

# Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC): A Comparison of Thai and International Teachers of English in the Thai Vocational Context

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**Abstract**—This study aims to investigate English teachers' levels of ICC within five components, which are knowledge, attitude, skills of interpretation and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness, and to compare the differences between levels of ICC and its components between Thai and international teachers of English. This study also seeks to understand the influences of aspects of intercultural background, consisting of international travel experiences, international seminars/training experiences, and intercultural contact. The participants were 113 Thai and 36 international teachers of English who were chosen using a multi-stage sampling methodology. The research instruments consisted of ICC scales adapted from the Byram ICC model (2020) and an intercultural background survey. Descriptive statistics, a t-test, and a two-way ANOVA analysis were used to analyze the dataset. The results showed that international teachers had greater levels of ICC. Of the five components, the attitude component was found to be at the highest level in both groups. Critical cultural awareness was at the lowest level among Thai teachers, while international teachers' skills of interpretation and relating were at the lowest level. Regarding international travel experiences, contact with international friends, social media contact, and frequency of co-worker contact were found to affect the ICC score of two groups; however, no effect on ICC score was found in regard to international seminars/training experiences. This study suggests that ICC components could be integrated into vocational education. Moreover, travel experiences and intercultural contact could contribute as extra activities for developing ICC in ELT.

**Index Terms**—Intercultural Communicative Competence, English Language Teaching, English teachers, Thai Vocational Education

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest challenges in today's globalized world is communicating and interacting effectively with people from different parts of the world—which is known as intercultural interaction. This communication is increasing as globalized communication becomes standard, and the range of language and cultural backgrounds involved in interactions are also increasing. The complexity of the above-mentioned communication often affects the interaction between culturally diverse people. Cultural norms are unknown when at least two languages and two cultures interact, so the participants rely on knowledge of their own culture and their limited knowledge of the other person's culture (McCloskey, 2019). Through these interactions, they adapt their behavior to norms specific to that group.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) had been developed relative to its importance. Post-pandemic, ICC is influential when people interact with a diverse group and is often used adaptably, evolving through skills acquired within the intercultural interaction. Accordingly, vocational education has had to face the challenges and meet the skill needs of ICC to prepare students working in multinational and multicultural work environments in many businesses and industries, in line with the theory of intercultural communication. With examining the level of ICC, the high levels of ICC may lead to the current intercultural challenges for English Language Teaching (ELT) in Thai vocational education.

To achieve effective communication, ELT in Thai vocational education should develop the learner's ability to communicate with people of different nationalities in English rather than merely focusing on language teaching (Chao, 2015). English teachers who work in Thai vocational colleges include local (Thai) teachers and international teachers (non-Thai) who are non-native English speakers (non-NES). This study was thereby conducted to assess the vocational Thai and foreign English teachers' levels of ICC, to compare the differences in ICC levels between Thai and foreign English teachers, and lastly, to identify factors that may have an impact on their ICC levels.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### A. ICC Components

ICC is defined as an individual's capacity to interact effectively and appropriately with people from a different cultural background in a situation where individuals from different countries, or those living in the same country, meet (Byram, 2020). This would cover encounters between people migrating from a country, or even sojourners (Byram, 2020). ICC was conceived by Byram (2020), with his model containing five sub-components—knowledge, attitude, skills of interpretation and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. First, the knowledge component determines what is known of one's social groups, their cultures, and similar knowledge of the interlocutor's social groups and culture, and understanding of the interaction process at an individual and societal level. Second, attitude measures ICC related to language teaching and emphasizes two capacities: the first capacity is curiosity, openness, and readiness when faced with people from various cultures, and the second is an ability and willingness to not judge one's own culture as superior to that of others (Byram, 2020). Moreover, skills of interpretation and relating determine the capacity of an individual to interpret situations or documents from another culture and to explain and relate them to events from one's interpretations of situations or documents. The fourth underlying rationale of ICC are skills of discovery and interaction, where the capacity to interact in real time and to discover new cultural knowledge as well as the capacity to use existing knowledge, skills, and attitudes under the pressure of real-time communication and interaction. The last component is critical cultural awareness, which is a vital component in the ICC model. It determines the capacity to evaluate critically based on different perspectives, a reasoning process, and values displayed in one's own culture and other cultures (Byram, 2020).

ICC has been incorporated into the teaching of English in recent years (Lwanga-Lumu, 2020; Petosi & Karras, 2020; Taylor, 2022) with some previous studies investigating the viewpoints of teachers, students, and educators (Günçavdi & Polat, 2016; Sangiamchit, 2017; Tawagi & Mak, 2015), while other studies have addressed ICC relating to just teachers (Gong et al., 2018; Thongpan & Thumawongsa, 2019; Yazdanpanah, 2019). Gong et al. (2018) found that teachers prioritized teaching intercultural knowledge followed by teaching intercultural attitude, and a study conducted by Thongpan and Thumawongsa (2019) measured the ICC levels of international teachers of English. The results revealed that all the ICC components were necessary for classroom language teaching, and teachers with high levels of ICC were aware of diverse cultural practices within language teaching and learning (Yazdanpanah, 2019). Given the existing studies, teachers, students, and educators have had opportunities to investigate the outcomes of ICC in ELT. These investigations have focused mainly on local English teachers, with several studies having been conducted on local teachers of English at vocational colleges in Thailand (Loo et al., 2019). Their studies emphasized pedagogical approaches employed in English classrooms and revealed that the teachers' lack of ICC knowledge had an effect on their teaching. There have also been several studies on international English teachers (Loo et al., 2019; Thongpan & Thumawongsa, 2019). Existing research has examined the levels of ICC among international teachers (Loo et al., 2019), but there is a research gap as there has been insufficient research examining Thai teachers' ICC levels compared to those of international teachers in vocational education.

### *B. Intercultural Background*

Intercultural background is a common factor that should be investigated. In this study, intercultural background refers to how participants have engaged with individuals from culturally or ethnically dissimilar backgrounds, including experiences of international travel, participation in international seminars/training, and intercultural contact (Guzman, 2018). International travel refers to the way that intercultural competence can be developed by those who have traveled. Any travel or tourist stays would have an effect on that development, with the duration of the visit influencing the number of intercultural experiences gained (Guzman, 2018). In this study, the operational definition of intercultural seminar/training is an event where a member of a particular culture interacts with members of another culture. Participation in intercultural seminars/training is aimed at getting chances to experience intercultural situations. The experiences of teachers taking intercultural courses or seminars may influence perceptions of the level of ICC. Cui (2016) suggests that the number of culturally oriented courses taken affects a teacher's level of intercultural competence.

Intercultural contact is one factor of intercultural background which refers to the various ways in which people engage with individuals from culturally or ethnically dissimilar backgrounds (Brand, 2014). These individuals can be international friends and co-workers (Baron-Earle, 2013), and the use of social media which is relevant to intercultural communication (Chen, 2012). Therefore, intercultural contact used in this study includes the frequency of co-worker contact, international friend contact, and social media contact.

Many researchers have suggested that intercultural background affects the levels of ICC the most (Cui, 2016; Estaji & Tabrizi, 2022; Jubert, 2016; Liu, 2019; Peng & Wu, 2016; Spijkers & Loopmans, 2020; Zhang, 2017), with the results showing that cultural background influenced intercultural communication. It was found that a higher frequency of intercultural contact with other nationalities led to a higher level of ICC, with direct contact and social media interaction also affecting ICC. However, this effect is not independent of actual interplay with the host culture (Liu, 2019), and the number of countries visited could not predict a teacher's ICC level. Prior international experiences were found to be unconnected to ICC levels (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2022), but social media was found to have a strong effect on the development of ICC (Peng & Wu, 2016). Thus, investigating how an English teacher's intercultural backgrounds influence their ICC levels would promote intercultural activities in ELT.

The study aims to examine the ICC levels of Thai and foreign English teachers, compare the differences in ICC levels between Thai and international teachers of English, and investigate whether cultural background affects the ICC levels of the two groups of English teachers. The above purposes of this study lead to the following research questions:

1. What are Thai and international English teachers' levels of ICC?
2. Do Thai and international English teachers differ in their ICC levels?
3. Do teachers' intercultural backgrounds affect their levels of ICC?

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Setting and Participants

The population was English teachers from 429 vocational colleges across Thailand. In total, 120 Thai teachers were randomly selected, and 113 of them agreed to participate in the study and complete the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 94.17%.

Investigation of international teachers of English in all or most colleges in Thai vocational colleges was not possible; therefore, some of the colleges were selected as representative cases. A total of 49 colleges in Thailand were selected, with 36 colleges completing the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 73.47%.

#### B. Instrumentation and Scoring Criteria

The questionnaire consisted of ICC scales and an intercultural background survey. ICC scales are one of the most widely used assessments of intercultural communication, measuring the ability of an individual to communicate and interact effectively. The ICC scale consisted of 23 items, rooted in the Byram ICC model (2020), related to the five sub-scales, which were knowledge (eight items), attitude (five items), skills of interpretation and relating (three items), skills of discovery and interaction (four items), and critical cultural awareness (three items). The Likert scale responses for the ICC scales were divided into a 5-point rating scale, with participants rating each item as strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. Participants could earn up to 5 points per item, with a maximum total of 115 points, and higher ratings indicated a higher level of ICC. Assigned scores were averaged across items and rates, and the mean and total scores are reported.

Another section of the questionnaire was the intercultural background survey, which consisted of items which assessed their international travel history, international seminar/conference/training experiences, and previous intercultural contact. To assess an individual's prior experiences, yes/no options were provided. If participants responded "Yes", they were asked to indicate the number of countries they had visited and the number of international seminar/conference/training sessions they had participated in. For intercultural contact, the survey relied on self-reporting, with the scale designed to measure the frequency of a participant's intercultural contact with people from different cultures. Participants indicated this frequency on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always), based on contact with co-workers and relevant international friends, and social media contacts.

#### C. Data Collection

Following approval from the Ethics Committee of Srinakharinwirot University (approval granted on July 29, 2021), the questionnaire was piloted with 30 teachers to ensure that the questions could be understood before the data collection. Once this was assured, all the individuals involved electronically signed a knowledge consent form and completed the questionnaire online. The official letter of permission and survey link was distributed to 168 targeted colleges via E-office, and a total of 149 responses were collected using Google Forms. These were exported to an Excel CSV file, copied into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20, and prepared for data analysis.

#### D. Data Analysis

For the first research question, the mean scores were computed to examine the level of ICC and its five components of the two groups of teachers. The mean scores were classified according to the following criteria: 1.00-1.80 was designated as "very low", 1.81-2.60 as "low", 2.61-3.40 as "middle", 3.41-4.20 as "high", and 4.21-5.00 as "very high". These criteria were used to show the categorical data distribution of ICC levels among the five components.

The data analysis determined if there were any statistically significant differences between the two groups for answering research question 2. The assumptions of parametric tests had not been violated, so an independently sampled t-test was used to determine the significant differences in the variability between teacher types according to ICC, which has a mean score with an alpha value of 0.05.

A two-way analysis of variance test (ANOVA) was used to analyze the third research question. This analysis was performed to examine the significant differences for the variables of teacher type and intercultural background based on the ICC total score, and a Scheffe Post-Hoc Test was used to determine statistically valid relationships between the variables, with the statistical significance deemed to be 0.05 for all analyses. Eta squared values were calculated to find the effect values, which were interpreted as suggested by Cohen's *d* as: small effect size =0.20, medium effect size =0.50, and large effect size =0.80 (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). For the international travel experiences and seminar/training participation, teachers who responded "No" were excluded from the analysis, and similarly, teachers

who did not report their prior international seminars/training were dropped from the analysis of teacher types and intercultural backgrounds using the ICC score.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### A. ICC Level

The investigation of Thai and international teachers regarding their ICC levels is presented according to each component of ICC, and the study also reports the mean and SD of each component. The numerical value affixed to each component (ranking) represents the means of both Thai and international teachers' groups. The components with the highest means were given the highest ranks and the components with the lowest means were given the lowest ranks.

TABLE 1  
COMPARISON OF MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION (S.D.), AND INTERPRETATION OF THE ICC LEVELS BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS

Components of ICC	Thai Teachers (n=113)			Ranking	International Teachers (n=36)			Ranking
	Mean	S.D	Levels		Mean	S.D	Levels	
Knowledge	3.90	0.82	High	3	4.41	0.41	Very High	2
Attitude	4.33	0.62	Very High	1	4.52	0.42	Very High	1
Skills of Interpretation and Relating	3.84	0.85	High	4	4.36	0.55	Very High	5
Skills of Discovery and Interaction	3.91	0.80	High	2	4.39	0.51	Very High	3
Critical Cultural Awareness	3.70	0.81	High	5	4.37	0.69	Very High	4
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.96</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>High</b>		<b>4.42</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>Very High</b>	

Table 1 shows that the ICC level of the international English teachers ( $M=4.42$ ,  $SD=0.36$ ) was slightly higher than that of the Thai English teachers ( $M=3.96$ ,  $SD=0.57$ ). The ICC levels of the Thai teachers were somewhat lower than those of the international teachers across all categories. It was found that the attitude component was ranked as the highest component of both Thai and international English teachers. The lowest level of ICC among the Thai teachers was found in critical cultural awareness, while skills of interpretation and relating were found to be the lowest among international teachers.

##### B. Comparison of ICC Level by Teacher Type

An independent samples t-test was used to compare the means of the two samples, and it showed that the two samples were normally distributed from the randomly assigned groups (For each group, the Shapiro-Wilk test showed a non-significant difference,  $p>0.05$ ). The two variances were approximately equal (Levene's test showed the variances were not significantly different,  $p>0.05$ ). Thus, these assumptions were not violated. The independent samples t-test could be performed to determine a statistical difference in the mean scores for ICC.

TABLE 2  
RESULT OF AN INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST SHOWING ICC LEVEL DIFFERENCE ACCORDING TO TEACHER TYPE

Variables	Assumptions	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T	df	Sig.
		F	Sig.			
Total Score	Equal variances assumed	6.089	.015	-4.587	147	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.729	93.316	.000*

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 2 shows the results of the independent samples t-test,  $p=0.00$ , which indicate that the average ICC scores of the two groups of teachers were significantly different. When both Thai and international teachers were compared, the average ICC score for the international teachers' responses was higher ( $M=101.64$ ,  $SD=8.35$ ) than that of the Thai teachers ( $M=91.00$ ,  $SD=13.08$ ).

After testing the levels of ICC, it was decided that the five sub-scales of ICC components be analyzed to further understand the differences between the two groups. An independent samples t-test was used to interpret this data. Overall, it was found that all components demonstrated significant differences in the level of ICC between two groups.

TABLE 3  
RESULT OF AN INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST SHOWING ICC LEVEL DIFFERENCE OF EACH SUB-COMPONENT ACCORDING TO TEACHER TYPE

	Thai		International		Group Comparison		
	M	SD	M	SD	t	df	Sig.
Knowledge	31.11	6.52	35.28	3.28	-5.074	119.380	.000*
Attitude	21.58	3.12	22.61	2.09	-2.275	88.581	.025*
Skills of interpretation and relating	11.54	2.56	13.08	1.65	-4.227	92.740	.000*
Skills of discovery and interaction	15.65	3.22	17.56	2.02	-4.217	95.031	.000*
Critical cultural awareness	11.13	2.44	13.11	1.93	-4.774	68.952	.000*

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3 shows that there was a significant difference between Thai and international teachers' knowledge ( $p=.000$ ), attitude ( $p=.025$ ), skills of interpretation and relating ( $p=.000$ ), skills of discovery and interaction ( $p=.000$ ), and critical

cultural awareness ( $p=.000$ ). These results reveal a significant difference between the two groups' ICC levels, specifically in the five components of ICC.

In sum, group differences exist between Thai and international teachers for the five components. The international teachers gained higher scores than the Thai teachers in all five components. This result indicates that international teachers tend to know more about appropriate and effective intercultural communication than Thai teachers.

### C. Influence of Intercultural Background on ICC Scores

This study specifically explored the influence of a teacher's intercultural background on their ICC levels. The intercultural backgrounds were investigated using three variables: international travel experience, international seminar/training experiences, and intercultural contact. The assumption of the two-way ANOVA was not violated and was fulfilled.

#### (a). International Travel Experience

TABLE 4  
RESULT OF A TWO-WAY ANOVA TEST ON THE ICC LEVEL FOR DIFFERENT TEACHER TYPES IN RELATION TO TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Types of Teachers	764.581	1	764.581	6.121	.015	.055
Numbers of Countries	416.430	3	138.810	1.111	.348	**ns
Types of Teachers x No. of Countries	216.839	3	72.280	.579	.630	**ns
Error	13114.729	105	124.902			

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Non-significant

Table 4 shows that the effect of interaction between the types of teachers and the number of countries visited was not statistically significant at  $F(3,105)=.579$ . Thus, this result could be used to examine the effects of other components. The results revealed a significant effect for the types of teachers  $p=.015$ , which indicates a significant difference between Thai and international teachers on the ICC score. The effect size, according to the partial Eta-squared value, for this statistical difference was small, at  $\eta^2=.055$ , and this value indicates that this variable affects the ICC level.

#### (b). International Seminar/Training Experiences

TABLE 5  
RESULT OF A TWO-WAY ANOVA TEST ON THE ICC LEVEL FOR DIFFERENT TEACHER TYPES IN RELATION TO INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR/TRAINING EXPERIENCES

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Types of Teachers	52.529	1	52.529	.379	.541	**ns
Number of Seminars/Training Courses	251.948	3	83.983	.606	.614	**ns
Types of Teachers * Numbers of Seminars/Training Courses	384.908	3	128.303	.925	.434	**ns
Error	8321.554	60	138.693			

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Non-significant

Table 5 shows that the interaction effect between the different types of teachers and their participation in seminars/training was not statistically significant at  $F(1, 60)=.379$ ,  $p=.541$ . In addition, a significant effect related to the teacher type and the number of seminars was not found either ( $p>0.05$ ), which indicates that this component did not affect their ICC scores.

#### (c.) Intercultural Contact

##### 1. Intercultural Contact With Co-Workers From Different Cultures

TABLE 6  
RESULT OF A TWO-WAY ANOVA TEST ON THE ICC LEVEL FOR DIFFERENT TEACHER TYPES IN RELATION TO CO-WORKER CONTACT

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Types of Teachers	17.491	1	17.491	.144	.705	**ns
Frequency of Co-Worker Contact	4267.474	4	1066.868	8.785	.000*	.201
Types of Teachers * Frequency of Co-Worker Contact	474.049	3	158.016	1.301	.277	**ns
Error	17002.821	140	121.449			

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Non-significant

Table 6 shows a significant effect for the frequency of co-worker contact,  $p=.000$ , which indicates that the number of seminar participation events was significantly different from the ICC score with  $F(4, 140)=8.785$ ,  $p=.000$ , and the

effect size was small,  $\eta^2 = .201$ . Thus, post-hoc tests were conducted to investigate the main effects of the frequency of contact with co-workers. The Scheffe Post-Hoc Test was employed to compare the frequency of co-worker contact. The results showed significant differences in the ICC score based on some frequencies relating to co-worker contact, with the scores for never-sometimes, never-often, and never-always being significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).

## 2. Intercultural Contact With Friends of Different Nationalities

TABLE 7  
RESULT OF A TWO-WAY ANOVA TEST ON THE ICC LEVEL FOR DIFFERENT TEACHER TYPES IN RELATION TO INTERNATIONAL FRIEND CONTACT

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Types of Teachers	689.496	1	689.496	4.723	.031*	.032
Frequency of International Friend Contact	586.099	4	146.525	1.004	.408	<i>ns</i> **
Types of Teachers * Frequency of International Friend Contact	43.216	2	21.608	.148	.863	<i>ns</i> **
Error	20582.582	141	145.976			

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Non-significant

Table 7 shows that the interaction effect between types of teachers and international friend contact was not statistically significant at  $F(2, 141) = .148$ . This result allows it to be used for the main effects of the other factors, and the main effect of teacher types. The score for teacher types ( $1, 141$ ) = 4.723,  $p = .31$  was found to be significant at an alpha of 0.05, and the effect size for this difference was small,  $\eta^2 = .032$ . However, the effect of frequency of interaction with international friends at  $F(4, 141) = 1.004$ , was not found to be significant.

## 3. Social Media Contact

TABLE 8  
RESULT OF A TWO-WAY ANOVA TEST ON THE ICC LEVEL FOR DIFFERENT TEACHER TYPES IN RELATION TO SOCIAL MEDIA CONTACT

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Types of Teachers	765.583	1	765.583	5.584	.020*	.144
Frequency of Social Media Contact	1087.360	4	271.840	1.983	.100	<i>**ns</i>
Types of Teachers * Frequency of Social Media Contact	907.330	4	226.833	1.654	.164	<i>**ns</i>
Error	19058.178	139	137.109			

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\*Non-significant

Table 8 shows that the interaction effect between types of teachers and frequency of social media contact was not statistically significant at  $F(4, 139) = 1.654$ . This result could be used for the main effects of the other factors as the main effect of types of teachers, at  $F(1, 139) = 5.584$ ,  $p = .020$ , was found to be significant at an alpha of 0.05, and the effect size for this difference was small,  $\eta^2 = .144$ . However, the frequency of social media contact, at  $F(4, 139) = 1.983$ , was not found to be significant.

In sum, the effect of intercultural background on ICC scores has been computed, and several sub-variables of intercultural background, including international travel, international friend contact, frequency of co-worker contact, and social media contact, were found to have significant differences according to types of teachers. On the other hand, international seminar/training experiences were found not to affect teachers' ICC.

## V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to ascertain whether there is a difference between the ICC levels of the two groups and investigate the influence of intercultural background on a teacher's level of ICC. Previous studies have neither focused on the ICC levels of Thai (local) and NNES teachers (international teachers), nor compared the levels. This study examines the ICC levels of the two groups and the difference in ICC ratings between the two groups using teachers from vocational colleges across five Thai regions. The results presented here show three main points. First, they show that the teachers' levels of ICC were investigated using the five components of ICC. Second, they show the differences in the teachers' levels of ICC, which could be explained using the average mean scores from Thai and international teachers. Thirdly, they show how intercultural backgrounds were used to examine the effect on the ICC scores of the two groups of teachers. All three points will be discussed based on the research questions of the study.

### A. Teachers' ICC Levels (Research Question 1)

The first research question focused on the level of ICC among the teachers who answered the ICC questionnaire. The findings show that the ICC components can be rated and the ICC levels of teachers can be compared between two groups. International teachers attained higher scores on components dealing with knowledge, skills of interpretation and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction than Thai teachers. The lowest score across all the components was for critical cultural awareness, which was found among Thai teachers, while the lowest score of international teachers was

for skills of interpretation and relating. International teachers were at a very high level in all categories, but Thai teachers only reached this level for the attitude component, where both groups scored equally high.

Thai and international teachers scored highly on the attitude component, revealing that they were open-minded and ready to act on cultural differences, which could be related to the study of Abduh and Rosmaladewi (2018). They state that the attitude component influences ICC levels the most. Furthermore, Saricoban and Oz (2014) also state that communication between people from different cultures was affected by the attitude of others, and Estaji and Tabrizi (2022) show that teachers were more open-minded and more respectful of other cultures in some contexts, which facilitated the intercultural process in learning situations. Alalwi (2016) describe interlocutors becoming more open-minded when interacting in intercultural communication, which corroborates Byram (2020), who states that a high score for the attitude component is a precondition for successful intercultural communication.

Within the five components, Thai teachers scored lowest for critical cultural awareness. It might be because of the fact that Thai teachers live primarily within their own culture, so they may value their culture while paying less attention to other cultures when communicating with people from different cultures. This may be why Thai teachers scored lower in this component. Riley and Pidgeon (2019) state that teachers who teach within their own culture cannot recognize cultural differences and will unconsciously attach negative stereotypes to people in other cultures. Hendrith (2018) suggests that teachers' lack of awareness about cultural differences may lead them to be ineffective at communicating, which indicates that they may lack ICC awareness, even if it is facilitated by their own experiences with successful intercultural communication. As such, being aware of the different cultures of foreigners is necessary within ICC; however, critical cultural awareness was considered less effective in intercultural communication among Thai teachers.

International teachers scored lowest for the skills of interpretation and relating; these skills may also reflect the idea that non-verbal communication creates misunderstandings and conflicts, especially in regard to behavior, which can create limits to understanding non-verbal meaning. International teachers may see that avoiding conflict means understanding other ways of communication as well as knowledge expressed in different cultures rather than interpretation and understanding of the behavior produced. For instance, the communication behavior may be individual in terms of writing or body movements, depending on the medium in which the intercultural communication has occurred. Interpretation may be factual and emotional interpretation may be influenced by their cultural knowledge. Ten (2014) states that each culture creates particular concepts of communicative behavior. Therefore, the ability to interpret the communicative behavior which has occurred in the intercultural communication would be at the lowest level among international teachers.

#### *B. Distinction between Thai and International Teachers (Research Question 2)*

In regard to the second research question, "Do Thai and international teachers of English differ in their levels of ICC?" the findings of this study demonstrated that there were significant differences between the two groups related to the levels of ICC, with international teachers demonstrating a higher level of ICC than Thai teachers. One explanation for this finding is that international teachers working or living in Thailand are living in an intercultural situation, so their ICC competency is naturally enhanced. Difficulties in everyday life will increase their level of ICC as well as improve communication skills and their ability to interact with people of different cultural backgrounds (Murray, 2022). The Thai teachers' lower levels of ICC may be caused by having less experience working with people from different countries and backgrounds, or poorly executed intercultural experiences, which reduces confidence in interaction with other nationalities. On the other hand, international teachers bring real ICC experiences gained recently; therefore, they have confidence in communicating with people of diverse nationalities.

International teachers with high levels of ICC, who have qualities that help them adhere to the behavior of most members of the host culture, are non-native English speakers (NNES); this is a group that typically includes cultural diversity. International teachers therefore gain more ICC experience as they work alongside both the local hosts and other cultures different from their own on a daily basis. Their host country's culture and other cultures are different, so behaviors must be adapted to communicate appropriately (Zhang, 2017), possibly leading to higher levels of ICC. Thai teachers may not have an awareness of themselves and may evaluate their own cultural norms as an important condition for interaction with people from different cultures. A conclusion that can be drawn from the above observation is that the experience of moving to work in Thailand, which forces adjustment to the host and other cultures, has an effect. International teachers must attempt to understand cultural differences to succeed, which is reflected in the higher levels of ICC.

Moreover, international teachers who have experiences in cross-cultural communication, lead to high levels of ICC. This fact is in line with the study of Ulla (2018), who found that NNES with experience working in other countries could have more ability to communicate successfully across cultures, which leads to a higher ICC level. One explanation for international teachers who are NNES showing higher levels of ICC than Thai teachers may be that when they move to Thailand, they meet more difficulties in intercultural communication and it may be beyond their ability to solve these problems caused by cultural differences in real time (Günçavdi & Polat, 2016). On the other hand, if Thai teachers are aware of difficult problems that they are unable to solve, they may remain at a lower level of ICC as well as avoid communicating with people who are from different cultures or countries. Therefore, international teachers tend to have more individual competency in intercultural situations.

### C. *Effect of Intercultural Background on ICC Levels (Research Question 3)*

This section addresses the third research question, “Do teachers’ intercultural backgrounds affect their levels of ICC?” This study found that the level of ICC was significantly different between those with international experience and those who had none. The international teachers had more international experiences, created by interaction with people of other nationalities as well as those of the home country (Thailand), whereas Thais only had a limited number of interactions with the international group. This fact might imply that experience gained through living in places where different cultural encounters are common enhances ICC (Guzman, 2018; Zhang, 2017). Thus, international teachers with experience of living in different cultures were more sensitive in terms of intercultural differences. Zhang (2017) states that there were significant effects on ICC caused by intercultural experiences, as those international experiences start the adaptation process, which can produce competencies in intercultural communication.

It is, therefore, not surprising that international friend contact affects ICC. This study reached similar conclusions by considering intercultural friendships, which were effective in providing successful communication in the context of cultural differences (Şekerci & Doğan, 2020). This finding is also congruent with research by Sousa, Gonçalves, and Santos (2019), which states that contact with friends of other nationalities has a significant effect on ICC. Tawagi and Anita (2015) also found that international teachers who had international friends had higher levels of ICC than Thai teachers. This might be because the international teachers commonly arrive as individuals with prior experiences in contacting potential international friends. As such, they have both the need and ability to communicate with NES and NNEs, whereas Thai teachers’ international friend contact would be less extensive, and they would have less experience communicating in intercultural situations (Tawagi & Anita, 2015).

Contact with co-workers did not affect ICC levels for either Thai or international teachers. However, the impact of frequent contact with co-workers could be of particular interest, as the difference in the frequency of contact with co-workers could affect the ICC score. Teachers who scored highly on ICC also had frequent co-worker contact, which was obvious for international teachers working in Thai colleges. Baron-Earle (2013) emphasized the importance of the number of times there was contact with foreign friends in raising ICC levels, and since both Thai and international teachers have contact with each other frequently at college, they have more opportunities to interact in intercultural situations. Spijkers and Loopmans (2020) state that intercultural contact within college does not influence intercultural competence, but this study explored the frequency of co-worker contact, which quite possibly influences ICC levels.

This study found that social media contact also affects ICC. As mentioned earlier in this paper, social media has been found to have a strong effect on the development of ICC. Peng and Wu (2016) found that social media contact affects ICC, and that an international teacher’s ICC level may be enhanced through social media. Therefore, this study tends to suggest that this factor is still strongly influential in intercultural communication despite the implementation of other strategies used in ICC. This finding is consistent with those in previous studies of Elboubekri (2017) and Liu (2019). However, this study did not find that the frequency of social media contact affects ICC. There might be a need for international teachers to have more social media contact with people from different cultures, if not more social media interaction.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Thai teachers gained a high score in four out of five sub-components of ICC, which were knowledge, skills of interpretation and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness, and gained a very high score for attitude. International teachers gained a very high score in all five areas. Teachers with a high level of ICC can build their knowledge and understand events in history and how such knowledge relates to a social group. Byram (2020), who observed how ICC allows intercultural speakers to enhance their own individual understanding, showed how it is important to respect the values and cultures of intercultural speakers and their countries. Moreover, curiosity and openness when faced with people from various cultures, and how teachers interpret events are important for mutual understanding. Higher levels of ICC are found where there is effective interaction and communication between people from different countries, and the results of this study suggest that two types of experiences would be considered relevant in effecting influences in ICC: international travel and intercultural contact (frequency of contact with co-workers, contact with international friends, and social media contact). Vocational education can contribute by providing extra activities as well as encouraging students to make international friends and social media contacts to increase their ICC and understanding of cultures different from their own. Intercultural background influences both ICC and the learners’ skills to allow them to work effectively in diverse environments.

The implications of this study could be used to promote ICC within ELT in vocational education, and give impetus for prioritizing the teaching of the highest ICC components levels to vocational students in Thailand. This study may help curriculum designers, English teachers, and educational researchers select activities related to international travel or intercultural contact, such as promoting international friendships and social media contact as extra activities to increase students’ ICC levels. Furthermore, educators can choose whether to combine ELT and ICC effectively or continue to follow the native English-speaking culture only in ELT. Such a change would help effective communication and interaction with people who use English around the world.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS



This research has some limitations, but it could lead to further research opportunities. The number of participants was relatively small (international teachers); therefore, future researchers could consider sampling a larger group of participants to expand the scope of the project. Second, the non-NES international teachers were analyzed in intercultural circumstances relevant to Thailand, but further research could observe the degree to which the ICC level is relevant to their circumstances in different contexts and interactions. Finally, the researchers found that the frequency of intercultural contact with co-workers was the factor that affected the ICC score the most, in that it seems that an increased frequency of contact with individual co-workers leads to an increase in the levels of ICC. It has been suggested that in addition to further research, it is necessary to examine the number of nationalities and how individuals interact, as well as the time they spend interacting with people from different cultures. It could be viable to study the distinctions within the approach of ICC primarily based on intercultural contact levels.

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