

An Appropriate Model of Intercultural Communication Competence Development for Foreign Language Teachers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, China

Xue Du,¹ Anurak Panyanuwat,^{1,2} Nongnaphat Phanphonlakrit,¹
Supalucsana Lomlai¹

1. Payap University, Thailand
2. Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Abstract: This study aims to (1) investigate the current and expected levels of intercultural communication competence (ICC) of foreign language teachers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL); and (2) develop an appropriate model for enhancing their ICC. The results revealed significant gaps between current and expected ICC levels of GUFL Foreign Language Teachers across core competency dimensions, with notable discrepancies between teacher self-assessments and student evaluations. Exploratory factor analysis refined the theoretical framework, yielding a five-dimensional structure that integrates “Awareness & Attitudes,” derived from the teacher data, and “Skills & Behavioral Adaptation,” from the student data. The largest gaps were identified in skills and behavioral adaptation. The resulting Dual-Perspective Integrated Intercultural Communication Competence Development Model emphasizes metacognitive reconstruction, behavioral adaptation, knowledge externalization, resource combination, stakeholder integration, and dual-perspective integration. By integrating knowledge management theory with intercultural competency development, the proposed model provides a systematic, innovative, and actionable pathway for improving teachers’ ICC, which is both theoretically sound and contextually grounded. It demonstrates the potential to enhance ICC through structured, reflective, and behavior-oriented activities aligned with institutional and regional needs.

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About the Authors: Xue Du, Interdisciplinary Studies College, Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand. E-mail: 455584688@qq.com.

Anurak Panyanuwat, Professor in Nonformal Education, and Emeritus professor in Man and Environmental Management, Chiang Mai University, Thailand; and a visiting professor at Payap University, Thailand. E-mail: anurak.p@cmu.ac.th. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9254-0375>.

Nongnaphat Phanphonlakrit, Ph.D. in Development Management from North Chiang Mai University, Thailand; currently working in Psychology International College, Payap University, Thailand. E-mail: nongna.pyu@gmail.com.

Supalucsana Lomlai, Ph.D. in Research and Educational Development from Chiang Mai University, Thailand; currently an Assistant Dean in Doctoral Degree Program at the Interdisciplinary Studies College, Payap University, Thailand. E-mail: supalucsana_1@payap.ac.th. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1129-5545>.

Correspondence to: Xue Du at Interdisciplinary Studies College, Payap University, Chiang Mai in Thailand.

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Introduction

THE 21ST CENTURY, characterized by the deep integration of economic globalization and digital technology, has witnessed increasingly interconnected countries and an unprecedented flow of people, capital, and information across borders. Against this backdrop, intercultural communication competence (ICC) is no longer an exclusive skill to a limited number of international communicators but is regarded as an essential competency for every global citizen (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Deardorff, 2006). This ability determines whether individuals can communicate effectively and appropriately in diverse cultural contexts, playing a vital role in fostering international cooperation, understanding, and peace.

Recognizing its critical importance, countries around the world have explicitly integrated ICC as a central objective in national educational policies and frameworks. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (1999) introduced the influential *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, which establishes a teaching framework organized around the “5Cs” (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities), placing “cultural understanding and interaction” on a par with linguistic proficiency. Similarly, the Council of Europe’s (2001, 2003) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* not only gives detailed descriptions of language proficiency but also emphasizes sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence, ultimately aiming to equip learners with communicative skills for real intercultural scenarios. A parallel emphasis is evident in Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000. The release of these globally influential standards marks a decisive transition in foreign language education: from a traditional model focused primarily on linguistic knowledge transmission toward a new era which calls for fostering capable intercultural communicators (Chen & Dai, 2014). This shift requires that foreign language teachers themselves first become exemplars and guides with advanced intercultural competence (Lustig & Koester, 2010).

As a result of its deepened Reform and Opening-up and enhanced comprehensive national strength, China is increasingly moving to the center of the world stage, creating an unprecedented demand for high-caliber, globally competent talent (Chen, 2023). Such individuals must not only possess professional expertise and language proficiency but also demonstrate exceptional ICC, to ensure that they excel in complex roles within international organizations, multinational corporations, and intercultural exchanges (Zhuang et al., 2011).

In response to these strategic national priorities, China’s higher education policies have also provided clear guidance. The Ministry of Education and Other Seven Departments’ Opinions on Accelerating and Expanding Education Opening-up in the New Era explicitly calls for enhancing the in-

ternational competitiveness of talent cultivation in China's higher education and accelerating the training of high-level global talents with an international outlook (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020). This policy document has set a clear direction for talent cultivation in higher education institutions. Looking back at earlier teaching syllabuses, such as the College English Teaching Syllabus (2000 edition) and the College English Teaching Guide, ICC had been listed as one of the core teaching objectives, with an emphasis on the development of students' sensitivity, tolerance, and flexibility in handling cultural differences (Wen, 1999). Yuan (2021) among other scholars were appointed to develop a theoretical model of college students' ICC based on the Teaching Guide, which provides a theoretical foundation for talent cultivation.

However, the imperative of teachers possessing advanced ICC often stands in contrast with the realities in China's educational landscape. While national policies like China's College English Teaching Guide have emphasized ICC as a core objective, significant challenges persist in the actual development of foreign language teachers' ICC. Research indicates that the overall ICC of foreign language teachers in China remains insufficient, often characterized by a disconnection between theoretical knowledge and practical application, as well as a lack of systematic support for its development (Zhong et al., 2013; An, 2013; Han, 2014; Gao, 2016; Zhou, 2024). This gap between policy expectations and teacher ICC creates a critical bottleneck in efforts to cultivate students' intercultural capabilities.

As a frontline hub and gateway for China's opening-up and cooperation with ASEAN, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (hereinafter referred to as Guangxi) plays a distinctive "bridgehead" role in the Belt and Road Initiative. Its geographical proximity to Southeast Asian countries creates the most direct and pressing demand for internationally-oriented, application-focused talents who are proficient in the languages and cultures of ASEAN nations and possess strong ICC (Gu, 2022; Zhao, 2023). However, studies indicate that higher education in Guangxi still faces challenges in its internationalization, with the ICC level of the teaching faculty being a key constraint (Zhang & Zhang, 2023).

In this context, private universities in Guangxi, leveraging their flexible mechanisms and application-oriented approaches, have become a significant force in cultivating international talent for the region. They are committed to capitalizing on geographical advantages, reshaping the form of educational internationalization, and enhancing quality through project-based initiatives (Zhang & Zhang, 2023). Nevertheless, compared to their counterparts at research universities, faculty of private, application-oriented institutions may face greater ICC-related challenges, such as insufficient theoretical grounding in cross-cultural studies, limited international experience, and teaching philosophies that require updating (Huang et al., 2020). This makes research on the ICC of foreign language teachers in Chinese private universi-

ties particularly urgent. As the “significant others” in students’ learning, the teachers’ own ICC level directly shapes the ultimate quality of talent development (Zhang, 2020).

This study selects GUFL as a critical case precisely because it embodies these nationwide challenges within a specific, under-researched, yet highly relevant context: Chinese private, application-oriented universities. Unlike public higher education institutions, private universities like GUFL often operate with greater flexibility but also confront distinct constraints, such as limited resources for professional development and a teaching faculty that have comparatively less theoretical training or international exposure, though with substantial practical experience (Huang et al., 2020). These characteristics renders ICC development a more acute and complex issue in these universities. GUFL’s explicit mission to serve the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area poses highly specific demands on the ICC of both its faculty and students, making it an ideal setting to investigate the gaps between current competencies and strategic needs. Therefore, researching ICC development in GUFL is not merely of vital significance for a single university; it addresses a nationally relevant issue through a typical and necessary case that illuminates the unique challenges and potential innovative pathways within a significant yet understudied sector in China’s higher education system.

Existing theoretical models of ICC, such as those proposed by Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006), are predominantly derived from Western contexts. Despite their broad applicability, these models’ relevance and effectiveness require localized validation and adaptation when applied to specific local, application-oriented institutions in China (Fu & Kulich, 2015). Furthermore, these models tend to adopt a static or linear perspective, failing to adequately incorporate Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory to examine how the dynamic interplay between macro-level policies (national), meso-level environments (institutional), and micro-level individuals (teachers) collectively influences teachers’ ICC development. Additionally, existing assessment tools primarily focus on evaluating awareness and attitudes, lacking effective measurement of behavioral effectiveness (Portalla & Chen, 2010; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). This results in an incomplete evaluation of the outcomes of teacher ICC development initiatives.

Hence, this study identifies research gaps among the reviewed literature. Existing studies typically rely on direct applications of classical Western theoretical models (e.g., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). While these models demonstrate broad applicability, they lack tailored consideration of China’s distinct educational management systems, institutional cultures, and teacher development ecosystems. To address this limitation, the present study transcends the use of isolated theoretical approaches by innovatively integrating the SECI model of knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), the CIPP evaluation model (Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017), and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory. Furthermore, the ma-

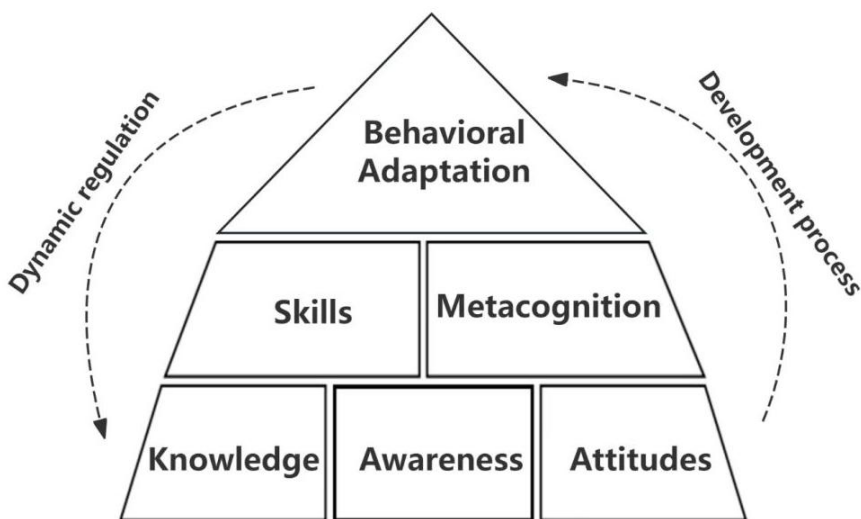


Figure 1. Initial Theoretical Framework: The Pyramid Feedback Cycle Model of Intercultural Communication Competence [Source: Developed by the authors, synthesizing theories from Bennett (1993), Byram (1997), Chen and Starosta (1996), Dearsdorff (2006), and Fantini (2000)]

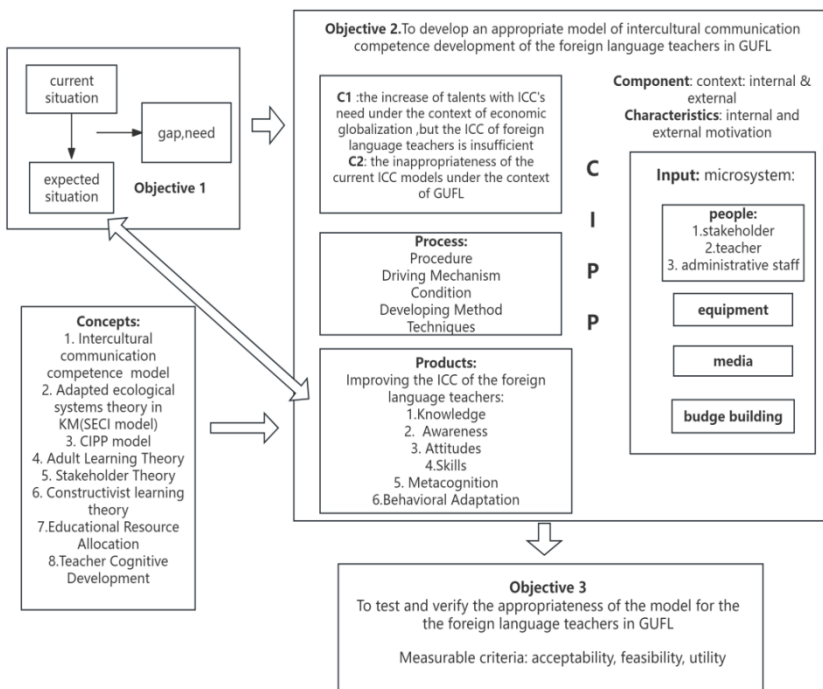


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Research.

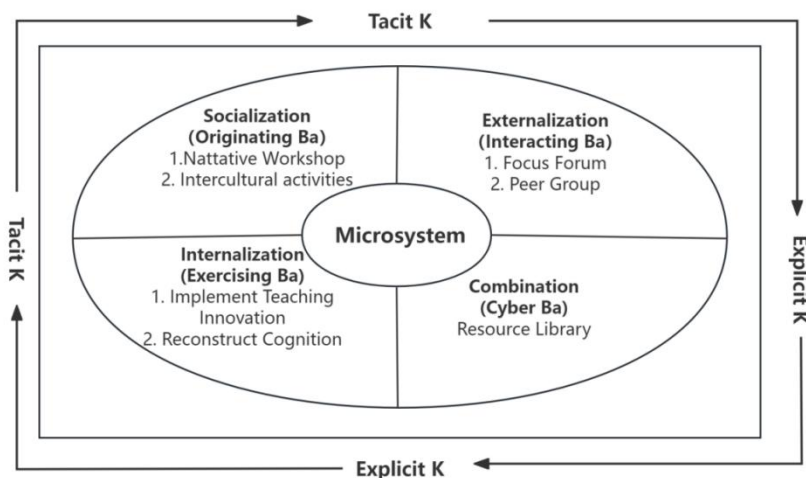


Figure 3. Adapted Ecological Systems Theory in KM (SECI Model) [Source: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) and Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995)]

majority of studies on teacher ICC concentrate on public or prestigious universities, paying inadequate attention to private foreign language institutions—a sector of growing importance within China's higher education system, marked by organizational flexibility as well as unique resource limitations (Huang et al., 2020). Also, most existing studies remain confined to theoretical model development or descriptive accounts, lacking robust empirical investigation into the practical mechanisms (e.g., driving forces, techniques) and actual effectiveness or feasibility (appropriateness) of these models. In addition, existing research tends to emphasize either macro-level conceptual frameworks or micro-level instructional strategies, overlooking systematic meso-level (institutional) approaches that integrate teacher ICC development with operational aspects of school management (e.g., budgeting, equipment, media support).

This study is guided by the following questions: (1) What are the current and expected ICC levels of the foreign language teachers at GUFL? (2) If there is a need to develop a model of ICC development for these teachers, what should be its characteristics and components (conditions, driving mechanisms, and techniques)? (3) Will the proposed model be appropriate for the foreign language teachers at GUFL or not?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the current and expected ICC levels of the foreign language teachers at GUFL.

2. To develop an appropriate model of ICC development for these teachers and investigate the characteristics and components (conditions, driving mechanisms, and techniques) of the model.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in a multi-dimensional and systematic theoretical framework, integrating key perspectives from ICC theory, teacher development theory, knowledge management, and program evaluation, among other fields. The conceptual framework applied in the research primarily comprises **Figure 1** (Initial Theoretical Framework: The Pyramid Feedback Cycle Model of Intercultural Communication Competence), **Figure 2**, and **Figure 3** (the SECI-based conceptual model for ICC development).

Initial Theoretical Framework: The Pyramidal Feedback Cycle Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (**Figure 1**), serving as the core competency framework of this study, systematically integrates multiple classical theories from the field of ICC research:

1. Drawing upon Byram's (1997) Savoirs model, the framework encompasses multiple dimensions such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness.
2. It incorporates the hierarchical structure and dynamic development concept of Deardorff's (2006) pyramidal model.
3. It introduces the metacognitive dimension proposed by Fantini (2000), emphasizing the critical role of reflection and regulation in intercultural learning.
4. It integrates the behavioral effectiveness theory of Chen and Starosta (1996), focusing on practical behavioral performance in intercultural interactions.
5. It also references Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which reflects the presence of the iterative feedback cycle in ICC development.

By synthesizing these theories, this study constructs a preliminary theoretical framework: The Pyramidal Feedback Cycle Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (**Figure 1**). This framework, integrating six core dimensions (Knowledge, Awareness, Attitudes, Skills, Metacognition, and Behavioral Adaptation), served as a comprehensive and systematic basis for defining the target intercultural competencies of foreign language teachers.

This study employs the CIPP evaluation model (Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017) as the overarching framework to guide the program evaluation process. The model's four components—Context, Input, Process, and Product Evaluation—collectively support the two research objectives. Specifically, Context Evaluation helps identify the existing needs for developing teachers' ICC, thereby addressing Objective 1. Input and Process Evaluation

jointly inform the construction of the ICC development model in question, aligning with Objective 2.

Complementing this structural framework, the SECI model of knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) offers a procedural mechanism for understanding how foreign language teachers' ICC can be developed. The model elucidates the dynamic interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge through four iterative stages of knowledge conversion: Socialization (facilitated through narrative workshops and intercultural activities), Externalization (supported by focused forums and peer groups), Combination (enabled by the development of resource repositories), and Internalization (realized through the implementation of teaching innovations and cognitive restructuring). Together, these stages form a structured yet flexible process for promoting teachers' intercultural learning and professional growth.

Furthermore, this study incorporates Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to examine the impact of human elements (teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders) and material elements (equipment, media, budget, etc.) within the microsystem on teacher development. It draws on the adult learning theory (Knowles, 1977) to design developmental activities based on the characteristics of teachers as adult learners. Also leveraged are constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes the social construction of knowledge and situated learning, and stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which is applied to coordinate diverse interests and secure multi-faceted support.

By integrating the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, this study enables multi-dimensional analysis, dynamic process design, and the establishment of a systematic evaluation mechanism. Together, these theories underpin the development of an appropriate, feasible, and sustainable model for enhancing the ICC of foreign language teachers at GUFL. The goal is to improve the teachers' ICC and support GUFL's mission of cultivating globally competent talent.

In summary, the integrated theoretical framework adopted in this study is not a mere assemblage of disparate theories but a coherent system where each component plays a distinct yet complementary role. The four theories underpinning the development of the model are as follows:

- The Pyramid Feedback Cycle Model defines the “what,” articulating the ultimate multidimensional goal of the development process by specifying the core competencies (Knowledge, Awareness, Attitudes, Skills, Metacognition, and Behavioral Adaptation) that constitute ICC.
- The SECI Model of Knowledge Creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) provides the “how,” offering the procedural mechanism for achieving the said goal by illustrating how teachers' tacit and explicit knowledge interact and transform through socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization within supportive “Ba” (shared contexts).

- The CIPP Evaluation Model (Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017) addresses the “how well” and “why,” guiding the evaluation and continuous improvement of the entire developmental process, from assessing the initial Context and Input, through monitoring the Process, to evaluating the final Product, to ensure the model’s acceptability, feasibility, and utility.

Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory situates this entire “what-how-how well” process within the “where,” indicating that teacher development is embedded within and influenced by a specific microsystem of human and material elements, which must be considered for any model to be contextually viable.

Thus, these theories work in concert to form a comprehensive and robust foundation for investigating the current and expected levels of foreign language teachers’ ICC and for constructing a contextually integrated, empirically grounded, and systematically evaluable ICC development model.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to assess the current state of ICC among foreign language teachers at GUFL. Data were collected via a questionnaire survey, and the assessment model was validated based on the empirical findings.

Participants

The study was conducted at GUFL, involving teachers and students from the School of European-American Languages and Cultures and the School of South-East Asian Languages and Cultures. The total number of faculty members was 178. A census survey method was adopted, whereby questionnaires were distributed to all teachers. A total of 150 questionnaires returned. After screening, 125 valid ones were retained, yielding a valid response rate of 70.2%. The total student population was 3,514. According to the sample size determination table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a minimum sample size of 346 is required at the 95% confidence level. To accommodate potential invalid responses and ensure a sufficient number of valid questionnaires, 400 questionnaires were distributed. A total of 372 were returned, and after screening, 350 valid responses were obtained, resulting in a valid response rate of 87.5%. The final valid sample size met the statistical requirements.

Instruments

The study utilized a self-developed instrument titled the “Questionnaire for Assessing Intercultural Communication Competence of Foreign Language Teachers.” The theoretical foundation for the questionnaire dimensions was

initially derived from established ICC models advanced by Bennett (1993), Byram (1997), Chen and Starosta (1996), Deardorff (2006), and Fantini (2000). In its development, the study adhered to established scale development theory and practice (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). The questionnaire encompasses six core dimensions: Knowledge, Awareness, Attitudes, Skills, Metacognition, and Behavioral Adaptation. In the meantime, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to examine the applicability and structural validity of this theoretical construct within the specific context of GUFL, allowing for potential data-driven refinement of the initial conceptual framework. The finalized questionnaire consists of 48 items, with 8 items for measuring each dimension. A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) was adopted to rate the responses.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Payap University, Thailand. The questionnaires were distributed online via popular Chinese platforms such as QQ and WeChat. Prior to their participation, all participants were informed about the research objectives, principles of data confidentiality, and anonymity, and their informed consent was obtained.

Upon completion of data collection, data were analyzed using SPSS 28.0, fulfilling the following steps:

Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample. Means and standard deviations were calculated for all research variables to summarize the central tendency and dispersion of the current and expected ICC levels.

Normality Test and Choice of Statistical Tests: The Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to assess the normality of the data distribution for all variables related to current and expected ICC levels. The results indicated a significant deviation from normality ($p < 0.05$ for all variables). Consequently, non-parametric tests were deemed appropriate solutions and employed for all subsequent inferential analyses.

Inferential Statistics:

- i. **Within-Group Comparisons (Current vs. Expected ICC Levels):** The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, the non-parametric equivalent of the paired-samples t-test, was used to compare the evaluations of differences between the current and expected teacher ICC levels within the teacher group and within the student group. The results were reported with Z-values, sample sizes (N), and exact p-values.
- ii. **Between-Groups Comparisons (Teacher vs. Student Perspectives on Current Level):** The Mann-Whitney U Test, the non-parametric equivalent of the independent-samples t-test, was used to compare the differences in the perception of the teachers' current ICC levels between the teacher

group and the student group. The results were reported with U-values, Z-values, mean ranks, sample sizes (N), and exact p-values.

- iii. Gap Calculation: The gap values presented in the results, representing the discrepancy between current and expected ICC levels, were calculated as the arithmetic difference between the mean of the expected level and the mean of the current level ($\text{Gap} = M_{\text{expected}} - M_{\text{current}}$).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the quality of the quantitative data, the validity and reliability of the questionnaire were rigorously assessed prior to the main analysis.

- *Validity*: The construct validity of the questionnaire was examined using EFA, which was performed separately on the teacher and student samples. The analysis aims to verify the dimensional structure of the ICC scale within the specific context of this study.
- *Reliability*: The internal consistency of the scale and its sub-dimensions was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which provides a measure of the questionnaire's reliability.

The specific procedures and the detailed results of EFA (including KMO measures, Bartlett's test statistics, variance explained, and factor loadings) and reliability analysis of overall and dimension-level Cronbach's alpha values are reported in the Results section. These analyses confirm the robustness of the instrument for this study.

Results

Current and Expected ICC Levels of Foreign Language Teachers at GUFL

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Prior to addressing the research questions, the validity and reliability of the questionnaire were assessed to ensure the robustness of the subsequent findings.

- *Validity*: EFA was conducted separately on the teacher and student samples. For the teacher sample, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure is 0.955, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ($\chi^2 = 7546.250$, $df = 1128$, $p < 0.001$), indicating the data are suitable for factor analysis. The analysis yielded 5 common factors accounting for 77.916% of the total variance. For the student sample, the KMO value is 0.958, with Bartlett's test ($\chi^2 = 8142.177$, $df = 1128$, $p < 0.001$) being also significant, and 5 factors were extracted, explaining 59.881% of the variance. All items

Table 1. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results for Current vs. Expected ICC Levels.

Group	Intercultural Communication Competence Dimensions	Perception of Current Levels (Mean ± SD)	Perception of Expected Levels (Mean ± SD)	Gap	Z	P
Teachers (n=125)	Knowledge	3.47±0.81	4.13±1.03	0.66	-6.778	< 0.001
	Awareness	3.54±0.83	4.14±1.04	0.60	-7.120	< 0.001
	Attitudes	3.68±0.92	4.30±1.01	0.62	-7.514	< 0.001
	Skills	3.44±0.83	4.24±1.05	0.80	-7.298	< 0.001
	Metacognition	3.23±0.81	4.04±0.97	0.81	-7.091	< 0.001
	Behavioral Adaptation	3.54±0.88	4.18±1.04	0.64	-6.986	< 0.001
Students (n=350)	Knowledge	3.18±0.58	4.58±0.57	1.40	-15.989	<0.001
	Awareness	3.20±0.56	4.56±0.57	1.36	-15.938	< 0.001
	Attitudes	3.18±0.58	4.58±0.55	1.40	-15.957	< 0.001
	Skills	3.09±0.63	4.59±0.53	1.50	-15.824	< 0.001
	Metacognition	3.13±0.55	4.58±0.54	1.45	-15.977	< 0.001
	Behavioral Adaptation	3.08±0.56	4.57±0.54	1.49	-15.952	< 0.001

Note: Gap = Expected Mean - Current Mean. All tests were two-tailed.

load above 0.5 on their respective factors, confirming good construct validity.

- *Reliability*: The internal consistency is excellent. For the teacher sample, the overall Cronbach's alpha for the 48-item scale is 0.987, with sub-dimension alphas ranging from 0.944 to 0.967. For the student sample, the overall alpha was 0.970, with sub-dimension alphas ranging from 0.766 to 0.920. All values exceed the accepted threshold of 0.7, indicating high reliability.

Tests of Normality and Choice of Statistical Methods

The Shapiro-Wilk test was performed on all variables related to current and expected teacher ICC levels. The results were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ for all variables), providing strong evidence that the data were not normally distributed. Accordingly, non-parametric tests—the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for within-group comparisons and the Mann-Whitney U test for between-groups comparisons—were employed for all inferential analyses.

Within-Group Comparisons: Current vs. Expected Teacher ICC Levels

The Gap value, representing the discrepancy between current and expected teacher ICC levels, is calculated as: $\text{Gap} = M_{\text{expected}} - M_{\text{current}}$.

As shown in **Table 1**, the Wilcoxon tests reveal that both teachers and students rated the expected teacher ICC levels significantly higher than the current levels across all six dimensions (all $p < 0.001$). For the teachers,

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U Test Comparing Teacher and Student Ratings of Current Teacher ICC Levels.

Intercultural Communication Competence Dimensions	Teacher Group (n=125)	Student Group (n=350)	Mann-Whitney U	Z	P
	Mean Rank	Mean Rank			
Knowledge	291.48	218.90	15189.50	-5.09	< 0.001
Awareness	303.05	214.77	13744.00	-6.19	< 0.001
Attitudes	320.43	208.56	11571.00	-7.85	< 0.001
Skills	295.30	217.54	14713.00	-5.45	< 0.001
Metacognition	261.56	229.58	18929.50	-2.24	0.025
Behavioral Adaptation	310.97	211.94	12753.50	-6.94	< 0.001

Note: A higher mean rank indicates a higher rating.

the most noticeable gaps were in Metacognition (Gap = 0.81) and Skills (Gap = 0.80). For the students, the gaps were substantially larger, with the most pronounced differences in Skills (Gap = 1.50) and Behavioral Adaptation (Gap = 1.49).

Between-Groups Comparisons: Teacher vs. Student Perspectives

Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to compare the teachers' and students' perception of teachers' current ICC levels.

The results (**Table 2**) indicate that the students rated teachers' current ICC levels significantly lower than the teachers' self-assessments across all six dimensions (all $p < 0.05$). The most substantial disparities were observed in Attitudes ($U = 11571$, $Z = -7.85$, $p < 0.001$) and Behavioral Adaptation ($U = 12753.50$, $Z = -6.94$, $p < 0.001$).

Synthesis of the Findings

In summary, the results demonstrate: (1) a consensus on the substantial need for ICC development among foreign language teachers; (2) a significant perceptual gap, with the students assessing teachers' current ICC levels more critically than teachers themselves across all competencies; and (3) a marked expectation gap indicating the students' higher standards for ideal ICC performance than those hold by the teachers.

Construction of an Appropriate Model of ICC Development for the Foreign Language Teachers at GUFL

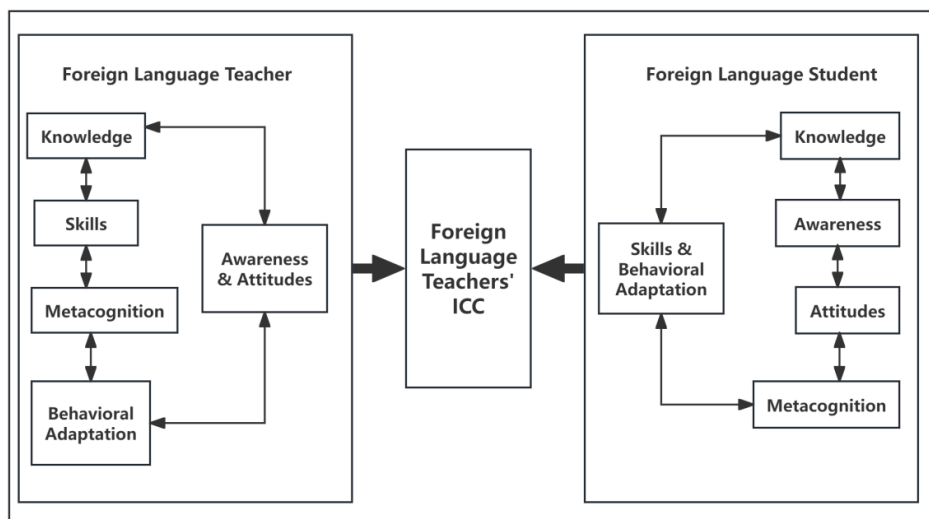


Figure 4. Dual-Perspective Integrated Intercultural Communication Competence Development Model. [Source: Based on exploratory factor analysis of teacher and student data]

The development of the model in question was informed not only by the identified gaps in teacher ICC levels but also significantly by the empirical findings regarding the structure of ICC revealed by EFA. While the initial theoretical framework (**Figure 1**) posits six distinct dimensions, the EFA results indicate a more nuanced, context-specific structure. For the students, the dimensions of “Skills” and “Behavioral Adaptation” converge into a single factor, termed the “Skills & Behavioral Adaptation” dimension. For the teachers, “Awareness” and “Attitudes” merge to form the “Awareness & Attitudes” dimension.

This fundamental divergence in how the two key stakeholder groups conceptualize ICC necessitates a refinement of the initial framework. A model aiming to bridge the perception gap between the two groups must acknowledge and incorporate these differing conceptual maps. Therefore, this study proposes the Dual-Perspective Integrated Intercultural Communication Competence Development Model (**Figure 4**), which integrates the empirically-derived five-factor structure into a cohesive developmental pathway. This model strategically targets the consolidated dimensions as perceived by each group, ensuring the ICC development interventions are both theoretically sound and empirically relevant within the GUFL context.

Based on the empirical findings and guided by the integrated theoretical framework that combines the SECI model and the Pyramid Feedback Cycle model (Initial Theoretical Framework), this study proposed a compre-

hensive development model aimed at enhancing the ICC of foreign language teachers at GUFL. Given the dual-perspective structure revealed by EFA, the model addresses the identified gaps through six strategic components, each targeting the specific competency dimension and perceptual discrepancies uncovered in the study:

Metacognitive Reconstruction through Exercising Ba

Addressing the largest self-identified gap in metacognition (Gap=0.81), this component establishes teaching innovation laboratories as an Exercising Ba, a shared context for practice that facilitates knowledge internalization. Within this context, teachers implement and refine intercultural teaching strategies. Through cycles of action research and cognitive restructuring exercises, teachers internalize explicit knowledge into personalized pedagogical approaches, directly targeting the metacognitive awareness gap identified in the study.

Skills & Behavioral Adaptation through Originating Ba

To bridge the most significant student-identified gaps in skills (Gap=1.50) and behavioral adaptation (Gap=1.49) (the two dimensions merge to form what the students perceived as a unified “Skills & Behavioral Adaptation” dimension), this component introduces immersive intercultural narrative workshops and authentic cultural activities. These experiences enable foreign language teachers to develop and demonstrate observable intercultural behaviors and practical skills through social interaction, directly addressing the competencies students value most.

Externalizing Awareness & Attitudes through Interacting Ba

In response to the significant perceptual gap in current teacher intercultural competencies (all $p < 0.001$ except Metacognition), this mechanism establishes peer coaching groups and focused forums. These interventions specifically target the consolidated teacher dimension of Awareness & Attitudes, providing a structured environment for educators to externalize their tacit cultural understandings and teaching philosophies through collaborative dialogue. This process of articulating implicit knowledge is beneficial for teachers making the foundations of their attitudes explicit and open to refinement, thereby directly addressing the critical discrepancy between teacher self-perception and student evaluation.

Resource Combination through Cyber Ba

Table 3: ICC Development Model Components Based on the Theoretical Framework.

Theoretical Components	Implementation Mechanisms	Target ICC Dimensions	Empirical Bases
Exercising Ba (Internalization)	Teaching innovation labs Cognitive reconstruction exercises	Metacognition	Teacher-identified gap (0.81)
Originating Ba (Socialization)	Cultural narrative workshops Immersive activities	Skills & Behavioral Adaptation (Student Perspective)	Student-identified gap (Skills=1.50, Beh.Adap=1.49)
Interacting Ba (Externalization)	Peer coaching groups Focus forums	Awareness & Attitudes (Teacher Perspective)	Perception gap (all $p < 0.001$)
Cyber Ba (Combination)	Digital resource library Teaching templates	Knowledge	Universal gap (all dimensions)
Stakeholder Integration	Co-design workshops Structured feedback	All dimensions	Expectation gap (all $p < 0.01$)
Dual-Perspective Integration Mechanism	Designing activities that yield evidence and outcomes meaningful to both teacher and student conceptual structures	All dimensions	Divergent EFA structures

Supporting all competency dimensions, this component develops a digital resource library that integrates cultural learning materials, teaching templates, and assessment tools. This platform facilitates the combination and systematization of explicit knowledge, providing accessible support for the development of all ICC dimensions, from knowledge to behavioral adaptation.

Stakeholder Integration Mechanism

Acknowledging students as key stakeholders with higher expectations (all $p < 0.01$), and directly addressing the divergent conceptualizations of ICC, this component institutionalizes structured feedback channels and co-design workshops. This mechanism ensures that the “student voice” and their perspective on “Skills & Behavioral Adaptation” directly inform and drive teacher ICC development, thereby bridging the expectation and perception gaps.

Dual-Perspective Integration Mechanism

Acting as the coordinating core, this mechanism ensures that development activities are designed to simultaneously address the competency dimensions as defined by both teachers and students. It bridges the two perspectives by creating synergies—for instance, ensuring that a teaching simulation in the Originating Ba serves as both a reflective exercise for the teacher’s Behavioral Adaptation and a visible demonstration of Skills & Behavioral Adaptation for students.

The model created an ecological system that transformed the identified gaps into developmental opportunities, leveraging the SECI knowledge conversion process to address both the internal needs identified by teachers and the external expectations expressed by students. By integrating the theoretical framework with empirical findings, this model provided a comprehensive approach to ICC development that is both theoretically grounded and practically relevant to the GUFL context (**Table 3**).

Discussion

This study systematically examined the current and expected ICC levels of foreign language teachers at GUFL, utilizing surveys administered to both teachers and students. Based on the empirical findings, a professional ICC development model was constructed. The following discussion addresses the two research objectives by interpreting the results through relevant theoretical lenses and concludes with a reflection on the study's limitations.

The ICC Gap and Dual-Perspective Divide: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Interpretation

The data indicate that both the teacher and student groups rated teachers' current ICC levels significantly lower than the expected levels across all dimensions ($p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with the multidimensional models of intercultural competence proposed by Wen (1999) and Byram (1997), which conceptualize ICC as a composite construct structure entailing knowledge, awareness, attitudes, skills, and behavioral adaptation. It is also highly consistent with the concept of "intercultural effectiveness" advanced by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009).

A deeper analysis reveals a critical divergence: the teachers identified their most substantial gaps in Metacognition (gap = 0.81) and Skills (gap = 0.80), as opposed to the students' identification of Skills (gap = 1.50) and Behavioral Adaptation (gap = 1.49) as the dimensions where teacher ICC exhibits the most severe deficits. This suggests that teachers are primarily aware of their inadequacies in cultural reflection and the application of pedagogical strategies, whereas students are more concerned with whether teachers can translate cultural knowledge into observable classroom behaviors. This result resonates with Deardorff's (2006) assertion that "intercultural competence requires not only knowing but also demonstrating through behavior."

EFA further provides empirical support for this divide, leading to a fundamental restructuring of the original six ICC dimensions to five. For the teachers, "Awareness" and "Attitudes" merged into a single factor, while for the students, "Skills" and "Behavioral Adaptation" converged. This finding

suggests that the two groups inherently conceptualize ICC differently, forming a dual-perspective structure that serves as a cornerstone for the model in question.

This perceptual gap can be explained through Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS): Teachers may be situated at the "minimization" stage, assuming they possess adequate intercultural teaching abilities, while students, as direct recipients of teaching outcomes, hold higher expectations and stricter criteria for teacher ICC, showing needs aligned with the "acceptance" or even "adaptation" stages. This interpretation, grounded in a model often assessed by the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer et al., 2003), underscored the developmental chasm that the current study identifies.

Furthermore, the expected levels of teacher ICC from the students' standpoint are also significantly higher than the teachers' own expectations ($p < 0.01$), particularly in the "knowledge" and "metacognition" dimensions. This underscores that students are not merely passive recipients of instruction but critical stakeholders who expect teachers to become more culturally reflective and behaviorally demonstrating guides (Zhong & Fan, 2013). This aligns closely with the "transcendence" perspective on intercultural competence proposed by Gao (2002), which emphasizes the construction of subjectivity and creative interaction.

These results, supported by robust non-parametric tests (conducted after the Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed data non-normality), consistently point to a widespread and urgent need for ICC development in teachers. This not only provides empirical justification for the model but also highlights the necessity of moving beyond traditional "knowledge-transmission" training approaches toward a new paradigm that integrated "behavioral transformation" and "reflective practice," thereby responding to calls for more effective intercultural training design (Perry & Southwell, 2011).

Theoretical Basis and Components of the Proposed Model

Based on the aforementioned findings, this study proposes an ICC development model that is characterized by its focus on "knowledge transformation" and "behavioral centrality" and fully integrates the SECI theory of knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Emphasis on Knowledge Transformation and Behavioral Adaptation

The most significant competency gaps indicate that training must be effective in increasing teachers' capacity to translate implicit knowledge into ex-

licit actions. Thus, the model emphasizes the creation of Interacting Ba and Exercising Ba through peer focus forums, teaching simulation labs, intercultural narrative workshops, and other mechanisms to facilitate the transition from knowledge to behavior. This aligns with the concept of “behavioral flexibility” and “interactional relaxation” emphasized in the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (Portalla & Chen, 2010). The empirical findings have vital implications for the SECI-based mechanisms: The gap in Behavioral Adaptation points to a failure in Internalization, while the gap in Metacognition underscores a weakness in Externalization and Combination. The model, by creating structured ‘Ba’, is explicitly aimed at strengthening these weak links in the SECI knowledge conversion chain.

Integration of Multi-Stakeholder Participation

The disparities in perception and expectations of teacher ICC between the teachers and students indicate the need for a built-in stakeholder engagement mechanism in the model. This component incorporates student feedback into teacher development evaluations and encourages teacher-student collaboration, a design inspired by stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) and echoing Fu and Kulich’s (2015) recommendation to “enhance structural diversity and empirical foundations” in ICC model research in China. The inclusion of students serves as a deliberate intervention to reconfigure the teacher’s ecological microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). By formally incorporating student input, this study introduces a new vital element that fosters a more dynamic and responsive environment, ensuring teacher ICC development is guided by the needs of its most immediate beneficiaries.

Focus on Reflective Awareness and Metacognitive Competence

The absence of significant differences between teacher self-assessments and student evaluations in the metacognition dimension ($t=1.30$, $p>0.05$) indicates a shared recognition of this area as a weakness. Therefore, the model prioritizes the cultivation of reflective practice and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997) through tools such as intercultural teaching journals and critical incident analysis.

Construction of a Dynamic, Theoretically-Informed Framework

The model adopts a dual-perspective integrated structure that progresses from knowledge to behavioral adaptation. This design responds to the emphasis on “systematicity” and “operability” in Peng et al.’s (2020) Theoretically-

cal and Practical Model of Intercultural Foreign Language Teaching. To ensure the model's practical viability, the study employs the CIPP evaluation model (Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017) to guide its systematic assessment. Furthermore, the model is situated within its broader ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and draws on adult learning theory (Knowles, 1977) to tailor activities to teachers as adult learners.

In summary, the findings of this study provided a solid foundation for constructing a multidimensional, behavior-oriented professional ICC development model. By integrating knowledge management theory with intercultural competence frameworks and embedding stakeholder feedback mechanisms, this model represents a tailored approach to designing ICC cultivation strategies in the context of China's foreign language education.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the research design was cross-sectional, capturing only a snapshot of the stakeholders' perception of teacher ICC at a single point in time. The absence of longitudinal data means the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of the proposed model in enhancing teacher ICC remain to be empirically verified. Future studies should implement the model and track its effects over time.

Secondly, the study's sampling is confined to a single private university in Guangxi, China. Although GUFL represents a critical case, the generalizability of the study's findings and the model to other regions and university types might be limited. Future research could adopt multi-site sampling strategies to test and refine the model across diverse institutional contexts.

Lastly, despite the use of robust statistical measures, the study's reliance on self-reported questionnaire data leaves it susceptible to biases such as social desirability. Future research could incorporate more objective measures, such as classroom observations or in-depth interviews, to triangulate the findings and provide a richer understanding of the ICC development process.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study not only confirms the significant ICC development gaps among foreign language teachers in a Chinese private university context but also makes substantive theoretical and practical contributions to ICC research. Theoretically, it offers a novel integrated framework that dynamically connects the 'what' of ICC (the empirically refined ICC dimensions), the 'how' of knowledge transformation (the adapted SECI Model), and the 'how well' of systematic evaluation (the CIPP model).

Empirical evidence, robustly supported by non-parametric statistical analysis, reveals significant disparities ($p < 0.001$) between current and expected ICC levels. A key finding is the identification of the dual-perspective, five-dimensional structure of ICC through EFA, where “awareness” and “attitudes” were merged by the teachers, and “skills” and “behavioral adaptation” by the students. This structural divergence, coupled with a clear misalignment between teacher and student evaluations and expectations, underscores the failure of the existing ICC development mechanisms to incorporate key stakeholder perspectives or to facilitate the translation of intercultural cognition into practical teaching behaviors.

Thus, it is necessary to fundamentally innovate the system. This awareness leads to the construction of the Dual-Perspective Integrated Intercultural Communication Competence Development Model. Practically, this model moves beyond knowledge transmission to a focus on tangible behavioral change and reflective practice. It provides a systematic and actionable pathway focused on the integrative cycle of “knowledge-reflection-behavior,” emphasizing the creation of interactive and practical learning environments (i.e., “Ba”) to facilitate the externalization of teachers’ tacit knowledge, the reflection and adjustment of teaching behaviors, and the collaborative construction of intercultural goals.

The model highlights the central role of “metacognition” and “behavioral adaptation,” addressing the limitations of previous models that prioritize cognition over behavior and lack dynamic feedback mechanisms. It has the potential to enhance teachers’ own ICC, as well as enriching students’ intercultural learning experiences. Moreover, by emphasizing stakeholder collaboration and contextual adaptability, the model exhibits significant prospects for scalability and can serve as a practical reference for foreign language teacher professional development in other higher education institutions.

The success of ICC development in GUFL foreign language teachers does not hinge on isolated training programs but rather on the dynamic integration of strategic planning, reflective practice, behavioral transformation, and student expectations. In the future, this model can be iteratively refined through implementation and further extended to teacher development programs across diverse disciplines and cultural contexts.

Suggestions

Based on the empirical findings and the ICC development model constructed, three major suggestions are proposed at the policy, managerial, and academic levels:

At the policy level, GUFL should adopt a teacher development policy that systematically embeds ICC into its strategic planning for foreign language teacher training. This policy should emphasize behavioral adaptation

and metacognitive reflection as core components, in alignment with the following key strategic conditions: (1) revising professional development criteria to include ICC evaluation; (2) fostering leadership that promotes a culture of intercultural teaching excellence; (3) allocating dedicated funding for ICC-specific training programs; (4) incorporating stakeholder (especially student) feedback into teacher appraisal mechanisms; (5) encouraging instructional innovation through teaching awards and recognition programs; and (6) strengthening organizational learning through the establishment of intercultural teaching communities and sharing mechanisms.

At the managerial level, GUFL's academic administration should modify its current teacher development framework by incorporating the proposed ICC model. The model emphasizes the coordination of goals between teachers and students, the use of "Ba"-based learning environments (e.g., peer coaching groups, intercultural teaching labs), and the adoption of formative feedback systems for continuous improvement. Rather than applying generic teacher evaluation criteria uniformly, GUFL is advised to develop context-sensitive indicators that reflect the developmental nature of ICC and address the specific challenges faced by foreign language teachers in a Chinese higher education context.

At the academic level, GUFL should design and implement an integrated digital platform to support teacher ICC development. The platform should allow teachers to document, share, and transfer their ICC-related learning outcomes into a recognized professional development credit system. All training content and reflective tasks should align with the empirically-derived dimensions identified in this study, particularly the consolidated domains of "skills and behavioral adaptation" and "awareness and attitudes," to ensure a coherent and evidence-based approach to enhancing teachers' intercultural instructional competence.

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