducted on a large sample. The scale has been widely validated within the Chinese academic community (Feng et al., 2024; Li, 2021; Mu & Yu, 2023; Wang & Teo, 2024). Therefore, the pilot study aimed to ensure that the questionnaire items were clearly understood, appropriately worded, and free from ambiguity. Participants were also invited to provide feedback on the layout and length of the questionnaire. It was administered to 140 participants from two parallel classes who closely resembled the target research population. The results yielded a Cronbach's

alpha of 0.836, indicating high internal consistency. Notably, no participants reported any issues or suggested changes, indicating that the questionnaire was well comprehended and appropriately designed.

### **Pilot Study on the Speaking Competence Questionnaire**

The Speaking Competence Scale underwent two pilot studies to evaluate its suitability. In the initial pilot, a five-point Likert scale format was adopted, based on the ILR scale for speaking competence used in Mia Leko's (2020) master's thesis. The five-point scale was chosen for its balance between sensitivity and simplicity, allowing participants to express varying degrees of competence while facilitating reliable calculation of mean scores (Qahtan et al., 2023). However, when administered to 68 students from one parallel class, the response patterns showed limited differentiation across proficiency levels. Many students assigned similar mid-range scores (e.g., 2, 3, or 4) across items targeting different aspects of speaking competence, making it difficult to accurately assess their abilities. This lack of score distinction reduced the scale's effectiveness in classifying speaking proficiency and compromised the clarity and reliability of pre- and post-test comparisons. Consequently, the five-point Likert scale was deemed inappropriate for this study's objectives and participants, as it failed to effectively distinguish between different levels of speaking competence (Bujang, 2022).

In the second pilot, the questionnaire adopted the original ILR scale's binary format and was administered to the same 140 students from two parallel classes who had

participated in the ICC pilot study. In this binary format, students selected “Yes” if they believed they had achieved a given item within a level, and “No” if they were unsure or had not yet achieved it. Prior to completing the questionnaire, students received brief training to familiarize them with the answering process and ensure they understood how to complete the questionnaire correctly. The results demonstrated a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.978, indicating extremely high internal consistency (El Hajjar, 2018). This high reliability can be attributed to the questionnaire’s binary response format and the concentration of most students’ speaking competence levels in the lower range. This survey clearly reflected students’ speaking competence levels. These findings support the high reliability and practical applicability of the instrument (Majid et al., 2017).

#### **Pilot Study on the Two Interviews Rounds**

To ensure the clarity and effectiveness of the interview questions, pilot interviews were conducted prior to the formal interviews. Piloting serves as a crucial step in evaluating whether the questions elicit meaningful and relevant responses, thereby informing potential refinements and improvements (Malmqvist et al., 2019). In this study, six students participated in pilot interviews, with three students for each interview protocol. The primary objectives of these pilot interviews were to familiarize the researcher with the interview procedure, assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions from the participants’ perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and evaluate whether the

interview guide could generate the type and depth of data necessary to answer the research questions (Lowe, 2019).

The findings showed that while most questions were clear and understandable, some participants had difficulty with specific terminology. During the interviews, these terms were explained to ensure participants could respond more clearly and accurately. In the language competence interview, one question was removed due to content overlap with another item. For the model effectiveness interview, to reduce potential subjective bias, some questions originally asking whether participants had “improved” were revised to ask whether any “change” had occurred. These modifications enhanced the clarity and focus of both interview protocols. Furthermore, the pilot study confirmed that the interview guides were effective in eliciting relevant data sufficient to address the research questions. Overall, the pilot process improved the methodological rigor of the study and ensured the smooth implementation of the formal interviews (Williams-McBean, 2019).

### **Pilot Study on the Teaching Intervention**

The pilot study was conducted to evaluate the feasibility of a large-scale intervention and to enhance the likelihood of success in the main study (Williams-McBean, 2019). Previous research emphasizes that pilot studies in educational contexts should focus on key feasibility indicators such as implementation fidelity, student engagement, and intervention acceptability, as these factors are essential for the success of the main study (Teresi et al., 2022).

Instead of a short trial, this pilot was carried out over eight weeks and involved three parallel classes comprising approximately 200 students. The course retained the same class size, instructional format, and activity design as planned for the full-scale implementation. This allowed for a realistic evaluation of both the feasibility of the intervention and the appropriateness of the research instruments (Thabane et al., 2010).

Details concerning implementation fidelity and student engagement are provided in Section 3.9.3. The pilot findings confirmed the feasibility of the instructional design and revealed generally positive student perceptions. Many students evaluated the course favorably in terms of clarity, relevance, and overall learning experience. However, due to large class sizes and extensive group discussions, the reflection phase (Module Four) occasionally exceeded the scheduled time and was supplemented with homework assignments. In addition, some students reported a lack of confidence in speaking, suggesting a need for further scaffolding and support. These findings helped validate the instructional model and provided useful insights for future refinement of the intervention.

### **3.7 Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process consists of three phases. The initial qualitative phase explores EFL learners' perceptions of the role of language competence in ICC, aligning with RQ1. The quantitative phase evaluates the effectiveness of the pedagogical model through surveys, addressing RQ2. Finally, the final qualitative phase investigates learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of the pedagogical model

in response to RQ3. Table 12 provides an overview of the data collection process, outlining the instruments, participants, timeline, and format for each phase.

Table 12

*Summary of Data Collection Phases and Process*

Phases	Instruments	Participants	Start time	Completion time	Format
Initial qualitative phase	Interview on language competence	20	1 <sup>st</sup> week	3 <sup>rd</sup> week	face to face
	Questionnaire for intercultural competence (pre-intervention)	275	1 <sup>st</sup> week	2 <sup>nd</sup> week	in class online questionnaire
Quantitative phase	Questionnaire for intercultural competence (post-intervention)	275	16 <sup>th</sup> week	17 <sup>th</sup> week	in class online questionnaire
	Questionnaire for speaking competence (pre-intervention)	289	2 <sup>nd</sup> week	3 <sup>rd</sup> week	in class online questionnaire
	Questionnaire for speaking competence (post-intervention)	289	16 <sup>th</sup> week	17 <sup>th</sup> week	in class online questionnaire
Final qualitative phase	Interview on effectiveness of the pedagogical model	20	14 <sup>th</sup> week	16 <sup>th</sup> week	face to face

### 3.7.1 Initial Qualitative Phase

The initial qualitative phase involved interviews with 20 participants selected based on the criteria outlined in Section 3.4, conducted between the first and third weeks of the intervention, these interviews aimed to explore participants' perceptions and experiences regarding language competence, providing foundational insights for the subsequent phases of the study.

The interview design followed Irving Seidman's (2019) three-interview framework, which includes (1) First interview, focused life history, (2) Second interview, the details of experience and (3) Third interview, reflection on the meaning. However, to accommodate participants' availability, these stages were integrated into a single session. The structured progression of questions: starting with background information, followed by factual experiences, and concluding with personal reflections, ensured a logical and comprehensive exploration of the topic (Seidman, 2019). The data collection process followed the interview protocol detailed in Appendix E.

Prior to formal data collection, the protocol underwent pilot testing to ensure the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the interview questions. The interviews were conducted in strict adherence to ethical research standards. Before each session, participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures and potential implications, and informed consent was obtained voluntarily. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time and of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. In line with best practices in qualitative research, measures were taken to prevent misuse of findings and to comply with institutional ethical review requirements. These procedures reflect key ethical principles outlined by Nii Laryeafio and Ogbewe (2023), including informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, confidentiality and the right to opt out, all of which contribute to protecting participants and ensuring research integrity.

Each interview began with an explanation of the research objectives, followed by the collection of demographic information. To facilitate open and in-depth responses, interviews were conducted in the participants' first language and lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. All sessions took place at locations and times convenient to the participants, typically on campus. A semi-structured interview format was adopted to balance consistency across sessions with the flexibility needed to explore emerging themes in greater depth (Lim, 2025). With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded for subsequent analysis.

### **3.7.2 Quantitative Phase**

The quantitative stage, which focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of the pedagogical model, involves the use of two questionnaires to measure changes in intercultural competence and speaking competence, respectively.

#### **3.7.2.1 Intercultural Competence Questionnaire**

The data collection procedure for assessing intercultural competence follows a pre- and post-intervention design. This design aligns with Deardorff's (2006) recommendation, which found that the vast majority of administrators (90%) support the use of pre- and post-assessments to determine whether interventions have made a meaningful and measurable impact on students' intercultural competence development.

#### **Pre-intervention Questionnaire.**

The pre-intervention questionnaire aimed to assess the baseline level of ICC among Chinese EFL learners and served as a benchmark for comparison. It was administered in the first and second weeks of the course. To maximize response rates and ensure data completeness, each class was given two opportunities to complete the questionnaire: once in the first week and again in the second week. The questionnaire was hosted on the Questionnaire Star platform and completed by participants in the classroom under the researcher's supervision. Students who missed the initial session were encouraged to participate in the second round of administration. Before conducting the questionnaire, participants were informed about the study's purpose, the questionnaire topic, data protection measures, intended use of results, and the estimated completion time. Participation was voluntary, and students were encouraged, but not obligated, to complete the survey.

### **Implementation of the Intervention**

The teaching intervention began in September of the Fall 2023 semester and spanned 17 weeks. Throughout the intervention, the instructor systematically integrated the four-phase pedagogical model into regular course instruction. This model aimed to enhance students' intercultural knowledge, skills, awareness, attitudes, and language competence. The effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated by comparing data collected before and after the intervention.

### **Post-Intervention Questionnaire.**

The post-intervention questionnaire was administered during weeks 16 and 17 of the

course, with all five classes completing it within this two-week period. Similar to the pre-intervention questionnaire, it was distributed twice during class sessions to maximize response rates and ensure comprehensive data collection. Its purpose was to assess students' intercultural competence levels after the instruction. By comparing pre- and post-intervention results, the study aimed to identify measurable changes in students' intercultural competence, thereby providing empirical evidence of the pedagogical model's effectiveness.

Although the questionnaire was administered online via the secure platform Questionnaire Star (问卷星, Wènjuàn Xīng in Chinese), the distribution occurred in a controlled classroom setting. The researcher provided students with QR code for direct access to the survey and gave face-to-face instructions to ensure clarity in completing the questionnaire. This approach combines the advantages of online surveys, such as efficient data collection, secure storage, and prevention of missing responses, with the benefits of in-person administration, including higher response rates and reduced misunderstanding (Cernat et al., 2024).

To guarantee consistency between pre- and post-intervention responses, participants were asked to provide their student ID numbers for accurate matching of questionnaires. Representative sample questionnaires are provided in Appendix B and D. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board to safeguard participant confidentiality and privacy. Additionally, to improve response rates and encourage participation, the researcher offered small monetary incentives to

the students (Cohen et al., 2018; Slattery et al., 2011). These combined measures, together with ethical safeguards such as confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw, effectively maintained data integrity and participant engagement throughout the study.

### **3.7.2.2 Speaking Competence Questionnaire**

The speaking competence questionnaire was administered to the same five parallel classes using the online platform Questionnaire Star. Unlike the ICC questionnaire, the pre-intervention speaking questionnaire was distributed one week later, during the second and third weeks of the semester. This delay was due to the binary rating format used in the speaking questionnaire, which may be unfamiliar to some students; thus, it was administered separately to allow time for explanation and ensure accurate responses (Slattery et al., 2011).

The post-intervention speaking questionnaire, however, was administered simultaneously with the ICC post-test, during weeks 16 and 17. The participants remained the same, and the administration procedures, closely mirrored those used for the ICC questionnaire. The demographic section of the speaking competence survey was slightly simplified, with items related to basic interaction frequency, overseas experience, and future plans to study abroad omitted.

### 3.7.3 Final Qualitative Phase

The final qualitative phase involved interviews that were conducted during weeks 16 to 17 of the semester to investigate participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the pedagogical model. The criteria for participant selection and the face-to-face data collection procedures in this phase were consistent with those used in the initial qualitative interviews. The data collection consisted of four parts, as outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix G).

To maintain consistency in research design while ensuring diversity, a new group of 20 participants was selected for this phase. This decision aimed to reduce potential bias associated with repeated interviews with the same individuals, which might compromise the authenticity of participants' responses due to increased familiarity with the research focus or the influence of social desirability bias (Seidman, 2019). Including a new cohort of participants also enabled the triangulation of perspectives, thereby enhancing the richness and credibility of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In addition, unlike the first round of interviews, not all second-round interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format. While approximately half of the participants were interviewed individually, the other half took part in small group interviews in a 1:2 or 1:3 format. This approach was adopted to reduce the power imbalance between the researcher, who was also the course instructor, and the students, thereby creating a more relaxed atmosphere (Seidman, 2019). Moreover, the group setting encouraged peer interaction, which contributed to a greater volume and diversity of information.

Nevertheless, during data analysis, each student's responses were examined individually to ensure analytical consistency and depth.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis section is organized into three parts: initial qualitative analysis (RQ1), quantitative analysis (RQ2), and final qualitative analysis (RQ3). Quantitative data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS 27, while qualitative interview data were examined through thematic analysis with NVivo 12.

#### 3.8.1 Initial Qualitative Phase

In this study, the qualitative data from two rounds of interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to explore students' perceptions of the role of language in ICC and to investigate the effectiveness of the pedagogical model.

Thematic analysis is a suitable approach for interpreting and comprehending human behaviors, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the relationships and meanings inherent in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). According to Javadi and Zarea (2016), thematic analysis techniques are widely used in qualitative research investigations. In this study, the researcher employs a six-phase thematic analysis process to analyze the data (see Table 13), as Braun and Clarke recommended (2006, 2021).

Table 13

*Six Steps for Qualitative Data Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021)*

Step	Description
Step 1	Be familiar with the data

Step 2	Generate and identify the codes
Step 3	Identify the main themes and sub-themes
Step 4	Review all themes
Step 5	Define all themes
Step 6	Writing up

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#### 1) Familiarization with data

According to Braun and Clarke (2021), thoroughly immersing oneself in the data is a crucial initial step in thematic analysis to fully grasp the depth and breadth of the content. In this study, since interview data were verbal, they were first transcribed using XunFei software. The researcher then carefully read and reread the transcripts while listening to the recordings to ensure transcription accuracy and comprehensive understanding. Any unclear parts were clarified through follow-up contact with the interviewees.

#### 2) Generating initial codes

The coding process, guided by the research questions on the influence of language competence on ICC development and the key aspects of language competence essential for effective intercultural communication, involved systematically segmenting the data, categorizing it, and identifying thematic patterns that reflect participants' perspectives. To maintain clarity and focus, coding was conducted separately for each research area. It followed the structure of open, axial, and selective coding, as outlined by Williams and Moser (2019), which supports an iterative process of developing and refining categories to construct meaningful themes.

In the open coding phase, the researcher used NVivo to highlight data segments relevant to the research questions, identifying initial themes such as “foundation,” “bridge,” “cultural understanding,” “confidence,” “relationship,” and “adaptability.” During the axial coding stage, these segments were assigned specific codes and grouped based on content similarities. In the subsequent selective coding phase, the codes were integrated into broader conceptual categories, including “communication adaptability,” “communication flexibility,” and “communication confidence.” Finally, the researcher refined and reviewed the coding framework to ensure alignment with the study’s objectives and to facilitate meaningful interpretation of the data.

### 3) Searching for themes

Following the initial coding phase, a list of diverse codes was generated from the dataset. As Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest, this stage involves sorting codes into potential themes by identifying meaningful patterns across the data. In line with this, the researcher organized the codes into candidate themes and compiled relevant data extracts concerning the impact of language competence on ICC development and the specific aspects of language competence. NVivo’s query tools were used to analyze and group the codes into broader thematic categories. The researcher then visualized the relationships among themes, sub-themes, and codes by constructing a thematic map to support the next stage of analysis.

### 4) Reviewing themes

In this step, the researcher reread each previously coded theme to determine whether it accurately reflected the meaning of the coded segments. For example, if the theme “knowledge comprehension” did not fully capture the essence of its segments, the researcher modified it by renaming it to “cultural understanding,” adding a description, or merging it with a related theme. Overall, the researcher integrated similar themes and eliminated unrelated ones, refining the thematic structure to ensure alignment with the main research objectives. This process reflects the principle emphasized by Braun and Clarke (2021), who highlight the importance of reviewing themes for coherence, distinctiveness, and relevance to the entire dataset.

#### 5) Definition and naming of themes.

In this phase, the researcher identified overarching themes that encapsulated the core meanings of related codes. For example, if several codes referred to “communication foundation,” “promoting better expression,” and “promoting understanding,” they were grouped under a broader theme such as “communication foundation and effectiveness.” Each theme was then clearly defined with a concise description, and an appropriate name was chosen to accurately reflect its content and analytical significance. The themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure clarity and coherence. Finally, they were documented in a summary table that included the theme name, definition, and corresponding codes. This process aligns with the guidance of Nowell et al. (2017), who emphasize that clearly defined and well-named themes are essential for producing a trustworthy and meaningful thematic analysis.

6) Finally, reporting.

The last phase involves the final analysis and report writing. After a thorough review of all themes, the researcher developed arguments related to the research questions. For example, themes such as “language limitations”, “confidence and relationship” are presented with supporting quotes or excerpts from the data. This step also includes indicating the frequency of each theme and noting any patterns or relationships observed among them.

### **3.8.2 Quantitative Phase**

The quantitative data analysis consists of two parts: one focusing on intercultural competence and the other on speaking competence. Both analyses were conducted using SPSS 27.

#### **3.8.2.1 Intercultural Competence Questionnaire**

Following data collection, the questionnaire data of intercultural competence was downloaded from the Questionnaire Star platform in Excel spreadsheet format. The researcher then meticulously reviewed the data, removing any invalid responses such as patterned answers. Subsequently, the data were imported into SPSS, and a codebook was compiled to assign numerical codes to responses while providing labels and definitions for variables (Pallant, 2020). Each survey item was assigned a distinct variable name, with corresponding numerical codes allocated to each response option. The coding scheme for participant characteristics is presented in Table 14.

Table 14

*Coding Scheme for Quantitative Participant Variables*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Code &amp; description</b>
Gender	1=Male 2=Female
Frequency of intercultural interaction	1 = Once a day or more 2 = Once a week or more 3 = Once a month or more 4 = Once a year or more 5 = Never
Overseas experiences	1=Yes 2=No
Language proficiency	1=Lower than CET4 2=CET4 3=CET6
Plans for studying or working abroad	1=Intent to 2=Uncertain 3=No plans

This codebook serves to organize and facilitate the interpretation of the collected data by associating variable names with their respective numerical codes. After inputting the data into SPSS, all variables were checked for any values outside the possible range. Once a clean data file was obtained, preliminary descriptive analyses were conducted to summarize participants' demographic profiles and key variables, including means and standard deviations for intercultural competence and its dimensions. Reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales, in accordance with the guidelines proposed by Field (2024).

Normality tests were conducted to determine whether the data met assumptions for parametric tests. In response to the observed non-normal distribution, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was selected as a non-parametric alternative to the paired-samples t-test, as recommended by Field (2024) and Pallant (2020). This test was applied to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between pre-

intervention and post-intervention scores, thus evaluating the impact of the instructional intervention on students' intercultural competence. Additionally, effect sizes were calculated to quantify the magnitude of the observed changes, providing a clearer interpretation of the intervention's practical significance.

By integrating both statistical significance testing and effect size analysis, this analysis approach was designed to provide a comprehensive basis for evaluating not only whether changes occurred but also the extent to which such changes might be meaningful in the context of intercultural competence development.

### **3.8.2.2 Speaking Competence Questionnaire**

The data from the speaking competence questionnaire were retrieved from the Questionnaire Star platform and thoroughly reviewed to ensure accuracy. All invalid or incomplete responses were systematically excluded. Subsequently, statistical analyses, including frequency analysis and the Chi-Square test, were performed using SPSS to examine patterns and relationships within the data (Agresti, 2018; McHugh, 2013).

The questionnaire contains binary response items ("Yes" vs. "No") to capture participants' self-reported speaking competence levels both before and after the intervention. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequency distributions, providing an overview of participants' speaking competence levels at both time points. This analysis highlights patterns in the data and offers a quantitative summary of the participants' speaking competence (Field, 2024).

The Chi-Square test was then conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant associations between the teaching intervention and observed improvements in speaking competence. As a non-parametric test, the Chi-Square test is particularly suitable for binary categorical data, such as proficiency improvement status, allowing an evaluation of whether the changes can be attributed to the intervention rather than occurring by chance (McHugh, 2013). By combining these analytical methods, the study provides a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention's impact on speaking competence, considering both statistical significance and the practical implications.

### **3.8.3 Final Qualitative Phase**

The data analysis for participants' perceptions of the model's effectiveness followed a thematic analysis approach, similar to the initial qualitative phase. The collected responses were transcribed, systematically coded, and categorized into themes using NVivo 12 to ensure consistency and reliability. The analytical process included data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, and refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Key analytical aspects included:

#### **Perceived Effects on Intercultural Competence:**

Participants' responses to Questions 4 to 9 were analyzed to investigate their perceptions of the course's influence on their intercultural competence. The analysis revealed two key subthemes: perceived progress and perceived challenges. These were examined in relation to the four core dimensions of intercultural competence, namely knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness, highlighting both the areas of notable

development and those in which participants reported limited improvement or ongoing difficulties.

**Perceived Effects on Speaking Competence:** Participants' responses to questions 10 and 12 were analyzed to examine their opinions on the course's influence on their English speaking competence. Specific aspects of perceived progress were identified, including confidence in speaking English and speaking competence in intercultural interactions as well as challenges.

**Overall Attitudes and Suggestions:** Participants' responses to Questions 13 and 15 were analyzed to assess their overall evaluation of the course's effectiveness in improving both intercultural competence and speaking competence. The analysis focused on identifying participants' general attitudes and constructive suggestions for course improvement. Common patterns in participants' comments were explored to reveal the effectiveness of the model as well as potential directions for pedagogical refinement.

### **3.9 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness**

This section addresses the measures taken to ensure the overall quality and rigor of the study's data collection and analysis. For the quantitative component, emphasis is placed on establishing construct and content validity as well as the reliability of the measurement scales used. In the qualitative component, the study follows established criteria of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Additionally, implementation fidelity is examined to verify that the

instructional intervention was delivered as intended, thereby further supporting the validity and reliability of the research findings.

### **3.9.1 Validity and Reliability in Quantitative Research**

The quantitative phase of this study employed two questionnaires: the AIC-CCS scale to assess ICC, and the ILR scale to evaluate speaking competence. This subsection outlines the construct and content validity of both scales and reports their reliability to ensure consistency in measuring the intended constructs.

#### **Construct and Content Validity of AIC-CCS Scale**

The AIC-CCS scale employed in this study was developed by Wu et al. (2013) and is grounded in Byram's (1997) theoretical model of ICC, which also serves as the theoretical foundation of the present research. The scale specifically targets Chinese university students and measures six key dimensions of ICC: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills, attitude, and awareness. As this study directly adopted the original AIC-CCS scale without any modifications, its construct validity is preserved, since the items are fully aligned with the theoretical constructs defined by Byram.

The content validity of the AIC-CCS scale was established during its development process. Wu et al. (2013) ensured content validity by adapting items from two existing instruments: Fantini's YOGA Form (2000) and the Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) (Fantini, 2007). Drawing upon theoretical insights from both

Fantini and Byram, they ensured that the scale adequately represented the essential components of ICC. Content validity was further reinforced through expert reviews, cognitive interviews, and student feedback, which contributed to item refinement. A pilot test and a large-scale validation study (n = 331) were conducted using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The final version of the scale includes six factors across four dimensions, with factor weights determined through the Delphi method. These rigorous procedures ensured that the AIC-CCS scale offers comprehensive and theoretically grounded coverage of intercultural competence.

### **Construct and Content Validity of ILR Scale**

The ILR scale demonstrates strong construct validity through its systematic progression of clearly defined proficiency levels, which are operationalized by task-based “Can Do” descriptors using a binary “yes/no” format. This approach captures actual communicative competence rather than general perceptions of ability. Empirical research supports this. Stansfield et al. (2010) and Roever and Powers (2005) confirmed the ILR scale’s robust correlation with other recognized language proficiency frameworks and its effectiveness in distinguishing oral proficiency levels. Furthermore, Long et al. (2012) provided psycholinguistic evidence by showing that learners’ control over specific linguistic features such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexis significantly differentiates ILR levels 2 and 3, thereby validating the scale’s construct through measurable linguistic competencies. This alignment reflects the multidimensional nature of speaking competence, as the ILR scale implicitly integrates phonological, grammatical, lexical, and pragmatic control across its levels.

In addition, Leko's (2020) master's thesis applied the ILR scale in investigating learners' perception of oral proficiency, offering practical evidence of the scale's applicability and relevance in educational contexts.

The ILR scale's content validity is reinforced by its comprehensive coverage of 39 speaking tasks distributed across five proficiency levels, reflecting a wide array of real-world and intercultural communication scenarios from elementary conversation to native-like professional discourse. Comparative studies show strong alignment with major proficiency frameworks such as the ACTFL Guidelines and NATO STANAG 6001, underscoring its broad relevance and comprehensiveness (Stansfield et al., 2010).

Herzog (2003) highlighted the ILR scale's dual role in assessment and instruction, emphasizing that its clearly defined descriptors across proficiency levels enable consistent, task-based evaluation of real-world speaking performance and ensure standardized assessment criteria across different languages and institutions.

Additionally, its trisection of task, content, and accuracy informs targeted curriculum development and teaching practices. Moreover, the ILR descriptors' emphasis on contextually appropriate language use makes them particularly suitable for evaluating speaking competence in real-world intercultural settings, aligning well with the focus of this study. To ensure the instrument's linguistic and cultural appropriateness for Chinese EFL learners, the questionnaire was carefully translated and back-translated, and piloted before formal data collection. This process enhanced its content validity by ensuring clarity and consistency in the adapted version.

### **Reliability of AIC-CCS Scale**

The reliability of the AIC-CCS scale was primarily examined through internal consistency, assessed using Cronbach's Alpha in the pilot study, which is a widely accepted measure of reliability in social science research (Taber, 2018). The AIC-CCS scale, originally developed by Wu et al. (2013), demonstrated strong reliability, with high Cronbach's Alpha coefficients reported for both the overall scale and its subdimensions. In the present study, the scale yielded a robust overall alpha value of 0.836, with each dimension also achieving satisfactory reliability, supporting its robustness in assessing intercultural competence. Moreover, further research by Li (2021), Mu and Yu (2023), and Wang and Teo (2024) has employed the scale and confirmed its reliability across various samples and populations within China.

### **Reliability of ILR Scale**

The ILR scale demonstrated extremely high internal consistency in the pilot study, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.978, indicating excellent reliability. The binary "yes/no" response format facilitates consistent self-assessment of specific speaking tasks. Additionally, previous research supports the scale's strong reliability and stability in measuring oral proficiency over time (Ma & Winke, 2019; Roever & Powers, 2005; Stansfield et al., 2010). Together, these factors confirm the ILR scale as a highly reliable instrument for assessing speaking competence in intercultural communication contexts.

### **3.9.2 Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research**

The qualitative phase of this study involved two semi-structured interviews. This subsection evaluates the trustworthiness of the qualitative inquiry based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) widely accepted framework, which includes four core criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These remain key benchmarks for assessing qualitative research (Ahmed, 2024; Enworo, 2023; Stahl & King, 2020).

#### **Credibility**

Credibility concerns the alignment between respondents' views and the researcher's representation of them (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In this study, credibility was enhanced through reflexivity and triangulation (Ahmed, 2024; Donkoh & Mensah, 2023; Nowell et al., 2017).

Reflexivity involves critical self-awareness of the researcher's own biases and assumptions. As Ahmed (2024) points out, recognizing and bracketing these biases during data collection and analysis helps minimize distortion and promotes greater objectivity. The researcher's extensive experience in intercultural teaching, spanning over 15 years, served as both a significant asset and a potential source of bias. To mitigate this, ongoing self-reflection was employed to examine how prior assumptions might influence data interpretation. To further ensure authentic responses, interview questions were designed to be open-ended and participant-driven, encouraging honest and nuanced reflections rather than socially desirable answers (Cairns-Lee et al., 2021).

Additionally, the researcher's dual role as both instructor and investigator created a possible power imbalance. To address this, some post-intervention interviews were conducted in small groups to reduce anxiety and foster a more open and relaxed environment for discussion (Gerson & Damaske, 2020; Seidman, 2019).

Triangulation is a crucial strategy to validate findings and enhance the credibility of a study (Ahmed, 2024). In this study, triangulation was achieved through both methodological diversity and the integration of multiple data sources. As Donkoh and Mensah (2023) explain, the most common form of methodological triangulation, often associated with mixed-methods research, combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. This study adopted such a design by using qualitative interviews alongside quantitative questionnaires to cross-validate the findings, thereby enhancing credibility. In addition, data triangulation was employed to ensure internal consistency and comprehensiveness (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). Specifically, data were drawn from three distinct sources: digital records generated by the ClassIn platform, the researcher's manual classroom notes, and third-party classroom observations conducted by a teaching assistant. The digital platform recorded important behavioral indicators, including attendance, frequency of participation, and completion of assignments; the manual notes captured detailed student interactions during impromptu responses; and the teaching assistant employed structured checklists to monitor classroom fidelity and provide objective, detached feedback on research procedures and findings, helping to reduce observational bias (Stahl & King, 2020)

This multi-source strategy minimized the limitations associated with single data sources and further strengthened the study's credibility.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings can be applied or generalized to other contexts or settings (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In this study, transferability was supported through thick descriptions of the research setting. The intervention was implemented in a university-level blended EFL course over a 17-week semester. Detailed contextual information was provided regarding the institutional environment, course objectives, and classroom structure. Additional details were offered on the content and aims of the intervention, as well as its implementation process, including the duration, frequency, and design of instructional activities, to ensure a clear understanding of how the intervention was carried out.

Moreover, the study clearly articulated the sampling strategy and participant selection criteria to enhance transferability (Ahmed, 2024). By including EFL learners with diverse levels of language proficiency and intercultural exposure, the study reflected a broad range of learner profiles. This purposeful inclusion, combined with a transparent explanation of sampling decisions, provides a sound basis for assessing the potential applicability of the findings to other EFL learning environments.

The study also acknowledged its scope and limitations, including contextual factors such as large class size, participants being non-English language majors, and varying levels of English language proficiency. While these factors may have influenced the

outcomes, providing such contextual information enables readers to make reasoned evaluations of the relevance and applicability of the findings to similar educational settings (Enworo, 2023; Stahl & King, 2020).

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the extent to which the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly-documented, allowing others to examine and assess the consistency of the study (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In this study, dependability was ensured by following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step thematic analysis process, which maintained methodological consistency throughout the data analysis. To further enhance accuracy, multiple rounds of theme refinement were conducted, and the analytical process was closely aligned with the research questions.

The appendix provides detailed interview protocols along with representative sample transcripts (see Appendices E–H), offering a transparent account of the data collection procedures. These documentation enhances transparency and facilitates replication or assessment of the study's dependability (Ahmed, 2024). An audit trail was also maintained throughout the research process to systematically record key methodological decisions and any adjustments made (Carcary, 2020), such as modifications to interview questions, coding strategies, and theme development. This practice further strengthened the study's reliability. Collectively, these measures ensured that the research process was systematic, transparent, and reproducible.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability focuses on ensuring that the researcher's interpretations and findings are directly grounded in the data, requiring transparency about how conclusions and interpretations were derived (Tobin & Begley, 2004). It emphasizes the objectivity and neutrality of the research process, aiming to ensure that interpretations are firmly based on the data. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), confirmability is achieved when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all established.

In this study, confirmability was primarily strengthened through data saturation and member checking, complementing the measures adopted for the preceding three criteria. Data saturation was reached after 40 interviews, ensuring that the information collected was rich and comprehensive (Hayashi et al., 2019). Member checking invited participants to review both the transcripts and the researcher's interpretations, which helped minimize potential bias and ensured an authentic representation of participants' voices. This process particularly enhanced the credibility of findings on learners' perceptions of language competence and the ICC pedagogical model. Collectively, these strategies reinforced the overall trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

### **3.9.3 Implementation Fidelity of the Instructional Intervention**

To enhance the integrity and credibility of the intervention outcomes, implementation fidelity was assessed using the four-dimensional framework proposed by van Dijk et al. (2021) and Sanetti and Kratochwill (2009), which includes core components (what and how many), dosage (how much), instructional quality (how well), and participant engagement.

### **Core Components (What and How Many)**

This instructional intervention was grounded in the four-phase pedagogical model developed in this study, which was informed by Byram's (2021) model of ICC and Newton et al.(2010)'s ICLT principles. Each session was systematically designed to integrate the five core dimensions of ICC, including knowledge, attitude, skills, awareness, and language competence, ensuring conceptual coherence and alignment with the intended learning objectives. To operationalize these dimensions and systematically monitor fidelity, the study drew on Carroll et al.'s (2007) fidelity evaluation framework. Guided by this model, the researcher developed a checklist to systematically document each session's content, activity sequence, task completion, and core component implementation, covering key fidelity dimensions such as adherence, dosage, quality, participant engagement, and differentiation (see Appendix K for the checklist).

### **Dosage (How Much)**

In practice, there is no agreed-upon standard for the "effective dosage" of intercultural teaching interventions. However, scholars generally agree that developing ICC is a long-term process, and short-term interventions lasting only a few weeks are unlikely to yield significant results (Busse & Krause, 2015; Deardorff, 2006). Most practical applications and instructional designs adopt a semester-long schedule, typically spanning 12 to 18 weeks (Esmaili & Kuhi, 2023; Huang, 2023; Liao & Li, 2023; Yu

& Yu, 2024), which is considered a reasonable duration to ensure effective intervention.

In this study, the instructional intervention lasted 17 weeks, with one 90-minute session per week. This duration meets the basic requirements for effective semester-based interventions as suggested in the literature. The entire course was delivered as planned, without cancellations or major adjustments, thereby ensuring the integrity and continuity of the intervention.

### **Instructional Quality (How Well)**

To ensure instructional coherence and accurate implementation of the teaching model, the intervention was delivered by the researcher herself. With over 15 years of experience in intercultural education and as the developer of the pedagogical model, she possessed a deep understanding of the instructional goals and intervention procedures. This familiarity ensured consistency between the design and delivery, and enabled her to flexibly adjust strategies based on classroom feedback to improve teaching effectiveness.

Although the dual role of researcher and teacher may raise concerns about potential bias, this arrangement is considered reasonable and effective in intervention research when instructional goals are clearly defined and implementation procedures are standardized (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Furthermore, a number of empirical studies have adopted this approach in intercultural teaching interventions, where the researcher also served as the instructor to ensure continuity, contextual sensitivity, and

precision in delivery (e.g., Higgins & Siritaratn, 2022, Huang, 2021; Huang, 2023; Liu, 2021; Wang, 2023; Yu & Van Maele, 2018).

To further safeguard instructional quality, a teaching assistant observed selected sessions and assessed clarity, interactivity, and fidelity using a structured checklist. The researcher also conducted regular self-assessments based on the same checklist to monitor instructional delivery. These procedures collectively supported the reliability and consistency of the instructional process.

### **Participant Engagement**

Participant engagement was monitored through multiple data sources, including attendance and activity records from the ClassIn platform, teacher observations, assistant feedback, and post-intervention interviews. These sources provided triangulated evidence of sustained involvement. Students attended regularly, completed tasks, and actively participated in class discussions and intercultural comparisons. Observational and interview data further indicated that students were cognitively and emotionally engaged, with many reporting that the course was meaningful and increased their interest in intercultural topics.

These implementation fidelity measures supported the broader methodological rigor of the study, which was also reflected in clearly defined learning objectives, standardized instructional procedures, the use of multiple data sources, and mixed-methods triangulation to ensure the trustworthiness and comprehensiveness of the

findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Heale & Twycross, 2015; Hayashi et al., 2019).

### **3.10 Summary**

This chapter outlined the research methodology, including the research design, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures. It also described the teaching intervention, detailing its specific instructional objectives and teaching plan. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining SPSS analysis of questionnaire data with Nvivo-based thematic analysis of interview data to capture both breadth and depth. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were examined in terms of construct, content, and internal consistency, while the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These methodological strategies collectively established a solid foundation for evaluating the instructional intervention, as presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four presents the results of the study, organized into three phases corresponding to the three research questions. The first qualitative phase explores how Chinese EFL learners perceive the role of language competence in developing ICC (RQ1). The second quantitative phase examines the effectiveness of the pedagogical model in enhancing ICC among Chinese EFL learners (RQ2). The third qualitative phase investigates how EFL learners perceive the effectiveness of the pedagogical model following the instructional intervention (RQ3). These findings are presented based on the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Chinese EFL learners perceive the role of language competence in developing ICC?

1a: How do EFL learners perceive the impact of language competence on their engagement in intercultural communication?

1b: What specific aspects of language competence do EFL learners consider crucial for effective intercultural communication?

RQ2: What is the effect of the ICC pedagogical model in the development of ICC among Chinese EFL learners?

2a: To what extent does EFL learners' intercultural competence change?

2b: To what extent does EFL learners' speaking competence change?

RQ3: How do Chinese EFL learners perceive the effectiveness of the pedagogical model?

3a: How do EFL learners perceive the effects of the pedagogical model on their intercultural competence?

3b: How do EFL learners perceive the effects of the pedagogical model on their speaking competence?

3c: What are the attitudes and suggestions of EFL learners toward the effectiveness of the pedagogical model?

#### **4.2 Initial Qualitative Phase (RQ1): Role of Language Competence**

The primary objective of the initial qualitative phase is to explore the role of language competence in ICC. 20 participants were engaged in semi-structured interviews, allowing for in-depth exploration of their perspectives and experiences. The results of this analysis, including the key themes and patterns are presented in the sections that follow, beginning with a demographic analysis of the participants.

##### **4.2.1 Demographic Analysis of Participants**

This part provides an overview of the characteristics of the 20 EFL learners who participated in the interviews. All participants are from non-English language majors across five parallel classes. The demographic aspects include gender, major, language proficiency, frequency of intercultural interactions, and overseas experience.

Table 15

*Demographics in the Initial Qualitative Phase (N=20)*

Participant	Gender	Major	CET level	Interacting frequency	Overseas experience
(P1)	Male	Spanish	6	1-2times/week	No
(P2)	Male	German	4	1-2times/week	Yes
(P3)	Female	Polish	4	3-4times/week	No
(P4)	Female	Spanish	6	1time/week	No
(P5)	Female	Spanish	6	1time/week	No
(P6)	Male	Spanish	4	1 time/week	No
(P7)	Male	Spanish	4	1 time/week	No
(P8)	Female	Spanish	6	1-2times/week	Yes
(P9)	Female	Japanese	N/A	3times/week	No
(P10)	Male	Japanese	4	1time/week	No
(P11)	Female	Japanese	6	2times/week	No
(P12)	Female	Japanese	4	2times/week	No
(P13)	Female	Japanese	4	2times/week	No
(P14)	Female	Japanese	N/A	2times/week	Yes
(P15)	Female	French	4	1time/week	No
(P16)	Female	Russian	6	1time/week	No
(P17)	Male	Russian	6	1time/week	Yes
(P18)	Male	Russian	6	1time/week	No
(P19)	Female	Russian	4	1time/week	Yes
(P20)	Female	French	N/A	3times/week	No

**Note.** “N/A” indicates the student did not pass the CET exam.

As depicted in Table 15, the participants comprise 7 males and 13 females, with a higher proportion of females, which is typical in language-related majors. They come from various language majors, including German, Polish, Japanese, French, and Russian, with English proficiency levels varying based on their CET exam results, ranging from below CET4 to CET6. The frequency of intercultural interaction also varied, with some participants engaging once or twice a week, while others interacted three to four times weekly, primarily with foreign instructors. Most participants had no overseas experience, though a few had brief trips lasting less than a month. The selection of these twenty students followed the principle of “maximum variation” in terms of gender, language proficiency, interaction frequency, and class participation,

ensuring a representative range of viewpoints. These characteristics serve as a foundation for understanding the background of the participants.

#### 4.2.2 Key Themes of the Role of Language Competence

This section outlines the findings in two aspects: the impact of language competence, and the key aspects of language competence. The former encompasses four main themes: “communication base and effectiveness”, “cultural understanding”, “confidence and relationships” and “language limitations”. The latter consists of three themes: “speaking competence”, “fluency and logicity”, and “contextual awareness”, as illustrated in Figure 14.

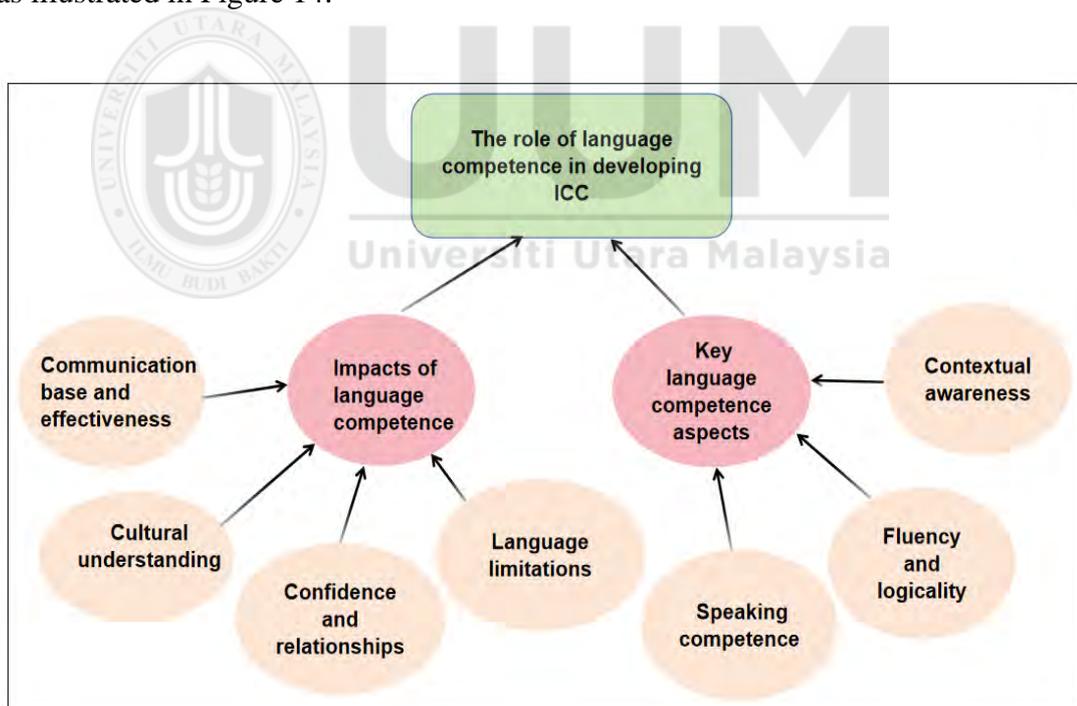
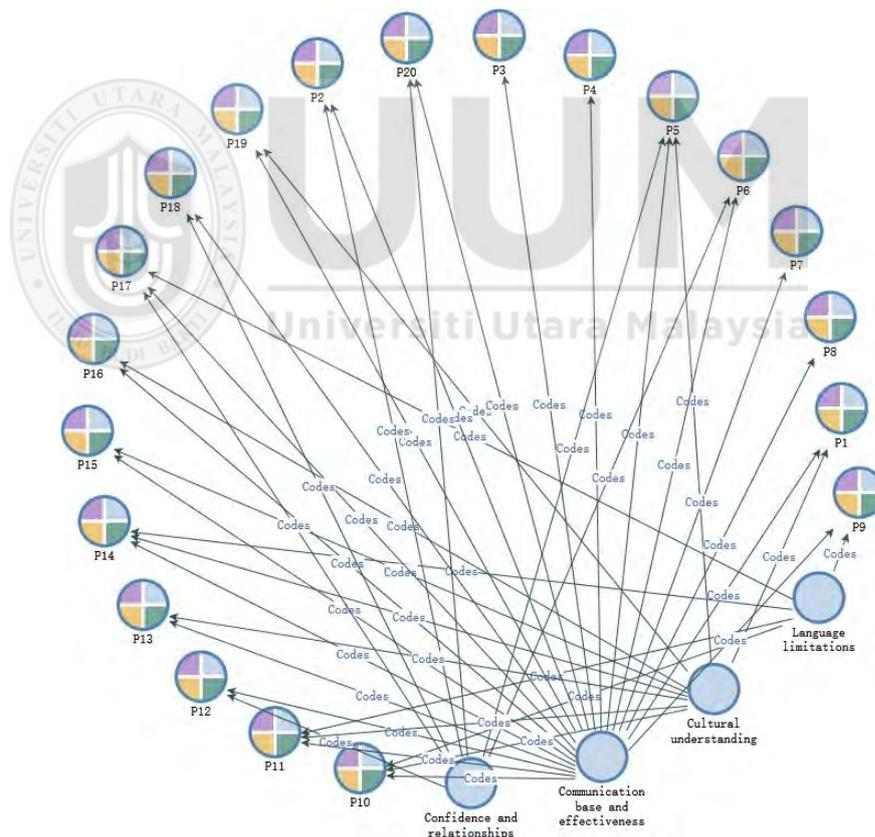


Figure 14 Themes on the Role of Language Competence in Developing ICC

##### 4.2.2.1 Impacts of Language Competence

This section analyzes the four main themes regarding the impacts of language competence: (1) language competence forms the foundation for communication and enhances communication effectiveness; (2) it facilitates cultural understanding by helping individuals overcome challenges and resolve misunderstandings; (3) it boosts communication confidence and aids in building positive relationships; and (4) while essential, language competence is not sufficient on its own for successful intercultural communication. Participants' responses illustrated these four themes and highlighted the interdependence between language competence and ICC.



*Figure 15* Distribution of Themes of the Impact of Language Competence

Figure 15 illustrates that all participants (20) identified language competence as the foundation of ICC, highlighting its role in effective communication. Additionally, 9

participants perceived that language competence enhances cultural understanding, while 7 participants believed that language competence contributes to building confidence, adaptability and positive relationships, 5 participants acknowledged the limitations of language competence.

### **Theme 1: Foundation for Communication and Effectiveness**

Language competence is perceived as closely linked to ICC and as the foundation of successful interaction. Without language competence, expressing thoughts, conveying emotions, and comprehending others' messages become challenging endeavors. In addition, possessing appropriate language competence empowers individuals to articulate their thoughts and viewpoints more effectively and smoothly.

Participant 13 said,

“In intercultural communication, language competence is very important, and I believe it is the foundation. If we don't have the foundation, we will have a tough time understanding others and getting our own thoughts across. Even sometimes we can rely on translation tools to help out, but they can also mess things up. These tools might give us the literal meaning of words, leading to misunderstandings or just plain awkwardness. So, it's crucial to have at least a decent, if not advanced, grasp of the language.” (P13)

Participant 2 shared a similar view, considering language competence as the medium for communication. He expanded on this idea by highlighting the relationship between language competence and ICC.

“It’s really interconnected between language competence and ICC; language competence is the medium of communication. How well we can communicate with someone or make them feel at ease during a conversation is directly influenced by our language. So, when we get better at a language, it boosts our ICC. At the same time, the more we engage with people from different cultures, the more we learn to use the language in different contexts. So, I believe language competence and ICC rely on each other and help each other grow.”

(P2)

Participant 20 took her personal experience as an example to highlight the importance of language competence in intercultural communication. She explained:

“I still struggle to have conversations with foreigners, not because of a lack of opportunities, but because my levels of language competence, particularly speaking competence, is not sufficient. In everyday interactions, when a foreigner speaks quickly, I often feel lost and unsure of how to respond. Therefore, language competence is crucial, it doesn’t mean to be exceptionally high; but needs to meet the level required for interactions.” (P20)

Some participants mentioned that language competence enables in-depth communication and facilitate the effectiveness of intercultural communication.

Participant 7 stated,

“If your language competence is good enough, you’ll find it a lot easier to communicate with others and understand what they really mean. That way, you can provide them with what they require. For instance, in trade, when you are dealing with companies from other countries, the better your language competence, the more efficiently and smoother you can handle these trade matters.” (P7)

In the same vain, Participant12 commented that language competence is not just a tool but a gateway to profound understanding in intercultural communication, as it facilitates deeper comprehension, fosters effective communication:

“I think language competence is more than just a tool; it’s like a key that opens the door to really understand people in intercultural communication. When you’re good at the language, you can understand the deeper meanings, emotions, and cultural context behind what people are saying. This deeper understanding will make communication work better, because it helps you connect with others in a more meaningful way and avoids misunderstandings.”

(P12)

## **Theme 2: Facilitating Cultural Understanding**

Language competence facilitates cultural understanding, helps overcome challenges and aids in resolving misunderstandings. Within the context of intercultural communication, language competence extends beyond mere linguistic aptitude. It encompasses a profound comprehension to diverse cultural contexts. Participants perceived that proficiency in language competence aids individuals in delving deeper into the backgrounds, values, and traditional customs of different cultures, thereby diminishing the occurrence of cultural conflicts and misunderstandings.

Participant 5 expressed,

“Intercultural communication encompasses many aspects, and can be quite complex. To communicate better with people from different cultures, we need better language competence. With it, we can understand well different communication styles, values, taboos and social norms, which helps us avoid misunderstandings and increases our opportunities for listening and learning from others.” (P5)

Participant 16 further commented that,

“I think having good language competence really helps when it comes to understanding and learning about other cultures. Such as in fields like literature and art, which involve specialized vocabulary and knowledge that are deeply tied to cultural context. When you know the language well, it opens the door to learning and appreciating the cultural meanings, traditions, and historical context in these works. Without good language competence, we might miss out

on important cultural insights and fail to fully engage with the rich cultural knowledge these fields offer.” (P16)

Participant 1 emphasized the inseparable relationship between language and culture. In intercultural communication, through language communication, people can better understand each other’s cultural backgrounds, thereby cultural exchange and interaction. He said,

“I believe that behind the formation of every language system, there is their culture providing support, so learning the language is also learning their culture, customs and values. Then, in communication, not only can you reinforce your language competence, but also you can learn new cultural knowledge.” (P1)

In addition, some participants emphasized that proficiency in language competence can help reduce and resolve mistakes and misunderstandings.

“I think when you’re really good at a language, it helps a lot in avoiding and even fixing mistakes or misunderstandings during communication. If you understand the language well, you’re less likely to misinterpret what someone is saying, and you can clear up confusion more easily.” (P19)

Participant 15, a French major, shared her own experience to highlight the importance of language competence in understanding cultural nuances and preventing misunderstandings. She reflected on a situation where she and her friend might have

misinterpreted the true intentions of a foreign instructor due to a lack of clear communication. She explained,

“I had a stomachache one day, so I took leave from that class. Afterward, the foreign instructor contacted me via WeChat and said something that I didn’t fully understand. I initially thought he was talking about his own health and wanted to tell him to rest more. However, my friend suggested that I might have misunderstood his intentions. This made me realize how important it is to have good language competence, not only to avoid misinterpreting what someone from another culture is really saying, but also to understand the underlying cultural context that shapes the communication.” (P15)

### **Theme 3: Boosting Confidence and Building Relationships**

Language competence helps to boost communication confidence, adaptability and supports the establishment of positive relationships. Participants expressed a sense of insecurity in communication due to insufficient language competence. However, they asserted that enhancing language competence can substantially bolster confidence. Furthermore, proficient in language provides individuals with expanded avenues and flexibility for communication, enabling them to engage in smoother and deeper interactions with others, thereby fostering the establishment of friendships.

Participant 6 offered his thoughts on how language limitations undermine his confidence in intercultural interactions. He believed that his current English

competence, while sufficient for exams, is inadequate for effective communication, leading to anxiety and lack of confidence to engage with people from other cultures.

“I think that my current level of English (CET 4), is not sufficient in communication. I feel like I’ve learned a kind of ‘dumb English’ that I might be able to handle English exams, but when it comes to speaking, I find it quite difficult. In face to face communications, I feel very nervous, and my brain goes blank, which makes it hard for me to actively engage with foreigners.”

(P6)

Participant 20 also highlighted how language competence contributes to more flexible self-expression and boosts both confidence and motivation.

“Having good language competence provides us with the flexibility to express ourselves and adapt to different conversational contexts. When we can clearly understand what others are saying, it naturally increases our motivation and willingness to communicate with foreign friends. However, I often find myself only partially understanding and struggling to express myself in English, which limits my ability to engage as confidently as I do in Chinese.” (P20)

Participant 5, possessing a higher level of English proficiency (CET 6), expressed confidence in her language competence, which strongly influences her willingness to participate in class and engage in intercultural communication. This proficiency in language competence has also cultivated her positive attitude toward intercultural interactions. She reflected on her experiences with foreign students,

“I think I can express my ideas freely and understand others without much difficulty. This motivates me to engage in class and in conversations with people from different cultures. During an exchange program, I had the opportunity to work on a project with students from various countries. My English competence allowed me to contribute to the discussions and understand different perspectives. This experience not only improved my communication skills but also made me more open and curious about other cultures. I feel that having a good grasp of the language has given me a positive attitude towards intercultural interactions, making me more willing and eager to connect with people from different backgrounds.” (P5)

Language competence helps boost adaptability. Better language skills make it easier to be flexible and adjust to new challenges in communication. Participant 18 said,

“In intercultural settings, we need to adapt to various cultural environments, including language, social customs, and behavioral norms. I think language competence helps us adapt more quickly to these changes, understand cultures more thoroughly, and respond appropriately. When your language competence is sufficient, you can handle misunderstandings better and express yourself more flexibly, which is super important for interacting with people from different cultures.” (P18)

Moreover, several participants noted the role of language competence in fostering positive relationships. Participant 2 emphasized how language competence can make

individuals more approachable and likable, facilitating the establishment of friendships and social bonds.

“Language competence can play a role in making friends. When we can express ourselves fluently and clearly, others feel more comfortable and are more likely to see us as approachable. This not only helps in forming friendships but also allows us to understand others' culture and sharing ours. Just like how Chinese people make friends by chatting, sometimes we can make a lot of friends if we can communicate smoothly.” (P2)

In the same vein, Participant 17 also highlighted the correlation between language competence and the establishment of relationships and cultural sensitivity,

“I think having strong language skills has a lot of benefits. When we can express ourselves clearly, communication just flows better, and we don't have to rely on translation tools or extra help. This makes it easier to talk with people and helps us notice the small differences in how people from other cultures communicate. That's when we start to really understand and appreciate those differences, which makes them feel like you really get them and helps us connect in a more meaningful way.” (P17)

#### **Theme 4: Limitations in Ensuring Successful Communication**

While participants emphasized the crucial role of language in intercultural communication, they acknowledged that language competence alone is not sufficient

to guarantee successful intercultural interactions. Effective intercultural communication also necessitates other competences, including knowledge, attitude, strategies and so on.

Participant 10 noted:

“Language competence is necessary, but it is just a tool. A positive attitude towards cultural exchange, along with cultural awareness and a proactive mindset in understanding other cultures, is essential. Proficiency in a language does not automatically lead to cultural understanding.”(P10)

Participant 9 elaborated on the limitations of language competence, stating that it is not enough by itself to bridge cultural gaps or prevent conflicts. She explained:

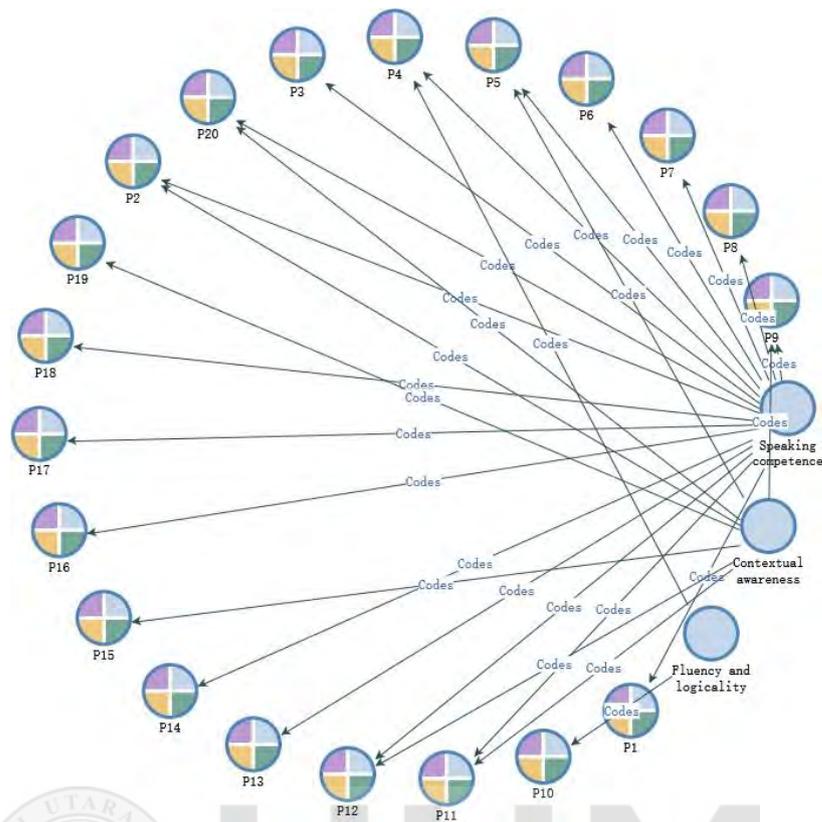
“Language competence is crucial, but by itself, it cannot ensure effective intercultural communication. If it could, cultural gaps and other conflicts would not exist. Even with advanced language competence, these problems persist because successful intercultural communication also needs positive attitudes, cultural understanding and the essential strategies.” (P9)

Participant 14 emphasized the limitations of language competence, noting that it is only one component of cultural exchange. She argued that without a broader cultural knowledge, exchanges remain superficial. Drawing from her experience on a team project evaluated by foreign judges, she illustrated how language alone was insufficient:

“We were tasked with setting up an online platform. Initially, we considered incorporating topics such as politics or economy. However, we quickly realized that our limited understanding of these areas resulted in superficial and fragmented discussions. It became evident to the judges that our grasp of the subject matter was incomplete, with clear gaps in our knowledge. As a result, we decided to focus on traditional Chinese music, a subject we knew well. This allowed us to engage in more meaningful and substantive exchanges.” (P14)

#### **4.2.2.2 Key Aspects of Language Competence**

Expanding on the understanding that language competence has a significant impact on ICC, this section delves into the three key aspects of language competence that are crucial for successful interaction. First, speaking competence is identified as the most vital component for enhancing intercultural interactions. Second, contextual awareness and knowledge of cultural etiquette are highlighted as essential for navigating different cultural settings. Third, the importance of fluency, coherence, and logical expression is emphasized. These aspects are closely linked, underscoring the notion that effective intercultural communication depends on a comprehensive mastery of language competence.



*Figure 16* Distribution of Themes of Key Aspects of Language Competence

As shown in Figure 16, 17 out of 20 participants emphasized speaking competence as the most critical aspect of language competence, 8 participants considered contextual awareness crucial for smooth intercultural interactions, and 2 participants believed that fluency, coherence, and logical competence are significant aspects of language competence.

**Theme 1: Speaking Competence**

Speaking competence is a key aspect of language competence that contributes to effective interactions. Participants believed that comprehending the other party’s speech and responding appropriately, as well as accurately articulate one’s own thoughts, is fundamental to establishing effective communication. The emphasizing

on the importance of speaking competence may be attributed to the traditional Chinese educational approach which prioritized exam-oriented education (Zhao, 2022). Although many students excel in test-taking, such as passing the CET-4 and CET-6 exams, they often lacked confidence in their speaking competence (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021).

Participant 8 noted the necessity of speaking competence for everyday interactions,

“I think, as students, we should first have a level of speaking competence that allows us to engage in daily communication. For example, if you go abroad to study or communicate with foreign teachers, being able to clearly express your ideas through spoken language is essential.” (P8)

In the same vein, the importance of speaking competence and confidence in speaking was highlighted by Participant 9, who stated,

“I believe that being able to speak up, having the courage to speak, is most important. Some students may pass the CET-4 or CET-6 exams, but if they fear of making mistakes and lack the courage to speak up and initiate communication with others, they will not be able to engage in effective communication.” (P9)

Participant 2 highlighted the importance of not only speaking clearly but also communicating appropriately to effectively understand others in face-to-face interactions:

“Speaking is especially important in face-to-face communication, which is common in intercultural settings. It’s not just about being able to talk, but also about doing it in a way that fits the situation and makes sense to others. In face-to-face conversations, how clearly and appropriately you communicate really matters. When it’s not face-to-face, AI or translation tools can be used to help, and because timeliness is not as emphasized, it’s much easier.” (P2)

Participant 4 expressed her understanding of speaking competence, noting that while politeness and grammatical correctness are important, they shouldn't overshadow the primary goal of communication, which is to understand and be understood through effective speaking and listening. She reflected on her experience:

“I believe speaking and listening are the most crucial aspects of communication as they directly address our essential needs for understanding and being understood. While avoiding grammatical errors and speaking politely are important, the primary focus should be on effective speaking and listening. For instance, when I started conversing with my friends, I was overly concerned about being polite. However, they often reminded me that the key is maintaining open and effective communication through active speaking, rather than overemphasizing politeness.” (P4)

## **Theme 2: Contextual Awareness and Cultural Etiquette**

Understanding the contextual awareness and the etiquette of different cultures is crucial. This means being aware of how different social contexts and cultural norms

influence language use, ensuring that communication is both contextually appropriate and respectful of the cultural nuances, thereby fostering more effective and meaningful interactions.

Participant 11, a Japanese major, reflected on the indispensable role of cultural context in fostering mutual understanding and respect during intercultural encounters, particularly as she learned Japanese.

“When I was learning Japanese, I realized how important cultural context is in spoken communication. For instance, the same word or phrase can have different meanings depending on the situation or the relationship between the people speaking. In Japan, there are so many subtle ways of showing respect or politeness that aren’t just about the words you use but also how you say them, and when you say them. I found that understanding these cultural differences really helped me to speak more effectively and avoid misunderstandings. It’s not just about knowing the language; it’s about understanding the culture behind it and how that influences the language.”(P11)

Participant 15 emphasized the importance of caution and cultural understanding to mitigate potential misunderstandings. She shared her apprehensions and efforts to navigate cultural differences gracefully.

“I’m always worried that some of the things I say might accidentally offend someone, so I try to be really careful when I talk. That’s why I’ve started making an effort to learn more about other people’s cultures. By understanding

their backgrounds and what's important to them, I can be more thoughtful about the words I use and avoid misunderstandings. I hope I can connect with them better and have harmonious interactions.” (P15)

Participant 20 underscored the significance of politeness and humility in fostering understanding and rapport across cultural boundaries. She highlighted the role of these qualities in bridging cultural gaps and facilitating mutual respect:

“I believe that politeness and humility are quite important, because even if we're not from the same culture, as long as we maintain a humble attitude, they can understand us even if we make mistakes in speaking. Moreover, with this attitude, we can also humbly learn more about their culture, laying the foundation for better intercultural communication in the future.” (P20)

Participants shed light on the multifaceted nature of language competence. They emphasized that effective communication extends beyond linguistic skills, emphasizing the significance of cultural understanding. Participant 9 commented,

“language competence encompasses more than just the ability to express oneself and understand others. Even if someone has good language competence, their lack of understanding of the other party's culture may inadvertently offend them by touching upon sensitive cultural points. For instance, using words or gestures considered impolite in the other culture can lead to communication breakdowns, despite fluent language expression. Therefore,

apart from language skills, understanding the cultural background and customs of intercultural communication partners is equally crucial.” (P9)

### **Theme 3: Fluency, Coherence, and Logical Thinking**

Expressing oneself with fluency, coherence, and logical thinking is highlighted as essential. Fluency ensures smooth and effortless language production, coherence maintains the logical flow and connection of ideas, and logical thinking structures the content in a rational and comprehensible manner, all of which are perceived as essential by participants for achieving successful communication across various types of contexts.

Participant 4 noted:

“I consider fluency and coherence to be essential for intercultural interactions. For example, if you consistently rely on a translator to search for the unknown words or phrases during conversations, it can inevitably disrupt the coherence of communication, and the conversation may become fragmented or disjointed, which can make the whole interaction feel awkward and less meaningful.” (P4)

Participant 10 explained that language competence encompasses not only vocabulary and grammar but also the logic and thought patterns inherent in language:

“Language competence also involves understanding the logic and thought patterns that are part of a language. For example, if you’re trying to explain a complex idea, it’s important to organize your thoughts in a clear and logical

way so that others can follow what you're saying. This kind of logical thinking is crucial, especially in cross-cultural communication, because it helps make sure that people from different backgrounds can understand what you're trying to say.” (P10)

### **4.3 Quantitative Phase (RQ2): Changes in ICC**

In this phase of the study, the effectiveness of the pedagogical model is assessed by analyzing changes in ICC, which encompasses both intercultural competence and speaking competence. To evaluate these changes, pre-intervention and post-intervention data from two questionnaires: One focused on intercultural competence and the other on speaking competence. Data were analyzed using SPSS 27.

#### **4.3.1 Demographic Analysis of the Participants**

To better understand the background information of the participants in the quantitative analysis, this part presents a detailed demographic analysis, which includes the participants' gender, major, language proficiency, overseas experience, frequency of intercultural interactions, and plans for studying or working abroad.

In this study, 319 students from five parallel classes participated in the course instruction. To boost questionnaire response rates, researchers offered small gifts to participants. However, some students were unable to complete the two rounds of questionnaires during the survey periods due to their involvement in voluntary activities outside of school or due to absences. After a meticulous review of the

questionnaires, researchers excluded invalid ones, including those with repeated patterns of responses, and identified 275 students who provided valid responses for both the pre-intervention and post-intervention phases of the intercultural competence questionnaire by matching their student IDs. For the speaking competence questionnaire, which had a simpler binary format, 289 students provided valid responses for both the pre-intervention and post-intervention phases.

Table 16

*Demographics of Intercultural Competence Survey (N = 275)*

Category	N	%
Gender		
male	65	23.6%
Female	210	76.4%
Major		
Japanese	54	19.6%
French	37	13.5%
Russia	35	12.7%
German	44	16.0%
Italy	21	7.6%
Portuguese	22	8.0%
Spanish	52	19.0%
Polish	10	3.6%
Language proficiency		
Lower than CET 4	41	14.9%
CET 4	144	52.4%
CET 6	90	32.7%
Overseas experience		
Yes	24	8.7%
No	251	91.3%
Frequency of intercultural interaction		
Once a day or more	4	1.5%
Once a week or more	133	48.4%
Once a month or more	27	9.8%
Once a year or more	57	20.7%
No interactions	54	19.6%
Plans for studying or working abroad		
Intend to	69	25.1%

Uncertain	135	49.1%
No plans	71	25.8%

Table 16 presents the demographic characteristics of participants in the intercultural competence survey. In terms of gender, female participants outnumber males, constituting the majority (76.4% vs. 23.6%). Participants are EFL learners from various language majors such as Japanese, French, Spanish, and German, indicating a greater exposure to language and cultural courses, which strengthens the demand for developing ICC. Regarding language proficiency, the majority of participants (52.4%) have achieved CET 4 level, 32.7% have reached CET 6 level, and 14.9% have a proficiency level lower than CET 4.

Most participants (91.3%) lack overseas experience, which is consistent with the prevailing situation in many domestic universities. However, a few individuals have traveled abroad, typically for less than a month. Additionally, nearly half of the participants (48.4%) engage in intercultural exchanges on a weekly basis, primarily with foreign language instructors in class or after class. Conversely, the remaining half, despite attending the same classes, may engage less in classroom interactions or may not view these interactions as genuine intercultural exchanges, leading them to perceive their intercultural interactions as infrequent or no interactions. Lastly, while some participants express a willingness to study or work abroad (25.1%), the majority (74.9%) remain undecided or have no plans.

Table 17

*Demographics of Speaking Competence Survey (N = 289)*

Category	N	%
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Gender		
male	73	25.3%
Female	216	74.7%
Major		
Japanese	54	18.7%
French	36	12.5%
Russia	33	11.4%
German	44	15.2%
Italy	25	8.7%
Portuguese	24	8.3%
Spanish	63	21.7%
Polish	10	3.5%
Language proficiency		
Lower than CET 4	38	13.1%
CET 4	150	52.0%
CET 6	101	34.9%

Table 17 presents data related to the speaking competence survey. The survey was conducted one week after the intercultural competence survey, with both surveys spanning a one-week duration and using the same data collection methods through WENJUANGXING platform. The demographic profiles of participants in both surveys are largely similar in terms of gender, major, and language proficiency, as they were drawn from the same group of 319 students enrolled in the course. To avoid repetition, questions regarding the frequency of intercultural interactions, overseas experiences, and future plans to go abroad were not included in the questionnaire.

Similarly, the majority of participants in the speaking competence survey are female, majoring in a variety of languages, and predominantly at the CET 4 proficiency level, indicating an intermediate level of language proficiency. Most participants lacked overseas experience, though they frequently interact with foreign language instructors, who provide opportunities for intercultural engagement. These consistent demographic profiles across both surveys ensure that the study is grounded in a stable

and representative sample. These factors are crucial for understanding the context in which the study's findings on intercultural competence and speaking competence will be interpreted, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn.

### 4.3.2 Changes in Intercultural Competence

This section provides an analysis of the changes in intercultural competence observed between the pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires, using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis assesses the impact of the pedagogical intervention on various dimensions of intercultural competence, including Overall intercultural competence, knowledge, attitude, skill, and awareness. The following subsections detail the descriptive statistics and reliability analysis, followed by inferential statistics to evaluate the significance and magnitude of the changes.

#### 4.3.2.1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

Descriptive statistics are employed to calculate the central tendency and dispersion of each dimension, providing a clear view of the basic characteristics of the data. Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement instruments, ensuring that the scales effectively measure the intended aspects of intercultural competence (Taber, 2018).

Table 18

*Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis for Pre-intervention*

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	Item
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Overall	275	1.21	4.50	3.42	.53	.938	28
Knowledge	275	1.60	4.30	2.93	.58	.900	10
Attitude	275	1.00	5.00	4.25	.77	.889	3
Skill	275	1.00	4.75	3.50	.65	.908	12
Awareness	275	1.00	5.00	3.88	.76	.877	3

Table 18 presents the pre-intervention descriptive statistics, including the mean scores for Overall intercultural competence, knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness, along with their standard deviations and Cronbach's Alpha values, based on a sample size of 275 participants.

The results showed that the Overall intercultural competence score, which aggregates multiple dimensions, had a mean of 3.42 on a 5-point Likert scale, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.53, indicating a moderate level of intercultural competence among the students. The reliability was high, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.938 across 28 items. Among the specific dimensions, "knowledge" had the lowest mean score of 2.93 (SD = 0.58), while "Attitude" had the highest at 4.25 (SD = 0.77). "Skills" and "Awareness" scores were moderately high at 3.50 (SD = 0.65) and 3.88 (SD = 0.76), respectively. The relatively small standard deviations across these dimensions indicated a consistent range of responses among participants. All dimensions demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.877 to 0.938.

Table 19

*Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis for Post-Intervention*

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	Item
Overall	275	2.36	4.86	3.78	.48	.934	28
Knowledge	275	2.10	4.80	3.35	.55	.885	10
Attitude	275	2.00	5.00	4.47	.64	.835	3
Skill	275	2.33	5.00	3.86	.56	.891	12
Awareness	275	2.67	5.00	4.20	.65	.837	3

Table 19 illustrates the post-intervention results. The Overall intercultural competence had a mean score of 3.78 on a 5-point Likert scale, with a standard deviation of 0.48 and a reliability of 0.934 across 28 items. Among the specific dimensions, “Knowledge” remained the lowest with a mean score of 3.35 (SD = 0.55) and a reliability of 0.885. “Attitude” scored the highest with a mean of 4.47 (SD = 0.64) and a reliability of 0.835. “Skill” had a mean of 3.86 (SD = 0.56) with a reliability of 0.891, while “Awareness” had a mean of 4.20 (SD = 0.65) with a reliability of 0.837.

Overall, the high Cronbach’s Alpha values of the post-intervention (ranging from 0.835 to 0.934), akin to those of the pre-intervention, confirmed the reliability and consistent measurement of all dimensions of intercultural competence, with noticeable improvements across all areas.

Table 20

*Comparison of Scores on Intercultural Competence Dimensions*

Variable	Measure	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	Change
Overall	Mean	3.42	3.78	+0.36
	SD	0.53	0.48	-0.05
	$\alpha$	0.938	0.934	-0.004
Knowledge	Mean	2.93	3.35	+0.42
	SD	0.58	0.55	+0.03
	$\alpha$	0.900	0.885	-0.015
Attitude	Mean	4.25	4.47	+0.22

	SD	0.77	0.64	-0.13
	$\alpha$	0.889	0.835	-0.054
	Mean	3.50	3.86	+0.36
Skill	SD	0.65	0.56	-0.09
	$\alpha$	0.908	0.891	-0.017
	Mean	3.88	4.20	+0.32
Awareness	SD	0.76	0.65	-0.11
	$\alpha$	0.877	0.837	-0.04

**Note.** SD represents Standard Deviation, and  $\alpha$  represents Cronbach's Alpha

Table 20 outlines a comparison of the pre-intervention and post-intervention data, detailing the mean, SD, and Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for various variables. Overall, the mean scores for each variable increased from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention. The Overall mean score increased from 3.42 in the pre-intervention to 3.78 in the post-intervention. Among the specific dimensions, Knowledge showed the highest increase of +0.42, indicating a significant improvement in participants' knowledge of intercultural competence. This was followed by Skill, which increased by +0.36. Attitude increased by +0.22 and Awareness increased by +0.32. The slight decrease in standard deviations suggests greater consistency in responses in the post-intervention. While there are minor fluctuations in Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, indicating reliability shifts, they remain consistently high across both tests, reaffirming the robustness of the measurement tools. These results together suggest that the intervention or program administered between the pre-intervention and post-intervention has resulted in a positive enhancement of participants' intercultural competence levels.

#### 4.3.2.2 Inferential Statistics: Wilcoxon Tests and Effect Sizes

Given the non-normal distribution observed in most pre-intervention and post-intervention data (except for the post-intervention Overall intercultural competence score), the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was selected to evaluate whether the instructional intervention led to statistically significant changes in participants' Overall intercultural competence and in the specific dimensions of knowledge, attitude, skill, and awareness. Effect sizes ( $r$ ) were calculated using the formula  $r = Z / \sqrt{N}$ , based on the Wilcoxon signed-rank test statistics, to quantify the magnitude of the changes and provide a clearer understanding of their practical significance.

Table 21

*Normality Test for Intercultural Competence Dimensions*

Dimension	Pre-intervention	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	Post-intervention	Normality result
	K-S (Sig.)	S-W (Sig.)	K-S (Sig.)	S-W (Sig.)	
Overall	.004	< .001	.200*	.210	Non-normal (Pre), Normal (Post)
Knowledge	< .001	.001	.001	.006	Non-normal
Attitude	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	Non-normal
Skill	< .001	< .001	.015	.037	Non-normal
Awareness	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	Non-normal

Table 21 presents the results of normality tests for Overall intercultural competence and its four dimensions in both the pre-intervention and post-intervention phases using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) and Shapiro-Wilk (S-W) tests. The findings indicate that only the post-intervention Overall intercultural competence meets the assumption of normality, as shown by non-significant p-values ( $p > .05$ ). All other dimensions in both the pre-intervention and post-intervention display significant p-values ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting non-normal distribution. As a result, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied to all dimensions, including Overall intercultural competence, due to the non-

normal distribution observed in the data. This test serves as a robust alternative to paired samples t-tests, accommodating non-normal data while ensuring valid results (Pallant, 2020).

Additionally, outliers were identified in the Overall intercultural competence dimension (three in the pre-intervention and two in the post-intervention) and the attitude dimension (four in the pre-intervention). These outliers were retained in the analysis as they reflected authentic participant responses, reinforcing the use of a non-parametric approach to accurately represent the data characteristics.

Table 22

*Wilcoxon Test and Effect Sizes for Intercultural Competence Dimensions*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Test Stat</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Z Value</b>	<b>Sig. (2-sided)</b>	<b>Effect size(r)</b>
Overall	275	27110.500	1262.782	7.303	< .001	0.441
Knowledge	275	25358.500	1171.217	7.826	< .001	0.473
Attitude	275	15829.000	964.370	3.348	< .001	0.202
Skill	275	25229.500	1248.284	6.094	< .001	0.368
Awareness	275	19270.000	1070.847	4.492	< .001	0.271

The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests for Overall intercultural competence and the four specific dimensions (see Table 22): Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, and Awareness, yielded statistically significant results, indicating improvements in participants' intercultural competence following the intervention. For Overall intercultural competence, the test statistic was 27110.500 with a standardized Z value of 7.303 and a *p*-value of less than 0.001. Similarly, the Knowledge dimension showed a significant change with a test statistic of 25358.500,  $Z = 7.826$ , and  $p < 0.001$ , which was the strongest effect among the dimensions tested. The Attitude dimension also demonstrated statistical significance with a test statistic of 15829.000,  $Z = 3.348$ , and

$p < 0.001$ , though the effect was less pronounced compared to other dimensions. Both Skill and Awareness dimensions yielded significant results as well, with test statistics of 25229.500 ( $Z = 6.094, p < 0.001$ ) and 19270.000 ( $Z = 4.492, p < 0.001$ ), respectively, highlighting notable differences between pre-intervention and post-intervention scores.

The effect sizes provide additional insights into the magnitude of these changes across dimensions. The formula  $r = Z / \sqrt{N}$  is a commonly used method for calculating effect sizes in the context of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. In this formula:  $Z$  represents the standardized test statistic obtained from the Wilcoxon test;  $N$  refers to the total number of paired observations. This measure is related to Cohen's  $r$ , but it is specifically applied in non-parametric analyses. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, an effect size of 0.10 is considered small, 0.30 is medium, and 0.50 or above is large. This allows for a clearer interpretation of the intervention's impact across each dimension.

The Knowledge dimension showed the largest effect size ( $r = 0.473$ ), indicating a particularly strong impact of the intervention on participants' knowledge. Overall intercultural competence and Skill followed with medium effect sizes of 0.441 and 0.368, respectively, suggesting meaningful improvements in these areas. Awareness demonstrated a moderate effect ( $r = 0.271$ ), while Attitude had the smallest effect size ( $r = 0.202$ ), indicating a more modest improvement in participants' attitudes toward intercultural communication. These findings suggest that the instructional intervention was broadly effective across all dimensions, with varying degrees of impact, most notably in the Knowledge, Overall intercultural competence, and Skill dimensions.

### 4.3.3 Changes in Speaking Competence

This section examines changes in participants' speaking competence, beginning with a descriptive analysis that summarizes the frequency distribution of proficiency levels before and after the intervention. This analysis identifies key trends, such as the overall shift from lower to higher proficiency levels. Next, inferential statistics, specifically the Chi-Square test, are applied to assess the significance of these shifts, confirming a strong association between the intervention and improvements in speaking competence. Additionally, the section includes an analysis of participants' self-reported improvements in confidence and speaking competence, based on additional questions on speaking competence change in the post-intervention survey, providing further insights into the perceived effectiveness of the intervention.

#### 4.3.3.1 Frequency Analysis

Frequency analysis, a statistical method commonly used to calculate and display the distribution of variables (Agresti, 2018), is particularly appropriate for assessing changes in speaking competence levels in this study. By comparing the frequency distribution of speaking competence levels before and after the intervention, this analysis allows for a detailed assessment of the intervention's impact, including the direction and extent of changes in speaking competence.

Table 23

*Distribution of Speaking Competence Levels (Frequency and Percentage)*

Level	Pre-intervention frequency	Pre-intervention %	Post- intervention frequency	Post- intervention %
L1	46	15.9%	32	11.1%
L1+	99	34.3%	65	22.5%
L2	93	32.2%	114	39.4%
L2+	42	14.5%	65	22.5%
L3	7	2.4%	11	3.8%
L3+	2	0.7%	2	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 23 provides a side-by-side comparison of the frequency and percentage of participants at each speaking competence level between the pre-intervention and post-intervention. According to the questionnaire, speaking competence is categorized into five levels, ranging from Level 1 to Level 5. These levels include Level 1 (Elementary Proficiency), Level 2 (Limited Working Proficiency), Level 3 (General Professional Proficiency), Level 4 (Advanced Professional Proficiency), and Level 5 (Functionally Native Proficiency). For further details, please refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1.2, Table 11.

The results indicated that most students' proficiency levels fall between levels 1 and 3 both in pre-intervention and post-intervention. The majority of participants were concentrated in the Level 1+ and Level 2 categories, constituting 34.3% and 32.2% of the sample in the pre-intervention and 22.5% and 39.4% in the post-intervention, respectively. Conversely, fewer participants were observed in the level 1, level 3, and level 3+ categories, comprising 15.9%, 2.4%, and 0.7% of the sample in the pre-intervention, and 11.1%, 3.8%, and 0.7% in the post-intervention, respectively. These results suggested a varied distribution of speaking competence among the participants, with noticeable improvements following the intervention.

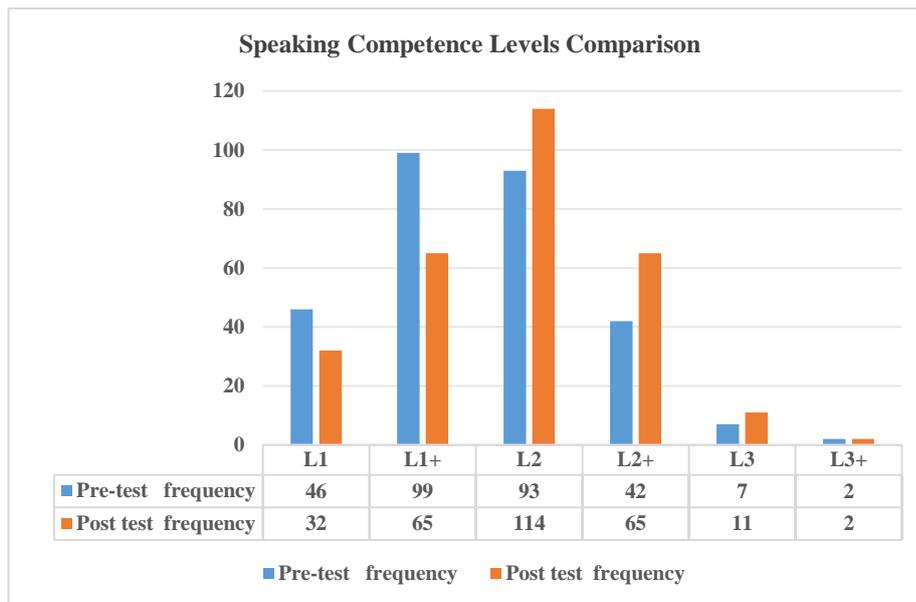


Figure 17 Speaking Competence Levels: Pre- vs. Post-Intervention (Bar Chart)

The bar chart compares the frequency of participants' speaking competence levels before and after the instructional intervention, illustrating the distribution across various proficiency levels (Level 1, Level 1+, Level 2, Level 2+, Level 3, Level 3+) in both phases (see Figure 17). A significant observation is the reduction in participants at the Level 1 and Level 1+ after the intervention, with 46 participants initially at Level 1 decreasing to 32, and those at Level 1+ reducing from 99 to 65. This suggests a positive shift, as many participants progressed to higher levels, particularly to Level 2.

Level 2 showed the most substantial increase, rising from 93 participants in the pre-intervention to 114 in the post-intervention, making it the most common proficiency level achieved during the post-intervention phase. Additionally, Level 2+ also saw a notable rise from 42 to 65 participants, reflecting the intervention's effectiveness in advancing speaking competence. Overall, the most significant advancements were

observed in half-level improvements, particularly in the transitions from Level 1+ to Level 2 and from Level 2 to Level 2+.

Despite these improvements, the movement into higher proficiency levels, such as Level 3 and Level 3+, was more modest. Participants at Level 3 increased slightly from 7 to 11, while those at Level 3+ remained constant at 2 participants. This indicates that while the intervention was effective in helping participants achieve a solid working proficiency, as evidenced by the significant concentration in Level 2 and Level 2+, advancing to the highest levels of proficiency proved more challenging. The results suggest that the intervention particularly benefited participants who initially could handle basic everyday conversations, enabling them to advance their proficiency levels.

#### 4.3.3.2 Inferential Statistics: Chi-Square Test

To thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness of the course in enhancing students' speaking competence, it is essential to move beyond frequency analysis, and examine the relationships between categorical variables. This study employs the Chi-Square test, a widely recognized non-parametric method for examining associations between categorical variables, such as pre-intervention and post-intervention proficiency levels. This test is appropriate for assessing significance when the data do not meet the assumption of normality (McHugh, 2013).

Table 24

#### *Chi-Square Tests for Speaking Competence*

Test type	df	Value	Asymptotic significance(2-sided)	Monte Carlo Sig.(2-sided)
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Pearson Chi-Square	901.853a	25	<0.001	<0.001
Likelihood Ratio	483.448	25	<0.001	<0.001
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	437.914		<0.001	<0.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	204.098c	1	<0.001	<0.001

The results of several chi-square tests, presented in Table 24, assess the association between speaking competence levels measured before and after the intervention. The chi-square test is a statistical method used to determine whether there is a significant relationship between two categorical variables, specifically the pre-intervention and post-intervention speaking competence levels.

Four different chi-square tests were employed to provide a comprehensive analysis: Pearson Chi-Square, Likelihood Ratio, Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test, and Linear-by-Linear Association. By employing this multi-faceted approach, the analysis captures subtle variations in the associations across different conditions, such as varying sample sizes, expected frequencies, and data distributions. This approach aligns with best practices in statistical analysis, as advocated by prominent researchers in the field of social science methodology. Conducting multiple tests ensures the robustness and reliability of the findings, thereby enhancing the credibility of the research outcomes (Agresti, 2018; Field, 2024).

The results in Table 24 indicated that all tests produced significance levels of less than 0.001, which is well below the conventional threshold of 0.05. This strong statistical significance implied that the observed differences in speaking competence levels between the pre-intervention and post-intervention were highly unlikely to have

occurred by chance. Namely, there is a robust association between the intervention and the improvement in students' speaking competence. The consistency of these significant results across various chi-square tests further reinforced the conclusion that the intervention was effective in enhancing the speaking competence of the participants.

#### **4.3.3.3 Additional Survey on Speaking Competence Change**

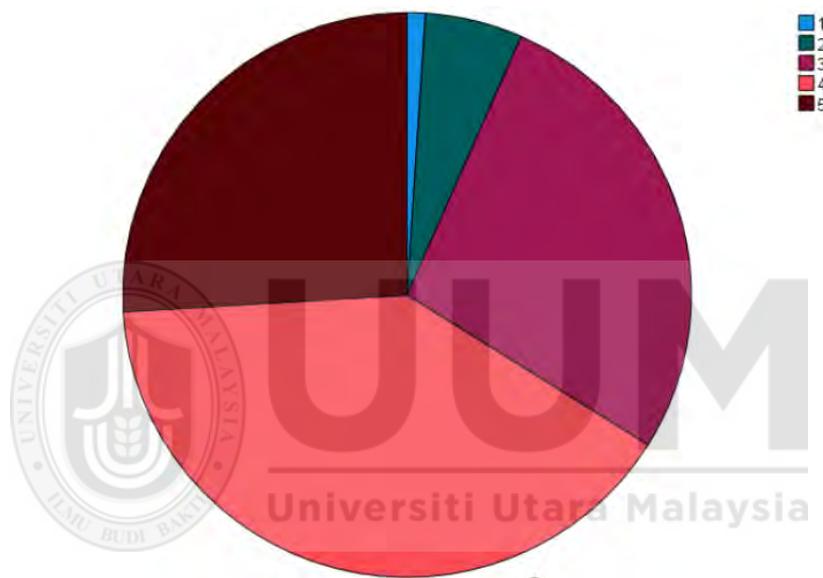
In addition to the binary questionnaire used to assess specific levels of speaking competence, two additional questions were administered separately via the AAP platform on ClassIn (云课堂, Yúnbānkè in Chinese), an online teaching platform, after the instructional intervention. These questions were not part of the formal pre- or post-intervention questionnaire but were designed to capture participants' self-perceived changes in English speaking confidence and overall speaking competence. They provide complementary insights into the effectiveness of the intervention.

Students rated their responses on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very much), offering insights into their perceived improvement in confidence and proficiency. These questions were included to provide a deeper understanding of the course's overall impact, encompassing all students who participated. This large-scale self-report analysis enriches the previous frequency and chi-square evaluations by incorporating subjective self-assessments.

Question 1: How much has this course improved your confidence in speaking English?

Response Distribution:

- 1 (Not at all): 3 respondents (1.0%)
- 2 (Very little): 16 respondents (5.5%)
- 3 (Moderate): 79 respondents (27.3%)
- 4 (Quite a lot): 116 respondents (40.1%)
- 5 (Very much): 75 respondents (26.0%)



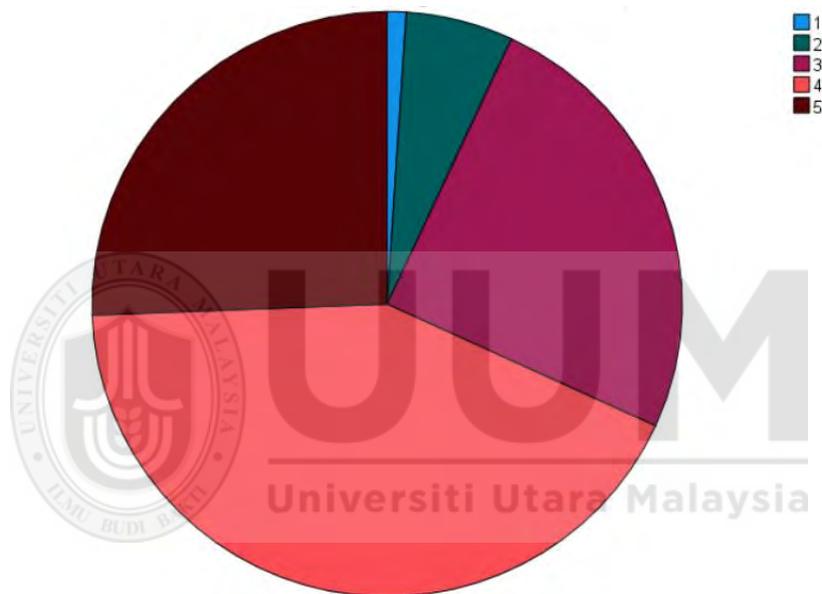
*Figure 18* Pie Chart of Speaking Confidence Enhancement

As illustrated in Figure 18, the majority of respondents perceived a significant improvement in their confidence in speaking. Specifically, 40.1% of respondents indicated that the course improved their confidence “quite a lot”. 26.0% reported a “very much” improvement. The mean score for this question was 3.84, indicating an overall moderate to considerable improvement.

Question 2: How much has this course improved your speaking competence?

Response Distribution:

- 1 (Not at all): 3 respondents (1.0%)
- 2 (Very little): 17 respondents (5.9%)
- 3 (Moderate): 123 respondents (42.6%)
- 4 (Quite a lot): 74 respondents (25.6%)
- 5 (Very much): 72 respondents (24.9%)



*Figure 19* Pie Chart of Speaking Competence Enhancement

Responses to Question 2, as shown in Figure 19, suggested that students generally viewed the course as having a positive impact on their speaking competence. A total of 42.6% of respondents indicated that the course improved their speaking competence to a “moderate” extent, while 25.6% reported that it improved their speaking competence “quite a lot.” The mean score for this question was 3.86, slightly higher than for Question 1.

Overall, the responses to both questions indicated a generally positive perception among participants regarding the course's effectiveness in improving their speaking competence and confidence. The majority of respondents reported at least moderate improvement, with a substantial portion indicating significant progress. These self-reported perceptions are consistent with the outcomes of the binary speaking competence questionnaire, where most participants experienced improvements in their proficiency levels.

#### **4.4 Final Qualitative Phase (RQ3): Effectiveness of the Pedagogical Model**

The previous quantitative data demonstrated significant enhancements in both intercultural competence and speaking competence. In this qualitative phase, the focus was on examining EFL learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of the pedagogical model. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants distinct from those in the initial qualitative phase. The analysis concentrated on their views on improvements in intercultural competence, speaking competence, and their overall attitudes on the pedagogical model.

##### **4.4.1 Demographic Analysis of Participants**

The interview participants shared similar characteristics with those from the initial qualitative phase, but were a separate group of 20 EFL learners from the same five parallel classes. Table 25 provides an overview of their key demographic characteristics.

Table 25

*Demographics in the Final Qualitative Phase (N=20)*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>CET level</b>	<b>Interacting frequency</b>	<b>Overseas experience</b>
(P1)	Female	Portuguese	6	1-2times/week	No
(P2)	Female	Spanish	4	1-2times/week	No
(P3)	Male	Japanese	4	1-2times/week	Yes
(P4)	Male	Japanese	N/A	1-2time/week	No
(P5)	Female	Spanish	6	1time/week	No
(P6)	Male	Japanese	6	0 time/week	No
(P7)	Male	Spanish	4	1 time/week	No
(P8)	Male	Japanese	4	1time/week	No
(P9)	Female	Spanish	4	1time/week	No
(P10)	Female	German	4	1time/week	No
(P11)	Female	Portuguese	4	1-2times/week	No
(P12)	Female	Spanish	6	1time/week	Yes
(P13)	Male	Japanese	N/A	1time/week	No
(P14)	Female	Russia	6	1-2times/week	No
(P15)	Female	Russia	N/A	1-2time/week	Yes
(P16)	Female	Portuguese	6	1time/week	No
(P17)	Female	Portuguese	6	1time/week	No
(P18)	Female	Japanese	4	1time/week	No
(P19)	Female	Japanese	4	1time/week	No
(P20)	Female	French	4	1-2times/week	No

The participants included 6 males and 14 females from different language majors, including Portuguese, Spanish, German, Japanese, French, and Russian. Their English proficiency levels varied: Some had not passed the College English Test (CET), while others had obtained certificates for CET-4 or CET-6. The frequency of intercultural interactions differed, from no interactions to once or twice a week, primarily involving interactions with foreign instructors in class or off-class. Most participants lacked overseas experience, though a few had brief travel experiences lasting less than a month. The selection of these 20 students followed the principle of “maximum variation” as in the initial phase. These background details help contextualize the

participants' profiles, offering a clearer understanding of the diversity within the sample.

#### 4.4.2 Key Themes of the Effectiveness of the Pedagogical Model

Key themes regarding perceptions of the effectiveness of the pedagogical model include three areas: perceived effects on intercultural competence, which covers both enhancements and challenges; perceived effects on speaking competence, encompassing speaking confidence and speaking competence; as well as attitudes and suggestions, which consist of overall attitudes and specific suggestions. These themes are illustrated in Figure 20.

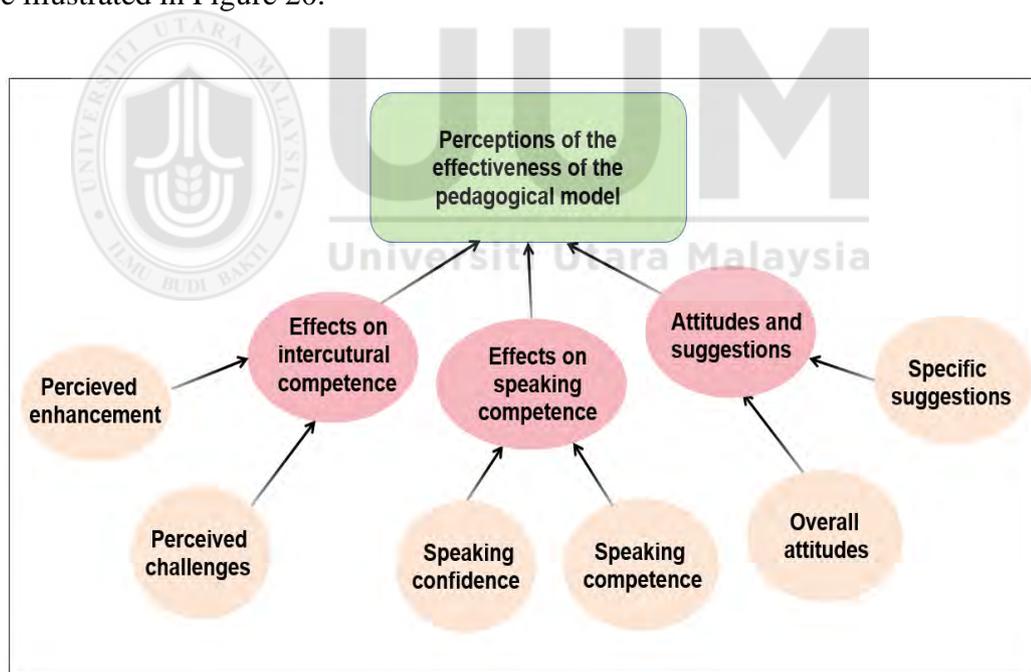


Figure 20 Themes on the Effectiveness of the Pedagogical Model

##### 4.4.2.1 Perceived Effects on Intercultural Competence

The effects on intercultural competence is understood through two main aspects: the participants' perceived progress and challenges they faced while developing ICC. These aspects reflected both the positive outcomes and the obstacles faced during the course, providing a comprehensive view of the participants' developmental process.

### **Theme 1: Perceived Enhancement**

This theme focuses on students' perceptions of their progress across the four dimensions of intercultural competence: knowledge, attitude, skill, and awareness. All students indicated progress in the four dimensions, although the extent of improvement varied from each one. Among the participants 12 out of 20 noted that knowledge, or a combination of knowledge with other skills showed the most significant improvement. The remaining participants pointed out that attitude, skills, or awareness demonstrated the greatest progress in different ways.

Participant 13 noted the improvement of knowledge:

“Before the course, I learned about culture through movies or videos, but it was fragmented, this course provided a comprehensive understanding of various aspects of foreign culture, including customs, geography, education, literature, religion, and more. Through comparing Chinese and Western cultures in class, I learned the commonalities and differences between them. I also learned some cultural theories to analyze cultural phenomena, which I think will help me fit in better when I go abroad” (P13)

In reflecting on the course's impact, Participant 14 underscored the significance of knowledge acquisition as the most prominent outcome.

“I think the most noticeable improvement should be in knowledge acquisition. Knowledge is a relatively direct acquisition, especially in the course, where we obtain information and knowledge about other cultures through teachers' explanations, presentations made by classmates, and discussions with peers. Improvements in attitude, skills, and awareness are deeper changes that may gradually manifest in daily experiencing. Although I feel that these aspects have also improved, it is not as noticeable as the increase in knowledge.” (14)

Regarding attitude, participants felt that the course enhanced their openness and respectfulness. Participant 15 emphasized the evolution of her attitude towards cultural diversity, moving from a superficial respect to a deeper more informed appreciation:

“From a young age, we were taught that we need to respect other cultures and people. Initially, I held this positive attitude but didn't really understand the reason. Now I learned more about the culture diversity and the reasons behind cultural differences, and my attitude has become more respectful and inclusive. Previously, my respect was subjective; now, with an objective understanding, I can accept differences more readily. Moreover, I used to focus on the differences in intercultural understanding. Now, I believe that while it is essential to acknowledge and understand these differences, it is equally important to focus on the shared concerns. (P15)

Similarly, Participant 12 reflected on how the course has significantly transformed her perspectives, reducing her biases and enhancing her appreciation for foreign cultures:

“While basically I held a respectful attitude towards foreign cultures, I admit to having biases in certain aspects. However, upon completing this course, my perspectives underwent many changes. For instance, I used to believe that China’s long history and rich culture overshadowed that of other countries, believing they lacked excellent literary works. Yet, delving into literature during the course, I discovered the works of various British authors throughout different periods, which changed my preconceived opinions about British culture. I came to realize that every culture has its unique characteristics.” (P12)

Participants also generally believed that the course improved their intercultural skills. Participant 5 illustrated the development of her intercultural skills, particularly in interpreting and relating cultural contexts. She highlighted how she has become adept at understanding and explaining cultural events, and how she applies this knowledge in interactions:

"When discussing traditional holidays, I related the significance of these events with my own culture to make them more understandable. When I discussed the traditional Chinese love story of Liangzhu (refers to the Chinese folk tale “The Butterfly Lovers” a tragic love story) with a foreigner, I explained it as the “Chinese Romeo and Juliet”, which helped him quickly grasp its significance. (P5)

In a similar vein, Participant 19 discussed how the classroom environment, with its emphasis on English-medium instruction and interactive participation, has contributed to the development of her skills:

“Because the teacher conducts classes in English, we frequently participate in answering questions, engaging in group and peer discussions, all of which enhance our English communication and interaction skills. Additionally, we have acquired new knowledge, which boosts our confidence and eagerness to discuss with foreigners with matters concerning their country.” (P19)

Participants also concurred that the course heightened their awareness and understanding of intercultural dynamics. Participant 17 emphasized the evolution of her communication approach, highlighting the importance of cultural awareness and topic selection when engaging with foreigners:

“Skills and awareness have indeed improved. Previously, I might have engaged with foreigners using a more Chinese-style approach, directly asking common questions like "Have you eaten?" or "Where have you been?" But now, I pay more attention to the choice of topics. For instance, I might start by discussing the weather with a British person and then transition to other topics. At the same time, I also pay attention to cultural differences, avoiding discussions on personal privacy that foreigners may not appreciate, such as relationship status, age, or salary.” (P17)

Participant 14 shared her experience of overcoming shyness in interacting with foreigners and how the course helped her gain a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and awareness:

“In the past, when encountering different behaviors or opinions from foreigners, I was often too shy to express my own thoughts. However, after gaining a deeper understanding of cultural diversity through this course, I now recognize the importance of expressing my own perspectives and identity. I can comprehend why they might behave differently from me, and I am more inclined to engage in more open conversations where I share my views while considering both our cultural differences.” (P14)

Similarly, participant 16 reflected on how the course improved her cultural awareness, especially in relation to her future plans in international business:

“This course really opened my eyes to the differences of people around the world. I started to realize how cultural values affect the way people make decisions and communicate. For example, something that’s considered straightforward in one culture might come off as rude in another. Understanding these differences has made me more aware of how to interact with people from other cultures, and I think this will be super helpful when I work in a global business setting.” (P16)

## **Theme 2: Perceived Challenges**

Participants acknowledged the advancements in the four dimensions of intercultural competence, but also noted the challenges, particularly in the skills dimension, which half of the participants (10 out of 20) identified as the most challenging and least improved. While a few participants (three) found awareness particularly difficult to develop, others (four) regarded attitude as the least improved dimension. The remaining participants mentioned other challenges, though they were less emphasized.

Participant 10 highlighted the challenges of skill, she noted:

“Although there is interaction and simulation in the classroom, because both the teacher and students are Chinese, we lack opportunities to interact with foreign friends and we cannot authentically simulate the environment and scenarios of intercultural communication. In real intercultural communication, we may encounter more challenges and uncertainties, which could make us feel nervous and uncomfortable. Therefore, the moods and experiences of communicating with foreigners are different from our classroom interactions.”

(P10)

Participant 15 expressed similar perspectives based on her experience. The lack of practical interaction opportunities not only hinders skill development but also makes it harder to internalize awareness, leaving her feeling unprepared when she encounters foreign friends:

“In my experience as a volunteer, when communicating with foreign friends, I still find myself at a loss for words at times, unsure how to articulate my

thoughts. It's a lack of practical experience and opportunities for practice. Sometimes, I might feel flustered, and in those moments, I cannot be attentive to certain things, such as their taboos and sensitivities. I may not consider these aspects right away and end up blurting out something inappropriate.”(P15)

Three participants mentioned the challenges in developing awareness, Participant 20 explained:

“Awareness is deeper and harder to internalize. We've learned concepts in the classroom, but in real conversations, we might not always recognize when our language or behavior is inappropriate. Often, we speak before thinking, which is common. Especially in cultural discussions, we might not immediately realize if something we say is offensive or misunderstood by the other party. It seems we struggle to apply what we've learned flexibly in practice.” (P20)

Although less frequently mentioned, attitude was also identified as a dimension with limited improvement. Some participants believed that their attitudes toward other cultures were already positive before the course and remained unchanged afterward.

Participant 7 expressed this sentiment:

“While the course reinforced his respectful and inclusive attitude, it did not lead to noticeable change.” (P7)

#### **4.4.2.2 Perceived Effects on Speaking Competence**

The effects on speaking competence are explored by examining two primary aspects: the increase in participants' speaking confidence and their enhanced speaking competence. These areas of focus provide a foundation for understanding the overall improvements reported by participants, as well as the ongoing challenges that require further attention in future interventions.

### **Theme 1: Increased Confidence in Speaking**

This theme explores the impact on speaking confidence, which is a key objective of the teaching intervention and also a known area of weakness for Chinese EFL learners (Zhang et al., 2017; Wang & Yuan, 2018; Ma & Wang, 2021). The majority of participants indicated that the course boosted their speaking confidence.

Participant 17 expressed her opinions:

“I am more confident now. Because we systematically learned about various aspects of foreign cultures, allowing us to discuss more confidently when communicating with foreign friends. For example, we can talk about what their country is like, what their education system is like, and then share about our own country's. This way, we can engage in mutual exchange rather than just receiving information from them. We now understand better what each other is saying and have more topics to talk about.” (P17)

Increasing confidence among students was also attributed to the frequent speaking opportunities provided in class. This active participation not only enhanced students'

spoken English competence but also fostered a conducive environment for discussions.

Participant 8 said,

“I definitely feel more confident. After all, there are many opportunities to speak in class, and I actively raise my hand. This not only helps improve my organization and expression in spoken English but also increases the opportunities for discussion with classmates. Through frequent interactions with my desk mate and group members, the more I speak, the more my confidence grows.” (P8)

Participant 18, despite initially struggling with insufficient English language competence, shared her improvement, emphasizing the psychological shift that contributed to her increased confidence. She stated:

“Before I lacked confidence, my English wasn’t good, and my pronunciation wasn’t accurate. But in class, we learned about various accents, like Indian, Japanese, Malaysian, and so on. Although speakers from different backgrounds have distinct accents, this actually reflects the diversity of society. I understand the importance of being brave in expressing oneself as long as the other person can understand. When I am not worried about the accent and pronunciation, I feel my communication skills have improved and more eager to express myself.” (P18)

Several participants highlighted the significant impact of the instructor's encouragement and supportive teaching approach on their speaking confidence.

Participant 13 specifically pointed out:

“In every class, the teacher creates a welcoming environment where we are encouraged to answer open-ended questions and actively engage in discussions. Rather than focusing on correcting grammar or pronunciation errors in the moment, the teacher prioritizes our ideas and the content of our speech. Her consistent encouragement, affirmation, and respect for our perspectives have boosted our confidence. Knowing that our contributions are valued, we feel more empowered to speak up.” (P13)

## **Theme 2: Enhanced Speaking Competence**

This theme explores the impact on speaking competence, with the findings showing that most participants observed a significant enhancement in their speaking competence. However, a small group reported more modest progress and offered explanations for this limited improvement.

Participant 18 highlighted how the integration of language and cultural topics in the course, along with the provision of specific contexts for communication, significantly contributed to her progress in speaking competence. She explained:

“My speaking competence has indeed improved. The course wasn't just about practicing language—it was about exploring interesting cultural topics within

specific contexts, which made learning more engaging and practical. Previously, communicating with foreign friends was very difficult. I would get nervous and struggle to express myself. But now, after discussing various cultural cases in class and practicing in role play exercises, I feel more confident. I can communicate more effectively using simple sentences, and I'm also more mindful of cultural sensitivities during conversations.” (P18)

Participant 1 attributed her progress in speaking competence to the immersive English-speaking environment created through various classroom activities, which she believes played a crucial role in her development. She remarked:

“In class, we listen to lectures, answer questions, and engage in discussions, role plays, or reflections, all in English. Our opportunities to practice English mainly come from these classroom activities, as we don't have much time and opportunities to practice outside of class. Through these interactions, we have improved our language organization and expression skills, allowing me to participate in deeper conversations with my international friends, which I previously found challenging.” (P1)

Participants mentioned how they've become more spontaneous and less reliant on rehearsed phrases or scripts, making their speaking feel more natural and authentic.

Participant 3 shared,

“I used to rely a lot on translation tools before speaking. I sometimes would type out what I wanted to say in Chinese and then let the translator do the work,

I just want to make sure the perfect answer. But now, after more practice, I feel more confident speaking on the spot. Instead of relying on the translator for everything, I just go with what I know and only use it when I really can't think of a word. This change has made my speaking feel more natural and less forced, and I'm able to have smoother conversations." (P3)

Participant 5 expressed her progress in speaking, noting that her understanding of the essence of intercultural communication has deepened, and this realization has led to a more effective communication style:

"I feel it's helpful for my spoken competence. Specifically, in previous interactions, I always tried to use big words or complex sentence structures to make it seem like I'm proficient in English. But now, I prefer to use simple and clear words and sentences, which allows me to express myself better. It's about making my expressions clearer so that others can understand me better, achieving effective communication." (P5)

Conversely, some participants pointed out they did not make noticeable process in speaking competence, despite gaining more knowledge in culture and language. Participant 11 noted,

"I feel like my speaking competence hasn't noticeably improved, but there has been improvement in the vocabulary, listening and comprehension aspects. Listening to the teacher's lectures and understanding the content in the books and video cases has enhanced my comprehension skills. I think the lack of

improvement in speaking is mainly due to the limited frequency of classes, and the class size is so big, which constricts the chances to practice.” (P11)

Participant 20 remarked on the distinctions between conversing with Chinese individuals and foreigners, expressing continued difficulty in communicating with foreigners:

“I think my speaking competence remains the same. I still feel hesitant to speak with foreigners. I’m comfortable speaking English with Chinese people, but it’s a bit harder with foreigners. It’s different in daily life compared to class communication.” (P20)

A few participants highlighted psychological barriers as a significant challenge to improving their speaking competence, despite having adequate language knowledge. They noted that their lack of confidence in speaking English often hinders their ability to engage actively in conversations. Participant 9, who had passed the CET-4 exam, shared her struggle with this issue:

“Even though I’ve passed CET-4, I still feel really nervous when it comes to actually speaking English. I know the grammar and vocabulary, but when it’s time to speak, I just freeze up. My mind goes blank, and I hesitate a lot. Even if I were to pass CET-6, I don’t think it would make a difference in how confidently I could communicate with foreigners. It’s not just about knowing the language; it’s about feeling confident enough to use it.” (P9)

#### **4.4.2.3 Attitudes and Suggestions**

This section addresses two main aspects: participants' overall attitudes toward the effectiveness of the pedagogical model and their specific suggestions for improvement. The first aspect reflects learners' levels of satisfaction and engagement with the course, offering insights into how well the model met their expectations. The second aspect highlights constructive feedback aimed at refining the course design to better align with learners' needs and preferences.

##### **Theme 1: Overall Attitudes**

This theme includes how well the course meet participants' expectations, its effectiveness in improving their intercultural competence and language competence, their views on the four structured phases and class activities, and the course's overall impact on their learning experience.

Participant 11 shared her positive impressions of the course:

“The course is interesting. I feel like everyone is quite interested because they answer questions voluntarily. The teaching structure is very clear and relevant. The interactive activities were helpful in enlivening the classroom atmosphere and practicing intercultural communication skills. Additionally, I learned a lot from my classmates through all kinds of activities. Overall, my intercultural competence has improved significantly, and I feel more confident expressing myself in English.” (P11)

Several students noted a change in their perspective towards English learning, becoming more engaged and motivated. Participant 2 remarked on the course's unique integration of language learning with intercultural elements:

“Compared with other English courses, I find the course quite interesting. It is different from the dull English classes which focus on learning vocabulary, grammar, preparing for CET exams I've had before. The way the course combined language learning with intercultural elements really caught my attention. The activities, especially those that tied language practice with cultural comparison, case analysis and reflection, made the learning process much more engaging. I've developed a greater enthusiasm for both language and intercultural studies, and I've gained a lot from the course.” (P2)

Participant 16 highlighted the value of reflective activities in deepening her understanding of cultural differences and educational priorities and shared an example of her learning experience:

“The overall impact of the course on my learning experience has been profound. The reflective activities were particularly beneficial, allowing me to deeply analyze my cultural assumptions. For instance, we discussed a story about an American mother who sued a kindergarten because her three-year-old daughter was taught the letter ‘O’. Initially, my partner and I thought the mother was really overreacting. However, through class discussions and reflections, I realized on the purpose of early childhood education that knowledge is not the

most important aspect; rather, it is imagination that truly matters. This exercise helped me develop a deeper understanding of educational priorities.” (P16)

However, not all feedback was entirely positive. Participant 6, a student with proficient language competence, tended to be quieter in class, expressed some reservations:

“I appreciate the effort put into the course, but I believe it would be even better if everyone could participate, especially those who are not willing to speak up voluntarily. Diverse activities or games could be designed to achieve this.” (P6)

While many participants were satisfied with the overall structure and content of the course, highlighting the clear teaching structure, the benefits of comparative, interactive and reflective activities, and the increased interest brought by the integrated method of language and intercultural teaching, they also provided several insightful suggestions to further enhance the learning experience.

## **Theme 2: Specific Suggestions for Improvement**

This theme encompasses participants’ specific suggestions for improving course designing and classroom activities, classified into four aspects: teaching methods, student participation, content integration, and culture exchange. These suggestions provide actionable insights for refining the course. Figure 21 displayed specific suggestions provided by participants.

Specific suggestions					
Student participation			Content integration		Teaching methods
Creative individual presentation		Simulating real life scenarios		Incorporating current events and news	Preparing of Structured study handouts in advance
				Adapting cinematic plots or literature	
				Continuation of literary works and...	Technology-assisted learning
Interactive games	Partner exchange	Peer teaching	Project-based collabora...		
				Cultural exchange	
				Inviting foreign students to class	Overseas experience sharing
Structured intercultural role-playing					

Figure 21 Themes on Specific Suggestions for Improvement

In terms of teaching method, Participant 13, recommended the preparation of structured study handouts to help students better organize and understand course content. He said:

“Because of the large class size and the fast pace of the lessons, sometimes time doesn’t allow for a summary from the teacher before the class ends. Therefore, it is hoped that an outline, including key points, can be provided by the teacher to guide our learning process. This would help us better follow the teacher’s instruction in class and promote independent review after class.”(P13)

Participant 17 emphasized the need for greater student engagement, suggested incorporating brainstorming activities during the intercultural acquisition phase:

“We do have brainstorming activities in our class, and we take full advantage of the rich resources of a large class. However, I feel that we don't go deep enough. For example, in a lesson about the American education system, we could start with a brainstorming session to explore what everyone already knows. This provides an opportunity for mutual learning among peers. Then, the teacher could further delve into specific topics that we are not familiar with in a more targeted manner.” (17)

Participant 11 proposed changing partners regularly to increase participation and stimulate fresh interactions:

“Changing desk partners every month through a random draw can help students meet new friends and increase their enthusiasm for communication. When students become too familiar with each other, they may feel less inclined to discuss certain topics. Switching desk partners brings a sense of novelty and encourages more dynamic interactions.” (P11)

Participant 6 suggested the inclusion of more games to engage all students, including those who are typically less active:

“He mentioned that last semester, a foreign teacher used various English-related games in class. For example, there was a map game with different English sections on it. Students would roll a die, move a certain number of spaces, and then complete a small English activity on the section they landed

on. He believes that similar activities could enhance classroom interaction and student participation.” (P6)

Given the lack of a multicultural environment, participants creatively suggested using available resources to simulate diverse cultures, Participant 10 recommended:

“I believe we can utilize our resources to engage in role-playing since we come from different language majors and can portray people from various countries. We can use intercultural scenarios from real life or movies. However, the teacher should arrange this in advance so that we have ample time to prepare, as we are still quite apprehensive about improvising on the spot.” (P10)

In terms of culture exchange, which is difficult in the campus environment, two participants suggested inviting overseas students from other campus or those students with international experience to share their insights, Participant 14 explained,

“Inviting foreign students into the classroom would be more effective. although we can communicate in English with teachers and classmates. This is because interacting with foreign friends or international students provides a more authentic intercultural exchange. We may pay more attention to cultural aspects and etiquette, leading to practical learning and application.” (P14)

Participant 3 supported this idea, noting the value of learning from peers with international experience:

“The experiences of students who have traveled or studied abroad serve as excellent examples because they have lived and interacted in different social environments. Consulting their opinions tends to be more objective compared to relying solely on information gathered online or from other sources, which may carry some degree of subjectivity. Through this approach, we can draw inspiration and learning from the real-life experiences of others, gaining an understanding of the challenges and opportunities present in different cultures and environments.” (P3)

Apart from these suggestions, several participants suggested improving the group introductory show activity in the intercultural acquisition phase, Participant 2 said:

“I think the introductory show made by students can be improved. While I acknowledge that some groups did a good job, some groups did not adequately prepare, and occasionally, they chose the same topic, resulting in a lack of interest. It seemed they were merely fulfilling their obligation. I hope teacher can give us more freedom on the topic and group member selection.” (P2)

#### **4.5 Summary**

This chapter presented the findings from the three research phases. The initial qualitative phase identified language competence as a fundamental factor in ICC development, highlighting its role in effective communication, cultural understanding, and confidence-building. Key aspects of language competence, including speaking competence, contextual awareness, and a combination of fluency, coherence, and

etiquette, were identified as critical. Insights from this phase informed the intervention's design by aligning teaching activities with learners' needs.

The quantitative phase demonstrated statistically significant improvements in all ICC dimensions following the intervention. Notable progress was observed in speaking competence, with pre- and post-intervention results confirming measurable advancements. These findings validated the pedagogical model's effectiveness in enhancing students' intercultural and language competence.

The final qualitative phase explored learners' perceptions of the effects of the pedagogical model. Most participants expressed positive attitudes toward the course structure and content, reporting increased interest and engagement. They also identified challenges in improving intercultural competence and speaking competence and provided suggestions for refinement. The three phases findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact, demonstrating its effectiveness in addressing the study's objectives.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the study's findings in relation to the research questions and objectives, organized into several key sections. It begins by examining the research findings within the framework of relevant theories and literature to provide a deeper understanding of the results. Next, the chapter explores the theoretical and practical implications of these findings in the context of foreign language teaching. It then addresses the research limitations and offers recommendations for future studies. Finally, it concludes with a summary of the key points, highlighting the study's contributions to the field.

#### **5.2 Discussion of Findings**

This section discusses the key findings arising from the study's sequential phases. It begins by interpreting insights from the initial qualitative phase concerning the role of language competence in fostering ICC, then presents findings from the subsequent qualitative phase that capture learners' reflections and experiences with the model. Next, it examines the quantitative results that assess ICC improvement following the teaching intervention. The section concludes by integrating qualitative and quantitative evidence to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the overall outcomes.

### **5.2.1 Initial Qualitative Phase (RQ1): Role of Language Competence**

This discussion is organized into two parts: First, it examines how language competence influences the development of ICC, and second, it analyzes which key aspects of language competence play a crucial role in facilitating effective intercultural communication.

#### **5.2.1.1 Impacts of Language Competence**

The findings demonstrated that language competence is closely interrelated with ICC. Without a certain level of language proficiency, effective intercultural communication is not possible. Language competence serves as the foundation of ICC, enabling individuals to engage in meaningful interactions and understand others across cultural contexts. Moreover, a solid command of language can enhance cultural understanding, boost communication confidence, improve adaptability, and support the development of positive relationships. However, participants also recognized that language competence alone is not sufficient to achieve successful intercultural communication.

Accordingly, the following discussion examines two key aspects: First, the role of language competence as a foundational and integral component of ICC; and second, its contribution to the development of other ICC dimensions, while recognizing that language competence alone is insufficient to ensure comprehensive ICC.

#### **Language Competence as the Foundation of ICC**

Language competence serves as the foundation of ICC. Participants consistently emphasized that it functions as a “foundation,” “tool,” “bridge,” and “medium” for expressing ideas, understanding others, and managing communication in intercultural contexts. Insufficient language skills were seen to undermine both motivation and the ability to interact effectively. As Fantini (2012, p. 270) pointed out, “it seems ironic to focus on intercultural interactions and ignore the language that directly mediates every transaction.”

Moreover, participants recognized the inseparable link between language and culture. Language not only facilitates communication but also conveys cultural values, norms, and meanings (Kim, 2020; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). This cultural embeddedness makes language competence essential for interpreting cultural nuances and managing intercultural encounters. As Byram (2021) highlights, language is key to negotiating identities in intercultural communication. Thus, language competence is not supplementary but integral to ICC, enabling individuals to engage meaningfully and appropriately across cultural boundaries.

This results that language competence forms the foundation of ICC align closely with scholars’ findings (Dalib, 2014; Dalib et al., 2019; Feng et al., 2024). Dalib’s (2014) research explored ICC in the Malaysia context, reinforcing the critical role of language competence in effective intercultural communication. The research revealed that successful communication with individuals from different cultural backgrounds was primarily achieved when they could understand the “Other” and make themselves

understood through language. Her studies highlighted that a lack of language competence led to significant constraints in interactions, causing misunderstandings and limiting the depth of intercultural engagement. Feng et al. (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study and found that as the language proficiency of EFL learners improved, many dimensions of their ICC showed significant enhancement. Language competence was identified as essential for the development of ICC.

### **Language Competence and the Development of Other ICC Dimensions**

Language competence is not an isolated ability but is closely linked with and supports the development of other dimensions of ICC. The findings of this study highlighted the central role of language competence in promoting cultural knowledge, fostering positive attitudes, enhancing communication skills, and strengthening intercultural awareness. In this regard, language competence acts as a catalyst (Feng et al., 2024), facilitating the development of these dimensions and enabling more effective intercultural engagement.

Specifically, language competence serves as the foundation of communication, enabling learners to convey ideas accurately and interpret messages appropriately, thereby improving communication effectiveness and helping them avoid misunderstandings during intercultural interactions. Participants frequently emphasized that linguistic ability was essential for expressing thoughts clearly and for preventing confusion or awkwardness in conversation. It also enhances cultural knowledge by allowing learners to access authentic linguistic and cultural resources—

such as media, conversations, and texts—through which they encounter diverse worldviews and cultural norms. As revealed in the interviews, language competence also facilitates cultural understanding and helps resolve misunderstandings by allowing learners to grasp cultural meanings embedded in communication (P1, P5, P16, P19). It fosters positive attitudes by increasing learners' confidence and willingness to engage with speakers from other cultures; some participants noted that improved language competence gave them the motivation and comfort to interact more openly. It contributes to building positive relationships, as proficient language use allows learners to express empathy, show respect, and maintain rapport—a finding echoed in participants' accounts of how clear communication made them more approachable and helped them connect with people from different cultures (P2, P17). It enhances communication skills because linguistic accuracy and pragmatic competence help learners interpret meaning appropriately, express themselves sensitively, and adapt language use according to sociocultural contexts (P7, P12). Finally, it strengthens intercultural awareness and adaptability, as learners with stronger language skills can notice subtle cultural meanings embedded in language use and adjust flexibly to new communicative challenges, as several participants observed in their accounts of adapting to diverse intercultural situations (P3, P17, P18, P20). Nevertheless, consistent with participants' reflections, language competence alone was not seen as sufficient for successful intercultural communication (P9, P10, P14); cultural knowledge, attitudes, and strategies are also necessary for deeper mutual understanding.

This finding supports Byram's assertion that language competence is integral to ICC and each component of intercultural competence is interrelated with language competence (Byram, 2021). While Byram's model highlights the importance of language competence, it largely presents a "list" of ICC dimensions without elaborating on the intricate relationships between these competencies (Byram, 2009). By providing evidence on how language competence enhances the development of other competencies, this study offers a more prescriptive understanding of the interconnectedness of ICC dimensions. This interconnectedness has been largely under-explored in the literature (Byram, 2009; Fantini, 2020; Kohli Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020).

These results also enrich existing ICC models by underscoring the practical importance of language in applying intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness. Many ICC models focus more on psychological traits and communicative behaviors, often understating the role of language competence (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2012, 2020; Jackson, 2020; Strugielska & Piątkowska, 2018). This limitation is reflected in ICC teaching programs and assessment tools that do not always integrate language as a component of ICC (Fantini, 2012, 2020). Although some empirical studies have identified language competence as a factor influencing ICC (Ghasemi Mighani, 2020; Huang, 2021; Mu & Yu, 2021; Wu et al., 2025; Sobkowiak, 2019; Sercu, 2023; Zhou & Burhanudeen, 2023), few have examined how it specifically supports other ICC dimensions.

Moreover, participants emphasized that sufficient or preferably strong language competence is essential for effective intercultural development. Higher proficiency offers more opportunities for meaningful interaction. This is supported by previous research in EFL contexts, which confirms the significant role of language competence in facilitating ICC development (Huang, 2021; Miauw & Guo, 2021; Sarwari & Abdul Wahab, 2018; Sobkowiak, 2019). However, language competence alone does not guarantee successful intercultural communication. As Moeller and Osborn (2014) point out, learners must also understand how, when, and why to say what to whom in specific contexts to avoid becoming fluent fools. This reflects the consensus in the literature that language competence is essential to ICC but does not automatically result in it (Deardorff, 2011; Dimitrova-Gyuzelva, 2019; Fox, 2010; Huang, 2021; Moloney & Harbon, 2010). These findings affirm the importance of integrating language competence with intercultural competence, as both are essential components of ICC and mutually reinforce each other.

#### **5.2.1.2 Key Aspects of Language Competence**

Participants identified three key aspects of language competence crucial for effective intercultural interaction: speaking competence, contextual awareness and cultural etiquette, as well as fluency, coherence, and logical thinking. These findings illustrate that language competence is a multifaceted construct, encompassing not only mastery of grammar and vocabulary but also an understanding of cultural context and

appropriate communication (Byram, 2021; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Van Ek, 1986).

Language is a complex system that goes beyond linguistic knowledge alone. Canale and Swain (1980), building on Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, divided language competence into four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence, emphasizing both linguistic accuracy and effective social use of language. Van Ek's (1986) expanded this view by adding socio-cultural and social competences, highlighting the need for awareness of cultural norms and the ability to adapt communication accordingly. Such frameworks help explain why participants in this study stressed not only accurate and fluent speech, but also contextual sensitivity, cultural etiquette, and logical organisation of ideas. Byram's (2021) adaptation of earlier communicative competence models for ICC further emphasises this integration, categorising language competence into linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences—components that mirror the interplay of accuracy, appropriateness, and coherence identified in the present findings.

The three key aspects identified in this study align with Byram's (2021) categories. Speaking competence, strongly emphasized by participants, combines linguistic competence: accurate grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, with sociolinguistic competence, which involves using language appropriately across different contexts. Contextual awareness and cultural etiquette (the ability to recognize and follow culturally specific norms, conventions, and politeness strategies in verbal and non-

verbal communication) highlight participants' sensitivity to cultural norms and the necessity for politeness and appropriateness in intercultural communication, aspects that also fall within sociolinguistic competence. Finally, fluency, coherence, and logical thinking relate to discourse competence, reflecting the ability to organize and convey ideas clearly and cohesively in spoken or written interaction.

These findings also corroborate Byram's assertions that language competence in intercultural communication must encompass non-linguistic sensitivity and frame communication as a situated, human interaction rather than a simple exchange of information (Byram, 2021). However, it is worth noting that students' interpretations of discourse competence, as revealed in the interviews, largely reflect van Ek's (1986) conceptualization, focusing on fluency, coherence, and logical expression, with limited reference to the intercultural negotiation strategies emphasized by Byram (2021). This suggests that achieving the kind of language competence Byram emphasizes requires extended time and more experiential interactions to fully develop.

Although language competence has been acknowledged as important for ICC development, few empirical studies have examined which specific aspects of language competence most significantly enhance effective intercultural interaction (Dalib, 2014; Sarwari & Abdul Wahab, 2018; Zhou & Burhanudeen, 2023). This study fills that gap by identifying speaking competence, contextual awareness and cultural etiquette, as well as fluency, coherence, and logical thinking as critical components. These insights not only enrich the theoretical understanding of language competence in ICC but also

provide practical implications for educators. Targeted teaching that develops these specific language competences can better prepare students for meaningful and effective intercultural engagement.

### **5.2.2 Quantitative Phase (RQ2): Changes in ICC**

This section discusses changes in students' ICC, focusing on intercultural competence and speaking competence, based on quantitative data, and interprets these changes reflect the effects of the implemented pedagogical model.

#### **5.2.2.1 Changes in Intercultural Competence**

The findings revealed that the pedagogical model significantly improved participants' intercultural competence across all dimensions, including Overall intercultural competence, Knowledge, Attitude, Skill, and Awareness. Descriptive statistics showed notable enhancements in each dimension, with Knowledge showing the greatest increase (+0.42), followed by Skill (+0.36), Awareness (+0.32), and Attitude (+0.22). The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test confirmed statistically significant improvements in all dimensions after the intervention ( $p < 0.001$ ), with effect sizes indicating moderate changes overall.

The most pronounced growth was observed in the Knowledge dimension. This may be attributed to two interrelated factors: its initially low baseline and the targeted emphasis of the intervention. Pre-intervention scores showed knowledge lagging behind attitude, skill, and awareness. This result reflects a common trend among

Chinese EFL learners, where knowledge is often identified as the weakest area of ICC (Gao, 2016; Meng et al., 2017; Mu & Yu, 2021, 2023; Peng et al., 2015; Wang & Yu, 2008; Zhang & Yao, 2020). The inadequacy of intercultural knowledge in China has been partly attributed to the traditional approach to language education, where culture is treated as supplementary rather than integrated into language instruction (Zhang, 2012). In many EFL classrooms, teaching tends to focus on fragmented elements of culture while neglecting the development of a more nuanced, contextual, and dynamic understanding of intercultural knowledge (Gu, 2017). In response, the present intervention prioritized the systematic integration of cultural content, which may have directly contributed to the improvement in students' intercultural knowledge. Similar findings were reported by Huang (2021) and Yu and Yu (2024), who also implemented explicit instructional models to strengthen students' cultural knowledge, showing that learners responded well to structured, content-rich pedagogical strategies.

By contrast, the Attitude dimension showed the least amount of improvement. However, this relatively smaller change should not be misinterpreted as a sign of deficiency. On the contrary, attitude consistently scored the highest both before and after the intervention, suggesting that students already possessed a relatively strong intercultural disposition prior to the course. This pattern is in line with previous research on Chinese EFL learners, where attitude has repeatedly emerged as the most developed dimension of ICC (Lu, 2023; Meng et al., 2017; Mu & Yu, 2021; Peng et al., 2015; Zhang & Yao, 2020). The prominence of attitude among Chinese learners can be explained by sociocultural and educational factors. According to Peng et al.

(2015), the emphasis placed on English language learning from early education onward exposes students to global perspectives and fosters openness toward cultural diversity. In addition, traditional Chinese Confucian values, which promote tolerance, respect for difference, and harmonious interpersonal relations, are deeply embedded in learners' worldviews. Zuo and Hu (2022) further argued that this cultural background contributes positively to students' intercultural attitudes, making them more receptive to engaging with otherness in respectful and empathetic ways.

The Skills and Awareness dimensions also showed improvement, though the gains were relatively modest. This outcome may be partly explained by the constraints of the large-class teaching environment, which often limits opportunities for in-depth interaction, personalized guidance, and sustained student engagement (Marzulina et al., 2021; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). The development of intercultural skills typically requires experiential practice, constructive feedback, and opportunities to apply strategies in communicative contexts. Similarly, cultivating intercultural awareness involves more than theoretical understanding, as it necessitates time for metacognitive reflection and dialogic engagement. These elements, however, can be difficult to facilitate effectively in large classroom settings.

In summary, all dimensions of intercultural competence demonstrated statistically significant progress following the intervention. These results are consistent with previous empirical studies, which suggest that pedagogical models or explicit classroom instruction are effective in enhancing students' ICC (Aski et al., 2023;

Higgins & Siritaratn, 2022; Huang, 2021; Liao & Li, 2023a; Tran & Duong, 2018; Zheng, 2016). As Aski et al. (2023) found, systematic, progressive, and explicit ICC training rather than isolated or sporadic activities is key to fostering meaningful and sustained development in learners' intercultural skills, attitudes, and awareness. In particular, the findings of this study align with those of Huang (2021) and Yu and Yu (2024), who implemented innovative instructional approaches and found that explicit teaching strategies were especially effective in fostering intercultural knowledge. In contrast, gains in the attitude and metacognitive dimensions tended to be more limited, a pattern echoed in the current research.

The moderate effect size observed in this study further substantiates the effectiveness of the pedagogical model in enhancing students' intercultural competence. This result is consistent with findings from Zhang and Zhou's (2019) meta-analysis, which demonstrated that pedagogical interventions, particularly those that incorporate culture-rich content and encourage classroom interaction, tend to yield moderate improvements in ICC. Similarly, Krishnan et al. (2021) reported that participation in on-campus intercultural activities can facilitate the development of ICC, although such activities often produce smaller effect sizes compared to more immersive or individualized instructional approaches.

#### **5.2.2.2 Changes in Speaking Competence**

The results indicate that the teaching intervention significantly improved students' speaking competence. Statistical analysis revealed a positive shift across proficiency

levels, particularly in half-level increments such as from Level 1+ to Level 2 and Level 2 to Level 2+. Although fewer students advanced to higher levels (Level 3 and Level 3+), the Chi-Square test confirmed a significant association between pre- and post-intervention proficiency levels ( $p < 0.001$ ), confirming the overall effectiveness of the intervention.

These findings further support the effectiveness of the intercultural teaching model adopted in this study, which treats language competence not as a separate component but as an integral part of ICC. In this model, the development of speaking competence is embedded within the cultivation of intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness, thereby allowing students to develop language competence in tandem with intercultural understanding. This approach moves beyond traditional language instruction by situating communicative tasks within culturally meaningful contexts and encouraging students to reflect critically on language use in intercultural situations (Nurzhanova & Issimova, 2022). Such integration provides learners with not only linguistic resources but also the interpretive strategies and reflective abilities necessary for competent communication across cultures. Speaking competence improves when students engage in cultural comparison, reflective dialogue, and interactive simulations, all of which exemplify culturally contextualized learning approaches. Empirical studies have shown that such approaches enhance not only fluency but also intercultural awareness (Wimontham et al., 2024; Tran & Duong, 2018). This finding aligns with Byram's (2021) argument that the goal of language education is to develop

learners as intercultural speakers who are capable of mediating between cultures, rather than to emulate native speakers.

The most substantial progress was observed among intermediate-level learners (Levels 1+ to 2 and 2 to 2+), who appeared to benefit the most from structured instructional support. This supports the view that intermediate students are particularly responsive to teaching interventions that build on their existing language foundation and promote greater fluency and accuracy (Sarmiento-Campos, 2022).

In contrast, students at Level 1 showed relatively limited gains, likely due to challenges in adapting to an all-English environment and comprehending complex texts and cultural content (Bon, 2022; Zhou & Burhanudeen, 2023). Progress among Level 3 students was also less evident, possibly because of limited peer interaction at a comparable proficiency level, which is essential for advancing fluency and engaging in more sophisticated communication. The small sample size at this level may have also affected the visibility of improvement.

### **5.2.3 Final Qualitative Phase (RQ3): Effectiveness of the Pedagogical Model**

This phase analyzes participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the pedagogical model. It encompassed three areas: participants' perceptions of intercultural competence development, perceptions of speaking competence development, and their overall attitudes towards the teaching intervention as well as suggestions for improvement.

### 5.2.3.1 Perceived Effects on Intercultural Competence

Participants widely acknowledged that the course enhanced all four dimensions of their ICC: knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness. However, the extent of improvement varied across dimensions. While most participants gained confidence in intercultural interactions and became more thoughtful in communication, they also noted gaps between classroom instruction and real-world intercultural experiences, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of structured ICC learning.

Knowledge was the most significantly improved dimension, with 12 out of 20 participants identifying it as their main area of growth. The course's systematic design helped students develop both cultural understanding and an appreciation of cultural diversity. This solid knowledge foundation enabled more respectful and confident communication across cultures. Many participants described becoming more "open-minded" and "aware of cultural differences," attributing this change to the structured exposure to cultural contrasts. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Huang, 2023; Ilie, 2019; Mu & Yu, 2023) that emphasize the role of cultural knowledge in enhancing intercultural openness and communicative appropriateness.

In terms of attitude, students experienced a shift from subjective respect, which was initially rooted in traditional values such as harmony and tolerance as described by Chen (2016) and Zhang et al. (2022b), toward a more reflective and empathetic appreciation of cultural diversity. The course guided them to move beyond superficial acceptance by helping them understand the underlying reasons behind different

cultural practices. This change in perspective, evolving from subjective tolerance to a more internalized and genuine appreciation, aligns with Ouedraogo (2021), who argues that intercultural learning requires a deeper emotional and cognitive transformation. As students internalized cultural differences, they reported reduced biases, increased empathy, and a more sincere engagement with other cultures.

The development of intercultural skills and awareness showed mixed results. Participants improved in interpreting cultural contexts, using analogies, and communicating more sensitively in English. However, nearly half reported limited progress in skills, explaining that classroom activities, while structured and supportive, lacked the unpredictability, emotional nuance, and cultural depth of real-life intercultural encounters. A few participants also noted modest improvement in awareness for similar reasons. As a result, applying their cultural understanding in authentic contexts remained challenging. These insights are consistent with the findings of Zhang and Zhou (2019) and Mu and Yu (2023), who observed that while structured environments support the early stages of ICC development, they need to be complemented by authentic, experiential learning. This supports the view, emphasized by Liao and Li (2023a), Dervin (2016), and Fantini (2012), that the development of intercultural attitudes and awareness is an ongoing process shaped by continuous and meaningful cultural experiences, rather than by instruction alone.

### **5.2.3.2 Perceived Effects on Speaking Competence**

Overall, students perceived the course as effective in improving their speaking competence and communicative confidence. While some reported moderate progress, others noted significant improvement. Three main factors contributed to these outcomes: regular opportunities for practice and interaction, the accumulation of cultural knowledge, and an integrated pedagogical approach that combined language and culture with strong instructor support.

Frequent speaking practice, structured around intercultural comparison, intercultural exploration and engagement, and intercultural reflection as proposed in Newton et al.'s ICLT principles, was regarded as central to building students' fluency and confidence.

Activities such as guided discussions, role plays, and peer interactions were intentionally designed to incorporate these principles, enabling learners to progressively strengthen their language skills while engaging with authentic intercultural content. This approach not only prepared them for spontaneous communication beyond the classroom but also fostered the adaptability needed in diverse communicative contexts. This finding aligns with Ellis (2019), who underscores the value of interactive tasks in developing speaking competence in EFL contexts. In addition, the acquisition of cultural knowledge emerged as a critical factor. As students deepened their understanding of foreign cultures, they became more confident in initiating and sustaining conversations, particularly with native speakers. Such knowledge provided the conceptual and contextual foundation for more substantive and meaningful exchanges, corroborating the findings of Jawas (2020) and Yang (2009).

The integration of language competence with the four dimensions of intercultural competence in the pedagogical model substantially enriched students' communicative competence. Language was not merely a vehicle for grammar and vocabulary acquisition; it was interwoven with intercultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills to create a more holistic learning experience. For example, language combined with knowledge allowed students to access and articulate culturally specific concepts, enhancing their ability to explain and compare cultural phenomena. Language paired with attitude encouraged learners to express openness, curiosity, and respect in their verbal interactions, shaping how they positioned themselves in intercultural exchanges. Integrating language with awareness helped students interpret discourse within its cultural context, recognising subtle norms, values, and perspectives embedded in communication. Finally, language linked to skills enabled them to adapt their communicative strategies, negotiate meaning, and manage misunderstandings effectively in real-time interaction. In line with Byram's (2021) assertion, this multidimensional integration prevented language from being reduced to a mere code for transmitting one's native cultural perspectives, instead fostering the ability to engage in meaningful, context-sensitive, and mutually transformative intercultural communication.

Additionally, the instructor's supportive teaching style reduced students' fear of speaking by focusing on content instead of immediate correction. This approach created a comfortable learning environment that encouraged students to express

themselves freely and confidently. These outcomes align with research on speaking anxiety and classroom support (Lin, 2023; Markey et al., 2021; Mendoza, 2019).

Despite these improvements, students still faced several challenges in developing speaking competence. Limited class time, large class sizes, and the lack of authentic communicative contexts made it difficult to fully transfer classroom learning to real-world situations. Some students felt that although classroom activities were helpful, they did not fully prepare them for the unpredictability and complexity of natural conversations. These findings support scholars' argument that real-world interaction is essential for the development of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence (Mu & Yu, 2023; Taguchi, 2011).

### **5.2.3.3 Attitudes and Suggestions**

Students expressed positive attitudes toward the course, attributing their engagement and progress to its structured design and emphasis on cultural comparison and reflection. They appreciated the course's clear organization and phased progression, which included intercultural acquisition, cultural comparison, interaction, and reflection. Each phase featured targeted learning objectives and varied, interactive activities. This systematic approach supported the development of linguistic competence and strengthened intercultural understanding by encouraging practical application of knowledge in communicative contexts, which aligns with findings from previous studies (Tran & Duong, 2018).

In particular, students valued the comparative and reflective components of the course. Cultural comparison tasks helped them identify similarities and differences between cultures, deepening their appreciation of diversity and reinforcing intercultural sensitivity. This aligns with the work of Byram (2003, 2006), Kramsch (2006b), and Newton et al. (2010), who argue that comparative analysis fosters awareness of both other cultures and one's own. Reflective activities further encouraged students to critically examine their assumptions and biases, enhancing self-awareness and empathy. These outcomes reflect the principles of intercultural language teaching (ICLT), as outlined by Newton et al. (2010), and support Byram's (2021) notion of cultural awareness as an evolving understanding of interconnected cultural experiences.

Despite the course's overall strengths, participants expressed a clear need for refinements that could enhance both engagement and authenticity in intercultural learning. Suggestions centred on providing more structured learning support, such as handouts or key-point outlines to help students follow fast-paced lessons, and introducing more varied and dynamic interaction formats, including targeted brainstorming, rotation of discussion partners, and the use of interactive games to involve less active learners. Several participants also highlighted the importance of creating richer intercultural experiences within the constraints of a limited multicultural environment, recommending role-playing of diverse cultural scenarios and inviting peers with overseas experience or international students to share first-hand perspectives. Such calls for adaptation align with Deardorff's (2017) emphasis

that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to ICC development, and that programmes should be customised to the specific context and learners’ developmental needs. These improvements could ensure more equitable participation and make the course more responsive to diverse learner needs.

#### 5.2.4 Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Results

To fully understand the impact of the pedagogical model on EFL learners’ ICC, this section adopts a deeper integration of qualitative and quantitative data. This methodological perspective not only confirms areas of convergence but also explains discrepancies and highlights dimensions that are better accessed through qualitative inquiry. The synthesis is summarized in Table 26, which provides a side-by-side comparison of quantitative results, qualitative insights, and the overall interpretation for each dimension.

Table 26

##### *Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings*

ICC Dimension	Quantitative finding	Qualitative insight	Integrated interpretation
Knowledge	Knowledge showed most significant improvement among all dimensions	Participants identified knowledge as their greatest gain among all dimensions	Consistent
Attitude	Attitudes improved significantly but it was the least enhanced dimension	Participants noted an improvement in attitude, though minimal due to their pre-existing positive outlook.	Consistent
Skill	Skills dimension showed considerable improvement, second only to knowledge.	Many participants reported skills as the least improved aspects in intercultural communication.	Inconsistent

Awareness	Awareness dimension exhibited significant improvement.	Participants generally felt awareness increased, though they noted specific challenges in critical self-reflection.	Expanded
Speaking competence	Speaking competence significantly enhanced	Qualitative findings supported this, indicating that participants felt more confident in speaking competence, despite challenges in practical application.	Expanded

### **Knowledge Dimension: Strong Alignment and Structural Reinforcement**

Both datasets consistently identify knowledge as the most improved ICC dimension. Quantitative data showed that students rated their knowledge gains highest, while qualitative responses confirmed this by highlighting appreciation for the course's structured input of both culture-general and culture-specific knowledge. This alignment reinforces the conclusion that the course's content design provided a strong foundation for measurable growth.

The effectiveness here can be attributed to knowledge is concrete and more easily self-assessed, it tends to show more obvious gains in surveys. Qualitative data added nuance by explaining that culture-general knowledge helped learners develop conceptual frameworks, while culture-specific insights offered practical relevance. Learners also noted that knowledge served as the basis for developing other dimensions such as attitudes, awareness, and speaking, which is consistent with the theoretical views of Byram (2021) and Zhang and Yao (2020).

### **Attitude Dimension: High Baseline and Modest Change**

Both quantitative and qualitative data indicated modest growth in attitudes. Qualitative findings provided insight into this result by revealing that many students already held open and respectful views toward cultural difference at the beginning of the course. This limited the potential for further measurable change, a phenomenon described as the ceiling effect. This finding aligns with studies by Kim et al. (2023) and Huang (2021), which similarly found minimal attitude shifts in contexts where students had an initially high level of openness.

Previous research supports this interpretation. For instance, Busse and Krause (2015) found that a problem-based intercultural unit did not significantly shift students' views, as learners did not regard ICC as highly relevant to their daily lives. Likewise, Arshavskaya (2018) noted that attitudes often remained unchanged in the absence of prolonged intercultural exposure. These findings suggest that attitudinal development, while foundational to ICC, may require immersive experiences and longer-term reflection rather than short-term instruction alone.

### **Skill Dimension: Apparent Discrepancy Reveals Hidden Barriers**

In the skill dimension, a clear divergence emerged. Quantitative data showed significant improvement, but qualitative reports indicated that many students felt this was the most difficult area to improve. While surveys likely captured gains made in structured, classroom-based performance, interviews revealed that learners struggled with the spontaneous, nuanced nature of real-life intercultural communication.

This discrepancy points to the limitations of self-reported skill assessments. Learners expressed concerns about two major obstacles. First, many experienced anxiety stemming from fear of offending others or being perceived as impolite, which discouraged active participation. This concern aligns with findings from Wang and Kulich (2015, 2017) and Feng et al. (2025), who note that Chinese learners often prioritize harmony, leading to communicative caution. Second, students lacked confidence in their spoken English, which further limited their engagement. This finding is supported by Lindberg et al. (2023) and Zhang and Wang (2022), who confirm that language anxiety and motivation directly impact skill development. These affective and experiential challenges were invisible in quantitative data but emerged clearly through qualitative analysis.

#### **Awareness Dimension: Alignment with Expanded Nuance**

Both types of data confirmed improvement in intercultural awareness. Quantitatively, students reported increased sensitivity and perceptiveness toward cultural differences, while qualitative accounts revealed more specific behavioral strategies. Students mentioned initiating conversations with neutral topics, avoiding culturally sensitive issues, and reflecting on the cultural roots of values and behaviors. They also expressed greater confidence in asking questions and conducting research about other cultures.

More importantly, qualitative findings showed that students began to monitor their own behaviors and assumptions in intercultural contexts, indicating early development of critical cultural awareness. Drawing on Byram's (1997, 2021) framework, critical

cultural awareness is not limited to sensitivity; it requires the ability to examine cultural practices from multiple perspectives and to critically reflect on one's own biases. This theoretical benchmark clarifies why the observed changes represent only an initial stage. Students demonstrated emerging self-awareness but had yet to achieve the full scope of critical reflection outlined by Byram. This layer of growth is difficult to capture in quantitative surveys, which may explain why the qualitative data offers a richer portrayal of change in this dimension.

### **Speaking Competence: Reinforced Gains with Expanded Nuance**

Quantitative results showed that students made significant progress in speaking competence, typically improving by about half a proficiency level. Qualitative findings reinforced this, explaining that learners attributed their improvement to increased intercultural competence alongside language practice. They noted that opportunities to discuss culturally diverse topics, role-play intercultural scenarios, and reflect on cross-cultural experiences enabled them to practise language in situations that demanded both linguistic precision and intercultural appropriateness. Additionally, students appreciated the instructor's supportive attitude, which emphasized fluency over correction and created a low-anxiety environment.

These outcomes align with the view that language competence and intercultural competence are interdependent, as effective communication across cultures requires both the ability to use language accurately and the awareness to adapt it appropriately. In line with Wang (2018), Zhang et al. (2022a), and Byram (2021), the findings suggest

that embedding speaking activities within intercultural contexts allows learners to develop communicative effectiveness on both linguistic and intercultural dimensions. Qualitative responses also revealed that such tasks gave students the confidence, contextual grounding, and adaptive strategies needed to express themselves effectively in culturally diverse interactions.

### **Conclusion: Toward a More Holistic Model of Integration**

This integrated analysis demonstrates that the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of pedagogical effectiveness. Quantitative data pinpointed where measurable gains occurred, while qualitative insights revealed the internal processes, emotional barriers, and instructional mechanisms behind those changes. Together, they clarify that knowledge, awareness, and speaking competence respond well to structured, classroom-based intervention. In contrast, more complex and internalized domains like attitude and real-world intercultural skills require extended engagement, emotional support, and authentic communicative experiences (Deardorff, 2017; Byram, 2021).

By combining measurable outcomes with learners' lived experiences, this integrated analysis not only clarifies where progress occurs but also reveals the processes and conditions that enable it. In sum, the pedagogical model proposed in this study moves beyond treating language competence and intercultural competence as separate strands, offering a unified framework to guide future instructional design toward richer and more applicable communicative ability in intercultural contexts.

### **5.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

In this section, the theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed, highlighting how these findings contribute to the broader discourse on ICC and provide meaningful insights for educators and curriculum developers.

#### **5.3.1 Theoretical Implications**

Firstly, this study offers a nuanced perspective on existing ICC models by incorporating the importance of language competence, suggesting areas for further exploration in the field. The majority of existing ICC models in both Western and Chinese contexts often paid inadequate attention to the critical role of language competence in intercultural communication (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2012, 2020; Jackson, 2020). This gap is evident in various ICC educational programs, training models, and assessment tools that do not adequately incorporate language competence as an essential element (Fantini, 2012, 2020). This study empirically validates the significance of language competence in ICC. Through empirical research, it is demonstrated that participants' understanding of intercultural competence is deeply intertwined with language competence. Language competence not only forms the foundation of ICC but also influences their ability to effectively engage in intercultural interactions. This enriched understanding highlights the essential role of language in achieving ICC development, underscoring its importance in the broader context of ICC.

Secondly, this study further substantiates Byram's assertion that language competence is integral to ICC by demonstrating its crucial role in strengthening various ICC sub-

competencies. While Byram's model acknowledges the significance of language, it offers limited elaboration on the intricate interconnections among ICC dimensions (Byram, 2009). The findings illustrate how language competence facilitates cultural understanding, enhances communication confidence, and fosters meaningful intercultural relationships. The relationship between language competence and ICC, which has been noted by scholars (Byram, 2021; Fantini, 2020; Kohli Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020) but remains underexplored in empirical research, is further clarified in this study. By providing concrete evidence on how language competence and its specific aspects support the development of other ICC dimensions, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the interconnected nature of ICC components and offers empirical insights to inform theory.

Moreover, this study supports Byram's (1997) conceptualization of language competence by identifying and elaborating on key aspects that are vital for effective intercultural communication. In particular, the study highlights the importance of speaking competence, contextual awareness, cultural politeness, as well as fluency, coherence, and logicity in facilitating students' intercultural interactions. These aspects of language competence extend beyond mere linguistic accuracy, encompassing the ability to adjust speech according to cultural and situational contexts, engage in polite and appropriate communication, and present ideas in a coherent and logically structured manner. Through students' specific explanations and examples, the study provides empirical evidence illustrating how these elements of language competence are applied in real intercultural interactions and contribute to intercultural

sensitivity. The findings align closely with Byram's multidimensional framework, which integrates linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence, and further enrich understanding of the role of language competence in authentic intercultural contexts (Byram, 2021).

Finally, this model uniquely integrates Byram's ICC with Newton's ICLT principles, resulting in a comprehensive instructional process that incorporates cultural knowledge input, interactive student engagement, and affective-cognitive development. This study affirms the relevance and applicability of Newton et al.'s (2010) principles, particularly principles 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6. While these principles offer significant value for classroom practice, they have remained underutilized in empirical. In this study, pedagogical activities were deliberately designed to embody these principles: integrating language and culture from the outset (Principle 1), promoting active classroom interaction (Principle 2), and fostering both exploratory and reflective learning (Principle 3). Moreover, the model also highlights the importance of explicit comparisons and meaningful connections between learners' own culture and the target culture (Principle 4), while shifting the focus from native-speaker norms to the development of ICC (Principle 6). In addition, the study acknowledges the diversity in learners' language proficiency levels and effectively utilizes the rich social and cultural resources available in large-class settings (Principle 5). The findings demonstrate that these ICLT principles are not only applicable but also effective in addressing the specific needs of Chinese EFL learners by simultaneously enhancing their intercultural competence and foreign language proficiency. The successful

application of these principles in the Chinese educational context offers a viable instructional model for promoting ICC in diverse educational settings.

### **5.3.2 Practical Implications**

Many contemporary teaching methods and models treat ICC and language competence as separate entities (Mu & Yu, 2023; Huang, 2021; Liao & Li, 2023a; Peng et al., 2020), even though they share a common end goal. Both fields might benefit from greater interaction (Fantini, 2020). This study advocates for a more cohesive approach, suggesting that ICC development should occur in tandem with language competence.

Without adequate language competence, students may find it difficult to engage meaningfully in intercultural exchanges, even if they theoretically understand cultural differences. The research proposed integrating ICC development with language competence through five teaching objectives: knowledge, attitude, skill, awareness, and language competence. The interventions demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach, with participants recognizing its benefits. By aligning these areas, educators can promote a more comprehensive understanding of communication in diverse contexts, as successful intercultural engagement is inherently linked to language competence (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2012, 2020). This integration significantly enhances learning experiences and effectively equips students for real-world interactions.

Second, the pedagogical model developed in this study adopts a systematic four-phase structure: acquisition, comparison, engagement, and reflection. While many Chinese

models provide broader principles and recommendations (Peng et al., 2020; Zhang & Yao, 2020), they often lack clearly defined, phase-specific, and process-oriented designs, as well as actionable strategies for educators. In contrast, the model proposed in this study features a clear logical structure and a traceable learning progression, which enhances its effectiveness for instructional organization and classroom implementation. Moreover, this model provides deep integration of language competence and intercultural competence. Language is not merely a tool but is deeply aligned with the intercultural objectives of each phase. By outlining concrete phases with clearly defined teaching objectives, targeted activities, and structured instructional sequences, it offers educators a feasible pathway to implementation.

Third, although the pedagogical model enhanced students' intercultural competence and speaking competence significantly, this study highlights the need for the continued development of ICC and for providing students with opportunities to engage in authentic intercultural interactions, even within constraints of educational settings. Classroom instruction provides the foundation, whereas real-world practice is vital for the internalization and application of both language and intercultural competences. Participants frequently highlighted the distinction between classroom and real-world interactions, asserting that further development in intercultural communication requires authentic engagements. This view has been echoed by many scholars, including Newton et al. (2010), Mu and Yu (2023), and Wang (2023), who emphasize the importance of authentic intercultural engagements. Educators should explore creative ways to simulate or facilitate these experiences, such as through virtual

exchanges, collaboration with international students and off-campus institutions, or culturally immersive activities. These opportunities help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, preparing students to navigate the complexities of intercultural communication in a globalized world.

Fourth, in contrast to many ICC models developed in Western contexts, this model is specifically tailored to address the needs of Chinese EFL learners, considering their cultural mindset, identity development, and cognitive-emotional progression. Recognizing that learners typically begin with cultural knowledge but may experience delays in developing awareness and skills, the model integrates comparison, interaction and reflection as transitional mechanisms to facilitate deeper learning. The unique context of Chinese EFL learners likely influenced the findings, as China's relatively homogenous linguistic and cultural landscape may amplify the need for stronger language competence (Feng et al., 2025), given the limited opportunities for authentic intercultural interactions. This study contributes to the broader discourse on the relationship between language competence and ICC, highlighting the importance of a holistic approach to fostering ICC among EFL learners. Additionally, it advocates for further comparative studies across diverse educational and cultural contexts to enhance our understanding of these dynamics.

#### **5.4 Research Limitations and Recommendations**

Despite the study's contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The current study faced constraints related to sample size and composition, focusing

mainly on non-English language majors. Although this focus provided meaningful insights into their perspectives on the role of language competence in ICC, the sample was unbalanced across different groups. To improve the generalizability of future research findings, it is recommended to include EFL learners from various academic disciplines and ensure a balanced number of participants across groups.

Another limitation concerns the absence of a control group due to administrative restrictions and practical challenges. Incorporating a control group of students who do not receive instruction under the ICC pedagogical model would allow for a more nuanced assessment of the instructional impact on ICC development (Cohen et al., 2018). Future studies should aim to include such a control group to better understand the effects of instructional methods on EFL learners' ICC development.

The study assessed speaking competence chiefly through a self-reported ILR questionnaire, supplemented by interviews. Given the large participant cohort and limited resources, this combination offered a practical balance of breadth and depth (e.g., Long et al., 2012; Leko, 2020). Admittedly, the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) (<https://www.actfl.org/assessments/postsecondary-assessments/opi>), widely considered the gold-standard, standardized test for spoken language proficiency, would have provided a more authoritative benchmark. However, since the participants are Chinese EFL learners, administering the OPI requires online testing and incurs fees that become prohibitive with a sample of this size. Future studies with sufficient funding or collaborative support could incorporate the OPI (or similar

standardized speaking-proficiency tests) to triangulate ILR self-reports and interview data, thereby yielding an even more comprehensive and objective appraisal of learners' speaking competence.

Large class sizes presented challenges for implementing some interactive and reflective activities, potentially limiting student engagement. Researchers should explore alternative instructional strategies suitable for large groups and consider smaller, more manageable group settings to facilitate deeper interaction and more effective pedagogical application (Marzulina et al., 2021; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010).

This study marks an initial attempt to integrate language competence with intercultural competence in teaching practice. However, it did not fully explore or evaluate a wide range of pedagogical strategies that might effectively foster both competencies simultaneously. The scope of instructional methods examined was limited, and innovative approaches were not deeply investigated. Future research should focus on developing and testing diverse pedagogical frameworks and creative teaching strategies that promote the concurrent development of language and intercultural competence (Feng et al., 2024, 2025).

## **5.5 Summary**

This chapter discussed the study's principal findings, highlighting the role of language competence in the development of ICC and demonstrating how the pedagogical model effectively enhanced Chinese EFL learners' ICC. Quantitative analyses revealed significant gains in intercultural and speaking competence, while qualitative evidence

captured learners' positive evaluations of the model and its impact on their engagement. Participants also reported challenges in applying certain skills in complex communicative situations, suggesting the need for additional practice and targeted support. The synthesis of data confirmed the model's capacity to effectively integrate language competence and intercultural competence for the comprehensive development of ICC, particularly within non-Western EFL contexts. The chapter also delineated theoretical and practical implications, emphasizing that the pedagogical model builds on Byram's ICC framework and applies Newton et al.'s ICLT principles, thereby strengthening its theoretical foundation and demonstrating its practical adaptability for classroom implementation. Finally, it acknowledged limitations arising from the modest sample size, the absence of a control group, and the challenges of large-class dynamics, and recommended that future research test the model across more diverse settings and develop more effective strategies for integrating language and intercultural competence.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A Questionnaire for Intercultural Competence

Hello everyone!

This questionnaire is designed for a study on intercultural competence, which pertains to one's ability to communicate and interact with people from different cultures. The results of this questionnaire will be used for academic research, and your personal information will be kept strictly confidential. Please carefully answer each question in the survey. Thank you for your generous support!

#### Part I: Background Information (Please Select or Fill in as Appropriate Based on Your Actual Situation)

1. Gender: A. Male B. Female
2. Your major \_\_\_\_\_ and Your student ID: \_\_\_\_\_ ;
3. Your English Language proficiency level:  
A. Lower than CET4 B. CET4 C. CET6
4. I have had overseas experience:  
A. Yes For how long did you stay overseas? \_\_\_\_\_ B. No
5. The frequency of my contact with people from different cultures (foreigners) in China:  
A. Once a day or more B. Once a week or more  
C. Once a month or more D. Once a year or more E. Never
6. My plans for studying or working abroad in the future:  
A. Intend to go abroad to seek educational or employment opportunities, etc.  
B. Uncertain  
C. Do not plan to go abroad

#### Part II: Intercultural Competence

This section is designed to collect your self-evaluation of your intercultural competence. According to your understanding, choose the most appropriate score from 1 to 5 about your objective and universal intercultural competence. We need your true thoughts. Thank you!

Please read the following items and rate yourself using the scale below:

(1) very low (2) low (3) average (4) high (5) very high

##### 1. Knowledge of Self

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) understanding native history             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (2) understanding native social norms        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (3) understanding the native sense of values | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

##### 2. Knowledge of Others

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) understanding foreign knowledge of history | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (2) understanding foreign social norms         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- (3) understanding the foreign sense of values 1 2 3 4 5
- (4) understanding foreign cultural taboos 1 2 3 4 5
- (5) understanding foreigners' speech 1 2 3 4 5
- (6) understanding basic concepts of intercultural communication 1 2 3 4 5
- (7) understanding successful intercultural communication strategies 1 2 3 4 5

### **3. Attitudes**

- (1) willingness to learn from those who differ from one's self and culture 1 2 3 4 5
- (2) willingness to respect foreigners' lifestyles and customs 1 2 3 4 5
- (3) willingness to learn foreign languages and cultures well 1 2 3 4 5

### **4. Intercultural Communicative Skills**

- (1) the skill of consulting with foreigners when misunderstandings occur 1 2 3 4 5
- (2) the skill of communicating with foreigners using body language or other nonverbal communication when it is difficult to communicate using language 1 2 3 4 5
- (3) the skill of successfully communicating with foreigners 1 2 3 4 5
- (4) the skill of treating foreigners politely 1 2 3 4 5
- (5) the skill of avoiding offending foreigners with inappropriate words and behavior 1 2 3 4 5
- (6) the skill of avoiding prejudice against foreigners 1 2 3 4 5
- (7) the skill of avoiding violating foreigners' privacy 1 2 3 4 5
- (8) the skill of having intercultural sensitivity 1 2 3 4 5
- (9) the skill of understanding different perspectives when encountering different cultural affairs 1 2 3 4 5

### **5. Intercultural Cognitive Skills**

- (1) the skill of acquiring knowledge of other cultures from foreigners 1 2 3 4 5
- (2) the skill of learning intercultural communication strategies 1 2 3 4 5
- (3) the skill of learning how to manage cultural conflicts 1 2 3 4 5

### **6. Awareness**

- (1) realizing cultural differences and similarities when communicating with foreigners 1 2 3 4 5
- (2) realizing the differences in cultural identity when communicating with foreigners 1 2 3 4 5
- (3) judging cultural situations from both one's own and the other's cultural perspective 1 2 3 4 5

## Appendix B Sample Questionnaire of Intercultural Competence

The following pages present a full example of one anonymized student response to the questionnaire administered via Questionnaire Star platform. This sample is provided to demonstrate the actual appearance and format of participant submissions.

### 中国大学生跨文化能力调查

序号：13

IP地址：112.17.241.232 (浙江-绍兴)

来源渠道：手机提交(直接访问)

填写时间：2024/1/2 8:07:28

#### 第一部分 个人信息

\* 1. 性别

B 女

\* 2 你的专业和学号(15位)是

意大利语 202130502

\* 3. 你的英语水平考试成绩

C 通过 CET6

#### 第二部分 跨文化能力自评量表

填写说明:本部分是中国大学生跨文化能力自评量表,包括7个方面(本国文化知识,外国文化知识,态度,跨文化交流技能,跨文化认知技能,意识和英语语言能力)。请依据你自己的实际情况,从“1”到“5”中选择一个数字进行自我评分并在数字上打勾(“1”代表程度**最低**,依次递增,“5”代表程度**最高**),具体参照如下:

1. 非常弱/些微,
2. 较弱/较少,
3. 一般/一些,
4. 较强/较多,
5. 非常强/非常多

\* 1. 本国文化知识 [矩阵单选题]

1) 了解本国的历史知识

2) 了解本国的社会规范知识

3) 了解本国的价值观知识

4

\* 2. 外国文化知识 [矩阵单选题]

4) 了解外国的历史知识

3

5) 了解外国的社会规范知识

3

6) 了解外国的价值观知识

4

7) 了解外国的文化禁忌知识

4

8) 了解外国人言语行为知识

3

9) 了解跨文化交流与传播等概念的基本知识

4

10) 了解一些成功进行跨文化交流的策略和技巧

3

\* 3. 态度 [矩阵单选题]

11) 愿意和来自不同文化的外国人进行交流和学习

5)

12) 愿意尊重外国人的生活方式和习俗

5)

13) 愿意学好外国语言和文化

5)

\* 4. 跨文化交流技能 [矩阵单选题]

14) 出现跨文化交流误解时和对方协商的能力

3

15) 出现语言交流障碍时借助身体语言或其他非语言方式进行交流的能力

4

16) 使用外语和来自不同社会文化背景和领域的人进行成功交流的能力

3

17) 在与外国人交流时礼貌对待他们的能力

3

18) 在与外国人交流时尽量避免用不恰当的语言和行为冒犯他们的能力

5)

19) 在与外国人交流时尽量避免对他们产生偏见的的能力

5)

20) 在与外国人交流时会避免提到他们有关隐私话题的能力

5)

21) 具有对跨文化差异敏感性的能力

4

22) 看待其他国家发生的事件时会从对方文化和多角度看问题的能力

4

\* 5. 跨文化认知技能 [矩阵单选题]

23) 具备通过与外国人的接触直接获取跨文化交际相关知识的能力

3

24) 具备运用各种方法、技巧与策略帮助学习外国语言和文化的能力

4

25) 出现跨文化冲突和误解时进行反思和学习并寻求妥善解决途径的能力

3

**\* 6.意识 [矩阵单选题]**

26) 意识到与外国人交流时彼此存在文化相似性和差异性

4

27) 意识到与外国人交流时文化身份的差异性

5

28) 意识到要基于不同文化视角审视跨文化交流情景

4



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## Appendix C Questionnaire for Speaking Competence

### Part I: Demographic Information:

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Major and Your student ID: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Your English proficiency Level:  
A. Lower than CET 4 B. CET 4 C. CET 6

### Part II: Self- assessment of Speaking Competence

This section is designed to collect your self-assessment of your speaking competence.

To estimate your rating, start a Level 1 and see how many times you answered “yes.” If you answered “yes” to each statement in the level, move on to the next level. If you answered “no” to one or more statements, then you are not at that level.

If you answered “yes” to all the statements at a level, but at the next level you have a mixture of “yes” and “no” answers, then you may be at the plus level. For example, if you answered “yes” to all the statements at Level 1, but have a mixture of responses at Level 2, you may be at Level 1+ in speaking, provided that you had more “yes” answers than “no” at Level 2.

Please read the following items and respond “yes” or “no.”

#### Level 1

1. I can tell/ask someone how to get from here to a nearby hotel, restaurant, or post office. Yes No
2. I can order a simple meal. Yes No
3. I can arrange for a hotel room or taxi ride. Yes No
4. I can buy a needed item such as bus or train ticket, groceries, or clothing. Yes No
5. I can ask and answer simple questions about date and place of birth, nationality, marital status, occupation, etc. Yes No
6. I can make social introductions and use greeting and leave-taking expressions. Yes No

#### Level 2

7. I can handle conversations about familiar topics in an organized way. Yes No
8. I can produce speech with some organization on familiar topics that extend beyond my daily routine. Yes No
9. I can describe my present or most recent job or activity in some detail. Yes No
10. I can give detailed information about my family, my house, and my community. Yes No
11. I can interview an employee, or arrange for special services (taking care of details such as salary, qualifications, hours, specific duties). Yes No
12. I can give a brief autobiography including immediate plans and hopes.

13. I feel confident that when I talk with native speakers on topics such as those mentioned above, they understand me most of the time. Yes No
14. I can take and give simple messages over the telephone, or leave a message on voice mail. Yes No
15. I can describe in detail a person or place that is very familiar to me. Yes No
16. I can report the facts of what I have seen recently on television news or read in the newspaper. Yes No
17. I can talk about a trip or some other everyday event that happened in the recent past or that will happen soon. Yes No

### Level 3

18. I feel that I have a professional command, rather than just a practical one, of the language. Yes No
19. There are few grammatical features of the language that I try to avoid. Yes No
20. I rarely find myself unable to finish a sentence because of linguistic limitations( grammar or vocabulary). Yes No
21. I find it easy to follow and contribute to a conversation among native speakers. Yes No
22. I can speak to a group of educated native speakers on a professional subject and be sure I am communicating what I want to, without obviously irritating them linguistically. Yes No
23. I can, on a social occasion, defend personal opinions about social and cultural topics. Yes No
24. I can cope with difficult situations such as broken-down plumbing, an undeserved traffic ticket, or a serious social or diplomatic blunder made by a colleague or me. Yes No
25. I can use the language to speculate at length about abstract topics such as how some change in history or the course of human events would have affected my life or civilization. Yes No
26. In professional discussions, my vocabulary is extensive and precise enough to enable me to convey my exact meaning. Yes No
27. I am able to adjust my speech to suit my audience, whether I am talking to university professors, close friends, employees, or others. Yes No

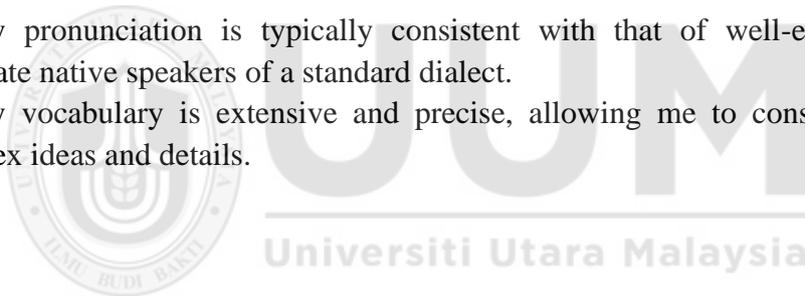
### Level 4

28. I consistently use the language in a sophisticated and nuanced way to effectively communicate with great precision. Yes No
29. I practically seldom make a grammatical mistake. Yes No
30. I can carry out any job assignment as effectively as if in my native language.

- Yes No
31. I can persuade someone effectively to take a course of action in a sensitive situation such as to improve his/her health, reverse a decision or establish a policy. Yes No
32. I can prepare and give a lecture at a professional meeting about my area of specialization and debate complex aspects with others. Yes No
33. I naturally integrate appropriate cultural and historical references in my speech. Yes No
34. I can eloquently represent a point of view other than my own. Yes No
35. I can lead the direction of the discussion(friendly, controversial, collaborative). Yes No

**Level 5**

36. My language proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of a highly articulate well-educated native speaker and reflects the cultural standards of a country where the language is natively spoken. Yes No
37. I can use the language with complete flexibility and intuition, so that speech on all levels is fully accepted by well-educated native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references. Yes No
38. My pronunciation is typically consistent with that of well-educated, highly articulate native speakers of a standard dialect. Yes No
39. My vocabulary is extensive and precise, allowing me to consistently convey complex ideas and details. Yes No



## Appendix D Sample Questionnaire of Speaking Competence

The following pages present a full example of one anonymized student response to the questionnaire administered via Questionnaire Star platform. This sample is provided to demonstrate the actual appearance and format of participant submissions.

### 口语交际能力调查问卷（是与否）

序号：6

IP地址：111.1.67.106（浙江-绍兴）

来源渠道：手机提交(直接访问)

填写时间：2024/1/8 14:21:05

#### 第一部分 个人信息

\* 1. 性别

B 女

\* 2 你的专业和学号（15位）是

德语 202130502

\* 3. 你的英语水平考试成绩

C. 通过 CET6

#### 第二部分 英语口语能力自评量表

填写说明：

请依据自己的实际情况，在以下评价项中选择一个数字进行评价，并在相应数字上打勾。评价标准如下：

1. "是"，

2. "否"

\* Level 1 [矩阵单选题]

1) 我可以用英语告诉别人如何从这里去附近的酒店、餐厅或邮局等。

1

2) 我可以用英语点一份简单的餐。

1

3) 我可以用英语安排酒店房间或出租车。

1

4) 我可以用英语购买需要的物品，如公交车或火车票，杂货或衣物。

1

5) 我可以用英语问答关于出生日期、地点、国籍、婚姻状况、职业等方面的简单问题。

1

6) 我可以用英语进行社交介绍，并使用问候和告别表达。

1

**\* Level 2 [矩阵单选题]**

7) 我可以用英语有条理地处理关于熟悉话题的对话。

1

8) 我可以用英语在熟悉话题上进行一些有组织的演讲，内容不局限于日常生活的范畴。

1

9) 我可以用英语详细描述我目前或最近的工作或活动。

1

10) 我可以用英语提供有关我的家庭、房子和社区的详细信息。

1

11) 我可以用英语面试员工，或处理工资、资格、工时、具体职责等细节。

1

12) 我可以用英语提供简短的自传，包括即将要实现的计划和希望。

1

13) 我确信当我与母语者讨论上述话题时，他们大部分时间能理解我。

1

14) 我可以用英语通过电话发简单的信息，或在语音邮件上留言。

1

15) 我可以用英语详细描述我非常熟悉的人或地方。

1

16) 我可以用英语报道我最近在电视新闻中看到或报纸上读到的事实。

1

17) 我可以用英语谈论一次旅行或发生在刚刚过去或即将发生的其他日常事件。

1

**\* Level 3 [矩阵单选题]**

18) 我觉得我在英语语言上有专业的掌握，而不仅仅是日常实用。

2

19) 在用英语表达自己时，我并不刻意避免某些语法结构，而是自然而然地运用语法。

1

20) 我很少因为语言限制（语法或词汇）而无法完成一句话。

2

21) 我能够理解母语人士之间的对话，并能够参与到这些对话中。

1

22) 我可以就专业主题与受过教育的母语者进行对话，并确保传达我想要表达的内容，而不会明显地在语言上激怒他们。

2

23) 在社交场合，我可以用英语捍卫关于社会和文化主题的个人观点。

2



24) 我可以用英语应对困难情况，比如管道故障、不公正的交通罚单，或社交或外交失误。

2

25) 我可以运用英语长时间探讨关于抽象概念的话题，涉及到历史、人类事件等。

2

26) 在专业讨论中，我的英语词汇足以使我传达我的确切意思。

2

27) 我能用英语调整表达方式，以适应不同的听众，无论是与大学教授、亲密的朋友、员工还是其他人交谈。

2

• **Level 4 [矩阵单选题]**

28) 我始终能用英语有效地传达信息，并保持很高的准确性。

2

29) 在用英语交流时，我几乎从不犯语法错误。

2

30) 我可以像在我的母语中一样有效地完成任何工作任务。

2

31) 我可以用英语说服某人在敏感情况下采取行动，比如改善他/她的健康，撤销一个决定或制定政策。

2

32) 我可以用英语在专业会议上准备并发表关于我的专业领域的演讲，并与其他人辩论复杂的方面。

2

33) 我在英语演讲中能够自然地融入适当的文化和历史参考。

2

34) 我可以用英语雄辩地陈述与我相反的观点。

2

35) 我可以用英语引导讨论的方向（友好的、有争议的、合作的）。

2

**\* Level 5 [矩阵单选题]**

36) 我的英语口语水平在功能上等同于一个高度表达能力且受过良好教育的母语者，并反映了该语言的本国文化标准。

2

37) 我可以以灵活而直观的方式使用英语，以至于在所有层面上的演讲都被受过良好教育的母语者充分接受，包括词汇和习惯用语、口语、以及相关的文化参考。

2

38) 我的发音通常与受过良好教育、极具表达能力的母语者的标准方言相一致。

2

39) 我的英语词汇丰富而准确，使我能够始终传达复杂思想和细节。

2



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## **Appendix E Interview Protocol on Language Competence**

### **Part 1: Icebreaker Questions**

1. What is your major? What is your language proficiency level?
2. Have you ever had overseas experience? If not, do you plan to study or work overseas in the future?
3. Do you have experience in communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds? How often?

### **Part 2: Intercultural Interaction Experience Survey**

4. Have you encountered any difficulties when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds? Can you provide an example?
5. What factors contribute to successful communication when interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds?
6. What are the characteristics of those who excel in intercultural communication?

### **Part 3: Perceptions on the Relationship Between Language Competence and ICC**

7. Do you believe there is a connection between language competence and ICC? Please elaborate on your views regarding this relationship.
8. Is language competence important for effective intercultural communication? Why?
9. Which aspects of language competence are crucial for successful intercultural interactions (e.g., listening, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, intercultural sensitivity, politeness, appropriateness, etc.)? Please provide specific details.
10. Have you ever faced challenges in intercultural communication due to language-related issues, such as difficulties in expression or comprehension? Can you describe one or two examples? When encountering language-related issues mentioned above, what strategies do you typically employ to address them?
11. Do you believe that a high level of language competence provides an advantage in intercultural communication? Why?
12. What advice would you offer to English learners who wish to enhance their language competence for more effective intercultural communication?

## Appendix F Sample Interview on Language Competence

The following pages present a complete sample of one anonymized student response to the interview conducted in Chinese. The interview was administered face-to-face. This sample is provided to illustrate the actual content and format of student responses during the interview process.

**Interviewee:** XX, Female, Spanish Major, CET-6

**Interview Topic:** The Role of Language Competence in Intercultural Communicative Competence

**Interview Format:** One-on-one oral interview

**Time and Location:** After class in the classroom, 28/09/2023

**Transcribed by:** Transcribed by XunFei software and checked by the Researcher

---

### **1. Have you ever been abroad? If not, do you plan to study or work abroad in the future? Why?**

**Answer:** I think going abroad is actually a very good choice. If I have the chance, I would choose to go abroad. I place more importance on intercultural communication because, after all, we are language majors. I hope to find a female partner to practice with, and now I have a female partner. She and I basically have one or two calls per week, and we've been keeping this up for a year.

#### **Follow-up: Does she live in China?**

**Answer:** No, she's in Peru, a country in Latin America. She speaks English and also Spanish—she's bilingual. For me, it's a great experience, so I actively maintain contact with her. It's been about a year.

#### **Follow-up: She doesn't learn Chinese with you, just chats?**

**Answer:** Right. She wants to understand what China looks like in the eyes of ordinary people, not the version exposed in the media. She thinks the stuff online isn't very reliable. So we use apps like Tandem and Twitter to share views on culture and world affairs. We found we really clicked, and we've been chatting ever since.

### **2. How often do you engage in intercultural communication on average?**

**Answer:** Once a week with her.

### **3. What topics do you usually talk about?**

**Answer:** Our conversations aren't limited to language—they go beyond language itself. We mainly communicate via voice messages. We usually talk about what we've done recently, what we've eaten. We talk the most about food culture, because our two countries have a lot in common in terms of cuisine. For example, people in my hometown love spicy food, and she's also very interested in spicy flavors. She also shares traditional dishes from her country, and we discuss cooking techniques.

There was one time we had a very profound conversation that left a deep impression on me. She mentioned that Latin American countries generally value close family bonds—whether or not they have their own families, they still like to maintain intimate communication with family members. I think China is actually similar in that way; it has emphasized family values from ancient times to the present.

We also talked about cultural differences in terms of sexual values. I asked her, “Would you mind if your fiancé or fiancée were not a virgin?” She said she wouldn’t mind much. I told her that in China, many people still care a lot about this issue, regardless of whether it’s the man or the woman. She explained that in her country, although many people are devout Christians, they don’t place that much emphasis on this issue. Maybe their religion doesn’t particularly stress taboos in this regard.

This really shocked me—it was a true *culture shock*. I had never thought that there would be countries in the world with completely different views on such issues. It really broadened my horizons.

**Follow-up: Did you talk mainly over the phone?**

**Answer:** Yes, we talk over the phone. You definitely have to understand what the other person is saying. I usually understand her, but my ability to organize my own words isn’t very strong. Sometimes I place my tablet nearby to talk, and I get the general meaning of what she says, whether it’s in English or Spanish. But I don’t always know how to respond. Occasionally, I get stuck on a word and quickly look it up on my phone—then I can jump back into the conversation. Because in voice communication, what matters most is timeliness, not precision, completeness of meaning, or grammar. I actually think as long as you can simply express your intent, it’s good enough—you don’t need to be too particular. So basically, whatever she says, I throw out some keywords, and she can follow me, and I can follow her.

Now we have a very good relationship. She’s also learning Chinese, especially the tones. I also ask her some questions about Chinese. I think this is a positive, healthy interaction. Through her, I’ve also learned more about Peru. It’s a really good thing.

**4. What difficulties have you encountered in communicating with foreigners? You mentioned earlier that you can understand them but sometimes struggle to find the words.**

**Answer:** One of the difficulties is that they express themselves more boldly. We Chinese tend to be more reserved and don’t express affection so openly. I feel like she and I are friends, but she thinks that we’re friends who are even more than friends. She uses very bold language. She’s learning Chinese and often says things like “I really like you,” “I love you,” “I love China.” I know she enjoys communicating that way, and there’s nothing wrong with the words themselves, but sometimes I still feel a bit uncomfortable. It just feels like her expressions are too bold. We usually wouldn’t speak like that and don’t know how to respond. I feel like there are big cultural differences in our communication.

**5. What factors help maintain good communication with people from different cultural backgrounds? What traits do people who are good at intercultural communication usually have?**

**Answer:** I think it’s about character. Because there are all kinds of people online, only those whose values align with yours can have a lasting connection.

**Follow-up: What abilities do you have that make your communication smoother and more effective?**

**Answer:** I think nowadays it’s still electronic technology.

**Follow-up: Not external factors—what personal abilities make communication better?**

**Answer:** Maybe being friendly and outgoing. In communication, personality can play a big role. If you're not afraid, and you're willing and enjoy communicating, plus you're interested, that will help a lot when talking to people from different cultural backgrounds.

**Follow-up: What you mentioned are more like preconditions—like having interest and courage to speak. Based on that, what further factors can help improve communication?**

**Answer:** I think it's the persistence in connecting with a culture. In my view, there's a seed in my heart—I want to learn English well, and learn Spanish well. No matter what obstacles there are, I will go in that direction. I think that's a key point.

**Follow-up: I still think that's a precondition. Let's say you already have the motivation and interest—what other factors or abilities do you think are needed for better communication?**

**Answer:** Probably language ability. But I don't think your language proficiency needs to be excellent in order to communicate. Because when I first started talking with others, my level was just average. But maybe what really made our communication last was the strong passion and interest in each other's cultures. I think the fact that someone is still willing to communicate with me, to learn about where I come from—even though we're thousands of miles apart, in different countries—that kind of engagement may be more helpful in promoting communication.

**6. What traits do people who are good at intercultural communication tend to have?**

**Answer:** They usually make a point of developing their spoken language skills or common expressions in daily life, so they can use them in actual conversations. This brings a sense of achievement and gives them an advantage in intercultural communication.

**7. Do you think there is a connection between language proficiency and intercultural communication?**

**Answer:** There is definitely a connection, but it's not absolute. Language proficiency may serve more as a foundation. Real communication happens in the process of "speaking," "doing," and "interacting." During this process, language skills gradually improve, and as your language proficiency improves, it in turn promotes intercultural communication. It's a mutually reinforcing process.

**8. Do you think language ability is important for effective cultural communication?**

**Answer:** I think it's quite important. Strong language skills allow you to express yourself more directly and accurately, and they also reflect your level of competence. The depth and range of your conversations can be expanded, so I'd say it's very important.

**9. Which aspects of language ability do you think are more important?**

**Answer:** I think speaking and listening are more important because they help solve basic communication problems. Reading, writing, and politeness are more like the

icing on the cake. For example, when I talk to my friend, I tend to use honorifics unconsciously, but she says it's unnecessary. In her country, saying "thank you" or "sorry" is common, but she feels it's not always needed. Once you reach a certain level of familiarity, friendly communication is enough. Polite expressions are more suitable for people you're meeting for the first time or those you're not very familiar with.

She mentioned that sometimes Chinese people may put too much emphasis on politeness. It's true that we tend to use such expressions unconsciously in our speech.

**10. Have you encountered challenges in intercultural communication because of language issues?**

**Answer:** Yes. I'm actually okay with listening, writing, and reading, but I'm afraid to speak. I'm worried that making mistakes will hurt my confidence. I really fear encountering intercultural communicators who directly interrupt me or correct my pronunciation or vocabulary. When I was just starting out, I came across some native English speakers on certain apps. They would bluntly interrupt me and say things like, "You need to work on that sound," or "You should review some basic vocabulary." Although their intentions might have been good, I felt discouraged at the time. So I think language, especially the basics of pronunciation, can indeed pose a challenge in intercultural communication.

**Follow-up: So when you're talking with others, have you ever felt confused because you couldn't understand them or express yourself clearly?**

**Answer:** Yes, I have. When I can't understand what the other person is saying, I do feel confused. But if I show that I'm having trouble understanding, the other person usually politely changes the topic instead of waiting for me to catch up. Some people even take the initiative to use simpler words or highlight keywords so I can piece together the meaning. For example, during a conversation about a party, I might not catch everything, but with the help of key words, I can generally understand what happened.

**Follow-up: When you don't understand or can't express yourself, what strategies do you usually use?**

**Answer:** I usually hesitate for a bit, then I'll ask the person to repeat what they said or tell them I didn't understand. I might say, "Could you say that again?" or ask them to rephrase it, or let me look up a key word. Sometimes, I'll suggest changing the topic. If it's a topic I'm not interested in, I might politely say, "Can we skip this topic?"

**11. Do you think having high-level language skills gives you an advantage in intercultural communication?**

**Answer:** I'm not entirely sure how to define "high-level," but if it means strong skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, then definitely yes. It means you already have the basic ability to communicate, and during interaction, it's easier to understand others, relate to them, and learn about their culture. So it naturally facilitates more effective communication.

**12. What advice would you give to English learners engaging in cross-linguistic communication?**

**Answer:** I suggest people work hard on improving their language skills. The most effective way is to immerse yourself in a real language environment. If that's not

available, then try to create one. If you really can't create one, then look for one. For example, find a language partner. In China, native English speakers aren't very common, so you might try finding a one-on-one partner online. If you urgently need to improve your speaking, you can also consider some paid one-on-one programs to boost efficiency. The key is to find the right platform. As long as you have the desire to learn English well, that desire will find an outlet to grow.

**Follow-up: Do you think this kind of practice is more effective than watching movies, listening to music, or reading literature?**

**Answer:** I think those methods are like planting seeds in your heart, and eventually, you need some way to express and release what you've accumulated. Practice gives you that opportunity to "release" it.

**Follow-up: So, in other words, if there's no practice...?**

**Answer:** Without practice, you won't have a deep, personal experience. Input activities like reading and watching movies will gradually enhance your internal language competence. But if you want to turn that into real communicative ability, you need to speak and practice. I think this is the most fundamental part. You can't study English literature or just read forever—real language learning requires output.



## Appendix G Interview Protocol on Model Effectiveness

### Part 1: Icebreaker Questions

1. Have you previously participated in other language and culture courses, intercultural communication courses, or intercultural training?
2. Are you interested in culture and language learning?
3. Did you have specific goals before joining this course?

### Part 2: Impact on Intercultural Competence

4. To what extent do you feel that this course has provided you with knowledge about foreign cultures?
5. To what extent do you perceive that this course has contributed to fostering an attitude of respect and inclusiveness towards foreign cultures?
6. To what extent has this course contributed to the development of your intercultural communication skills?
7. To what extent do you believe that this course has increased your awareness of cultural differences?
8. Among the knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness dimensions of intercultural competence, in which dimension do you feel you've made the most progress? Why?
9. In the dimensions of knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness, in which dimension do you feel you've made the least progress? Why?

### Part 3: Impact on Language Competence

10. How has this course influenced your confidence in speaking English? Please explain.
11. In what ways, if any, has this course affected your speaking communication skills? Please specify the areas where you have noticed changes.
12. How has this course impacted your ability to interact with foreigners (e.g., awareness of cultural differences during oral communication, understanding and respecting different cultures, considering context, etc.)?

### Part 4: Attitudes and Suggestions

13. Overall, please evaluate the effectiveness of this course in enhancing your intercultural competence (knowledge, attitude, awareness, and skills and provide brief reasons)  
A. Not relevant B. Not helpful C. Somewhat helpful D. Very helpful
14. Overall, please evaluate the effectiveness of the course in improving your language competence and provide brief reasons).  
A. Not relevant B. Not helpful C. Somewhat helpful D. Very helpful
15. What's your general attitude towards this course? What aspects do you think could be improved to better meet students' needs? Please provide specific suggestions.

## Appendix H Sample Interview on Model Effectiveness

The following pages present a complete sample of one anonymized student response to the interview conducted in Chinese. The interview was administered face-to-face. This sample is provided to illustrate the actual content and format of student responses during the interview process.

**Interviewee:** XXX, Female, Portuguese Major, CET-6  
**Interview Topic:** Effectiveness of the Teaching Model  
**Interview Format:** One-on-one oral interview  
**Date and Location:** On campus, 10/01/2024  
**Interview Organized by:** Researcher  
**Transcription:** Transcribed using iFLYTEK software, proofread by the researcher

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**1. Have you ever taken other language and culture courses, intercultural communication courses, or intercultural training before?**

**Answer:** No, I haven't taken any such courses or training.

**2. Are you interested in learning about languages and cultures?**

**Answer:** Yes, I'm quite interested in learning about languages and cultures. We started learning English in the third grade of primary school, and I also attended extra English tutoring classes. My grades were always good, which probably contributed to my strong interest in English. After entering university, I chose Portuguese as my major, so I'm not only interested in English-related language and culture but also have a deep interest in the language and culture related to my own major.

**3. Before taking this course, did you have any expectations or goals for it?**

**Answer:** My main goal was to gain more knowledge about the cultures and concepts of different countries. I think we sometimes hold stereotypes about certain cultures, so I also hoped this course would help break those stereotypes and deepen our understanding and awareness.

**4. Has this course helped you gain any new understanding of the cultures of English-speaking countries like the UK and the US?**

**Answer:** Yes, I think this course has deepened my understanding of foreign cultures. Each unit had a different theme, such as cultural theories, geography and ethnicity, education systems, religion, and literature—topics I hadn't explored much before. Previously, I only learned fragmented bits of cultural knowledge through movies or short videos, but through this course, I gained more systematic and comprehensive knowledge.

**5. Has this course changed your way of viewing or approaching foreign cultures?**

**Answer:** Yes, it has. I used to be vaguely aware that there were cultural differences between countries, but I didn't realize the extent of those differences or the reasons behind them. After studying the course more deeply, I came to understand that differences in history, geography, and customs all contribute to these cultural

variations—both in external expressions and internal values. This has helped me develop a more open-minded and tolerant attitude.

**6. Do you think your practical communication skills with foreigners have changed? For example, in information sharing, expressing ideas, or interacting with others?**

**Answer:** I think I've improved my skills while gaining more knowledge. For instance, in class we analyzed stories, case studies, and made comparisons between Chinese and Western cultures. These left a strong impression on me, and now I'm able to engage in deeper conversations—not just focusing on the surface level. I also organize my thoughts better when expressing opinions. As for interaction, I feel more confident, although I haven't had many opportunities to put this into practice yet.

**7. After finishing this course, do you notice any changes in your cultural awareness when communicating with foreigners?**

**Answer:** Yes. When interacting with foreigners, we're naturally aware of cultural differences, especially since they look different from us. Their way of speaking or doing things may differ, and we need to be sensitive to those differences. Also, in class, we learned about cultural theories like high-context and low-context communication, individualism versus collectivism, etc. I can relate these to Portuguese, the language of my major, which further helps me develop my awareness of cultural differences.

**8. Among the four aspects of intercultural competence (knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness), in which area do you think you've made the most progress?**

**Answer:** I think I've gained the most in terms of knowledge because it's more direct and tangible. Each week we covered different topics, so knowledge was the easiest to perceive. The other aspects require more time to internalize and transform into skills.

**9. In contrast, which aspect do you think you've improved the least or still have room to grow in?**

**Answer:** I would say attitude, because even before taking this course, we had been learning English for many years and were already aware of cultural differences. We've long known that we should respect other cultures, so I feel my attitude hasn't changed as much compared to the other aspects.

**10. How has this course influenced your confidence in speaking English? Please explain.**

**Answer:** Yes, it has given me more confidence. I now have a better idea of how to approach conversations—what aspects to focus on and how to talk to people. This makes me feel more prepared. Before, I didn't really know how to interact with them, and I often felt unsure of myself.

**Follow-up: Could you be more specific? What kind of communication are you referring to?**

**Answer:** I mean when talking to foreigners, I used to worry a lot about not being able to express myself clearly or not knowing how to start the conversation. But after taking this course, our teacher taught us some useful communication strategies. For example, we can begin with topics we're both familiar with, use simple examples to explain complex ideas, and also use tone and body language to support what we're saying.

Now I feel more confident. I know how to start a conversation in different situations, how to respond, and how to shift topics naturally. I don't freeze up like I used to.

**11. Earlier you mentioned psychological changes. In terms of your English speaking competence, do you think there has been any change? If so, please specify in which aspects you've changed.**

**Answer:** The teacher conducted the class in English, and we answered questions in English as well. We also practiced with our deskmates and group members. Actually, our opportunities to practice English mainly came from this course, since we don't usually have time to practice it outside class because our major courses keep us quite busy. So, using English in class and having to respond to the teacher and classmates quickly within a short time really helped us improve our ability to organize thoughts and express them clearly. I think my ability to organize language and express myself has definitely improved.

**12. After completing this course, if you had the chance to communicate with foreigners, what changes would there be in the way you interact or the topics you talk about compared to before? What topics are you now more inclined to discuss, and why?**

**Answer:** We mainly interacted with our foreign teacher. I think it helped me in terms of communication and interaction because, in the past, I didn't know how to start a conversation with them or how to talk about a topic we both share. For example, if I wanted to talk about education, I wouldn't have done it before because I didn't know anything about their education system. But now, after learning about it, I feel like I have a general idea and can even introduce them to our own system. When they respond, I can continue the conversation more easily because I already have a basic understanding. Also, I react faster now—I used to think in Chinese first and then translate it into English in my mind. Now I don't have to think in Chinese anymore.

**13. Overall, how would you evaluate the effectiveness of this course in improving your intercultural competence (knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness)?**

**Answer:** I think it was very helpful.

**14. Overall, how would you evaluate the effectiveness of this course in improving your language competence?**

**Answer:** I think it was very helpful, although perhaps it contributed more to intercultural competence than to language competence.

**15. What is your overall attitude toward this course? What aspects do you think could be improved to better meet students' needs? Please provide specific suggestions.**

**Answer:** I feel that most students are quite interested in the course, as many of them actively raise their hands in class. Everyone seems engaged. The English courses I took before were very boring—they focused on vocabulary, grammar, and text analysis, and nobody really participated; we just listened to the teacher. One shortcoming is that our class is quite large, so there aren't that many opportunities to practice. Sometimes you don't even get a chance to speak even if you raise your hand. I really liked the presentations we did in class each week—students put a lot of effort into them, and some even interviewed foreign friends from many different countries.

As for improvements, I hope the teacher can invite foreigners or international students to join our class, so we can have more authentic opportunities for interaction.



## Appendix I Lesson Plan-Unit 1

**Topic:** Exploring the concept, metaphors and significance of culture

**Total Duration:** 90 minutes

**Learning Objectives:**

**Knowledge:** Understand the concept, and metaphors of culture, grasp the significance of culture in language.

**Attitude:** Develop openness and respect for cultural diversity.

**Skills:** Enhance the ability to compare, analyze, and interpret cultural phenomena.

**Awareness:** Cultivate sensitivity to hidden aspects of culture and potential misunderstandings.

**Language Competence:** Improve vocabulary and discourse strategies related to culture; enhance oral fluency and accuracy, build confidence in using English for intercultural topics.

### Phase 1: Intercultural Acquisition

**Duration: 25 minutes**

Time	Content	Activities	Learning Objectives
10 mins	Lead-in Brainstorming	Teacher asks: <i>What is culture? What does it include? Why do we need to learn the culture of others?</i> Students brainstorm ideas; teacher affirms and builds upon their responses.	Knowledge, Language Competence
15 mins	Teacher Input on Cultural Metaphors	Introduction to the iceberg metaphor; emphasis on visible vs. invisible culture. Integrated vocabulary instruction: <i>metaphor, implicit, explicit, culture markers, hidden culture</i> , etc. Includes a task on classify culture-related vocabulary.	Knowledge, Awareness, Language Competence

### Phase 2: Intercultural Comparison

**Duration: 25 minutes**

Time	Content	Activities	Learning Objectives
2 mins	Task Assignment	Students are divided into groups. Each group is assigned one cultural metaphor (e.g., the water a fish swims in, onion, software of a computer, grammar of a language).	Attitude Skills Language competence

Time	Content	Activities	Learning Objectives
13 mins	Group Discussion	Students use reference sentence patterns provided by the teachers	
10 mins	Group Presentations	Group leaders present the results. Teacher gives feedback and highlights the similarities and distinctions among the metaphors.	

### Phase 3: Intercultural Engagement

**Duration: 30 minutes**

Time	Content	Activities	Learning Objectives
3 mins	Video Viewing	Short video clip watching: This video showcases a humorous misunderstanding that arise from differences in dining customs between Chinese and westerners	Skills Language competence Awareness
10 mins	Pair Discussion	Students analyze the reasons behind the misunderstanding	
17 mins	Sharing & Teacher Feedback	Groups present their analysis. Teacher summarizes key value differences such as "face," "hospitality," and "Differences in dining etiquette." Highlight deeper values behind observable behaviors; emphasize the importance of perspective-taking in intercultural communication.	Skills Awareness, Language Competence Attitudes

### Phase 4: Intercultural Reflection

**Duration: 5 minutes**

Time	Content	Activities	Learning Objectives
5 mins	Assignment	Students finish the following tasks:	Awareness, and Integrating all of the five learning objectives
		1. Write a reflective essay on either the in-class video or a cultural conflict from the film <i>The Gua Sha Treatment</i> , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– a brief summary of the event,</li> <li>– observed cultural differences,</li> <li>– personal reflections.</li> </ul>	
		2. Record a short interview with a foreigner (either in China or abroad) or a returned student. Design three specific questions about cultural differences. Show it next class	

## Class Summary

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**Duration: 5 minutes**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Learning Objectives</b>
5 min	Wrap-up	The teacher briefly revisits the core cultural metaphors discussed in class, emphasizing their role in understanding culture as a complex system that includes both visible customs and deeper, invisible values, beliefs, and communication norms. The teacher also highlights the importance of learning about other cultures to foster openness, respect, and effective intercultural communication. Key value differences illustrated in the video and group discussions are reviewed to reinforce students' understanding of how underlying cultural values shape observable behaviors. Finally, students are encouraged to apply these metaphors and insights to better observe and interpret cultural phenomena in their daily lives.	Integration of all five learning objectives

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## Appendix J Overview of Teaching Plan For 17 Weeks

The teaching intervention consisted of 17 sessions delivered across 17 weeks. Each session lasted 90 minutes. Instruction targeted five dimensions of ICC: knowledge, attitude, awareness, skills, and language competence, and all instructional content was arranged according to the process outlined in the four-phase pedagogical model.

Week	Unit	Main contents	Activities
1	Course Orientation	Introduce students to the course structure, objectives, and expectations.	Lecture, course introduction, Q&A
2	Unit 1 Culture	Explore the concept, metaphors, of culture and its significance in language learning.	Lecture, group discussion, video analysis, journal reflection
3	Unit 1 Culture	Hofstede's culture dimension theory; High context and low context theory; Deepen understanding of cultural aspects through activities and discussions.	Lecture, group discussion, video analysis, reflection speech
4	Unit 2 ABCs of British and American Culture	Examine key cultural elements of British and American societies.	Student presentations, lecture, group discussion, role play, reflection speech
5	Unit 2 ABCs of British and American Culture	Analyze cultural norms, values, and behaviors prevalent in British and American cultures.	Student presentations, lecture, group discussion, movie theme analysis, live collaborative reflection via APP
6	Unit 3 Social Customs and Traditions	Investigate social customs and traditions across different cultures.	Student presentations, lecture, group discussion, video clip performing, oral sharing of reflections
7	Unit 3 Social Customs and Traditions	Compare and contrast social practices and traditions from various cultural perspectives.	Student presentations, lecture, group discussion, Business negotiation exercises, oral sharing of reflections
8	Unit 4 Land and People	Explore geographical and demographic aspects of different regions and their impact on culture.	Student presentations, lecture, group discussion, video analysis, collaborative reflection
9	Unit 4 Land and People	Examine the relationship between land, people, and cultural identities.	Student presentations, Lecture, group discussion, decision-making exercises, journal reflection

10	Unit 4 Land and People	Analyze how geographical factors shape cultural practices and behaviors.	Student presentations, lecture, group discussion, video analysis, oral reflection
11	Unit 7 Family and Education	Investigate family structures and educational systems in diverse cultural contexts.	Student presentations, lecture, discussion, education video analysis, oral reflection
12	Unit 7 Family and Education	Discuss the role of family and education in shaping cultural values and norms.	Student presentations, Lecture, group discussion, News analysis, journal reflection
13	Unit 9 Language and Literature	Explore the relationship between language, literature, and cultural identity.	Student presentations, lecture, group discussion, video analysis and imitation, collaborative reflection
14	Unit 9 Language and Literature	Analyze cultural themes and perspectives portrayed in literary works from different cultures.	Student presentations, lecture, video analysis, discussion and reflection through APP
15	Unit 11 Religion and Belief	Examine the role of religion and belief systems in shaping cultural practices and worldviews.	Student presentations, lecture, real life religion stories, discussion and reflection through APP
16	Unit 11 Religion and Belief	Explore diverse religious traditions and their cultural significance.	Student presentations, lecture, group discussion, conflict resolution scenarios, journal reflection
17	Final Revision	Review and consolidate learning outcomes from the course.	Lecture, course summary, Q&A

## Appendix K Implementation Fidelity Checklist

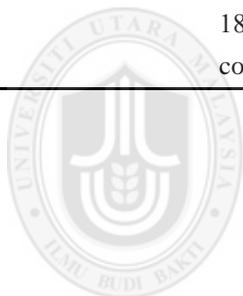
This implementation fidelity checklist covers five aspects and is designed to be used for each session of the course.

**Class:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Session No. / Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Observer:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Topic of the Lesson:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Notes / Special Circumstances:**  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Part II: Fidelity Dimensions (Yes / No)

Dimension	Observation Points	Yes	No	Comments
<b>Adherence (Content and Process Alignment)</b>	1. Was the lesson content delivered according to the teaching plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	2. Did the session include the four instructional phases (acquisition, comparison, engagement, reflection)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	3. Were all five learning objectives (knowledge, attitude, skills, awareness, language competence) addressed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	4. Were diverse activities (e.g., questions, group work, reflection) implemented?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Dosage (Instructional Dose)</b>	5. Was the session delivered according to the scheduled frequency and duration in the overall intervention plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	6. Were planned instructional contents completed as scheduled?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	7. Was the pacing appropriate, without skipping or shortening key parts?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Quality of Delivery</b>	8. Was the instruction clear, focused, and engaging?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	9. Were the teaching strategies varied and suitable for promoting intercultural understanding and language development?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	10. Did the teacher adapt flexibly to students' feedback and learning needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Dimension	Observation Points	Yes	No	Comments
<b>Participant Engagement</b>	11. Did the teacher provide timely and effective feedback to facilitate student understanding and improvement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	12. Were teaching tools and platforms effectively utilized to support instructional goals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	13. Were students encouraged to actively explore, ask questions, and engage in autonomous learning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	14. Did students demonstrate interest during the session?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	15. Did students actively contribute to class discussions or interactions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Differentiation (Critical Components Maintained)</b>	16. Was language competence integrated meaningfully with other ICC dimensions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	17. Did the session follow the four-phase teaching model in the correct sequence (acquisition → comparison → engagement → reflection)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	18. Was attention given to fostering students' confidence in using language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	



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## Appendix L Sample Checklist for Implementation Fidelity

### Appendix K Implementation Fidelity Checklist for Each Session

Class: Monday 10:05-11:40.  
 Session No. / Date: Session 3 18th September, 2023  
 Observer: Sophia  
 Topic of the Lesson: Unit 1 Culture. Culture theory.  
 Notes / Special Circumstances:  
A student is on sick leave.

#### Part II: Fidelity Dimensions (Yes / No)

Dimension	Observation Points	Yes	No	Comments
Adherence (Content and Process Alignment)	1. Was the lesson content delivered according to the teaching plan?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	2. Did the session include the four instructional phases (acquisition, comparison, engagement, reflection)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	3. Were all five learning objectives (knowledge, attitude, skills, awareness, language competence) addressed?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	4. Were diverse activities (e.g., questions, group work, reflection) implemented?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Dosage (Instructional Dose)	5. Was the session delivered according to the scheduled frequency and duration in the overall intervention plan?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	6. Were planned instructional contents completed as scheduled?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quality of Delivery	7. Was the pacing appropriate, without skipping or shortening key parts?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	8. Was the instruction clear, focused, and engaging?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>the teacher delivered the lesson with enthusiasm, demonstrated strong command of the material, and effectively emphasized the key points.</i>
	9. Were the teaching strategies varied and suitable for promoting intercultural understanding and language development?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	10. Did the teacher adapt flexibly to students' feedback and learning needs?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	11. Did the teacher provide timely and effective feedback to facilitate student understanding and improvement?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	12. Were teaching tools and platforms effectively utilized to support instructional goals?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>classroom platform video clips.</i>



Dimension	Observation Points	Yes	No	Comments
Participant Engagement	13. Were students encouraged to actively explore, ask questions, and engage in autonomous learning?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	14. Did students demonstrate interest during the session?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Students actively voluntarily answer questions, discuss with peers and group members.</i>
	15. Did students actively contribute to class discussions or interactions?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Differentiation (Critical Components Maintained)	16. Was language competence integrated meaningfully with other ICC dimensions?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	17. Did the session follow the four-phase teaching model in the correct sequence (acquisition → comparison → engagement → reflection)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	18. Was attention given to fostering students' confidence in using language?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

*Some students' English are not good, the teacher offered sentence structure and key vocabulary as support. The classroom maintained a relaxed atmosphere, encourage most students to express themselves freely.*



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