
Research Articles

Intercultural Awareness and Attitudes Toward Intercultural Communication Among Fourth-Year Students in Thailand: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This study examined the intercultural awareness of fourth-year students at a Thai university, focusing on whether enrolment in an intercultural communication course was associated with higher levels of intercultural awareness. It also investigated the relationship between course enrolment and intercultural awareness and explored students perceived attitudes toward intercultural communication. A mixed-methods research design was employed with 150 fourth-year students enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts program at Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep. The sample comprised 75 students who had completed an intercultural communication course and 75 who had not. Quantitative data were collected using a 15-item questionnaire developed based on Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence and Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence. The instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$). Qualitative data were obtained through seven-question semi-structured interviews with 20 selected participants and analysed using thematic analysis. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, an independent-samples t-test, and Pearson's correlation.

The findings indicated that students who had enrolled in the course demonstrated significantly higher intercultural awareness ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.55$) than those who had not ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.66$), $t(148) = 5.54$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size ($d = 0.90$). Course

enrolment was also positively associated with intercultural awareness, $r(148) = .41, p < .001$. Interview findings showed that students generally perceived intercultural communication as important for their future employment, although they reported limited opportunities for authentic intercultural interaction and anxiety related to language use. The findings highlight the potential of structured intercultural communication instruction to enhance students' intercultural awareness and underscore the importance of experiential learning opportunities in developing practical intercultural communicative competence.

Keywords: Intercultural Awareness, Intercultural Communication, Thai EFL Students, Higher Education

Introduction

Language and culture are closely interconnected, shaping how individuals perceive the world, communicate meaning, and interpret the behavior of others. People from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may perceive and respond to the same situations differently because cultural values influence how messages are encoded, transmitted, and interpreted (Samovar et al., 2017). These differences become increasingly significant in an era of globalization, in which individuals frequently interact across national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. The growing movement of people across borders has also contributed to increasingly multicultural workplaces and educational environments. In Thailand, approximately 3.32 million foreign workers were reported in recent years, reflecting the country's increasingly diverse social and professional landscape.

Effective communication is fundamental to successful interaction in both professional and social contexts. As opportunities for cross-cultural contact continue to expand, intercultural communication has become an essential competence for individuals who must communicate and collaborate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Developing an understanding of cultural differences can reduce misunderstanding, promote mutual respect, and support more effective communication. Baldwin et al. (2023) emphasize that the ability to understand and engage with cultural differences is increasingly important in contemporary

globalized societies. In the Thai higher education context, intercultural communication competence is similarly considered important for preparing university students to participate effectively in international workplaces and multicultural environments (Thongprayoon et al., 2020).

Recognizing this growing need, the Bachelor of Arts program at Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep introduced the course “English for Cross-Cultural Communication.” The course was designed to provide students with opportunities to develop English communication skills while increasing their understanding of cultural differences and intercultural interaction. However, although intercultural communication courses are increasingly incorporated into higher education curricula, there remains a need to examine whether participation in such courses is associated with students’ actual levels of intercultural awareness.

In particular, limited research has compared the intercultural awareness of students who have enrolled in intercultural communication courses with that of students who have not received such course-based instruction within the same university context. This gap makes it difficult to determine the extent to which formal academic exposure to intercultural communication contributes to students’ awareness of cultural differences and their attitudes toward intercultural interaction. Therefore, the present study examines the intercultural awareness of fourth-year students at a Thai university, compares students who enrolled in an intercultural communication course with those who did not, and investigates the relationship between course enrolment and intercultural awareness. The findings are expected to provide useful evidence for improving intercultural communication education and preparing Thai university students for increasingly multicultural academic and professional environments.

Objective

1. To examine whether students who enrolled in intercultural communication courses demonstrate higher levels of intercultural awareness,
2. To analyse the relationship between course enrolment and students' intercultural awareness
3. To explore the perceived attitudes of fourth-year students toward the concept of intercultural communication.

Literature Review

Culture and Intercultural Communication

Culture strongly influences how individuals perceive, interpret, and communicate about the world. Samovar et al. (2017) explain that people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may perceive reality differently because cultural values influence how messages are encoded, transmitted, and interpreted. Culture therefore encompasses not only observable customs and traditions but also underlying beliefs, values, expectations, and behavioural patterns. Geertz (1973) conceptualizes culture as a system of meanings through which people communicate, develop knowledge, and interpret their experiences, while Hall (1973) emphasizes that many cultural influences operate implicitly and may affect behaviour without conscious awareness. Williams (2014) similarly views culture as a complex concept whose meanings vary across social and historical contexts. These perspectives indicate that communication is closely connected to culture because individuals interpret messages through culturally shaped frameworks. Consequently, effective intercultural communication requires awareness of both other cultural perspectives and one's own cultural assumptions. Intercultural communication education can support this awareness by encouraging learners to recognize cultural differences and reflect on alternative perspectives (Baker, 2024; Baldwin et al., 2023).

Intercultural Competence and Awareness

Intercultural competence has become increasingly important in education and employment because graduates are expected to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Bremer, 2006; Hulstrand, 2008). However, intercultural competence is a multidimensional concept involving attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviours rather than simply knowledge about another culture (Fantini, 2009). Deardorff's (2006) process model provides an influential framework for understanding intercultural competence. It identifies attitudes, knowledge, and skills as foundational elements leading to internal outcomes such as flexibility and adaptability and, ultimately, appropriate intercultural behaviour. Important attitudes include respect, openness, and curiosity; knowledge involves cultural self-awareness and understanding of other cultures; and skills include observing, listening, interpreting, analysing, and evaluating intercultural situations. Intercultural awareness can therefore be viewed as an important cognitive foundation of intercultural competence. It involves recognizing differences in cultural values, perspectives, communication conventions, and interpretations; while also becoming aware of one's own cultural assumptions. Byram (1997) similarly emphasizes attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating skills, interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness. These models suggest that intercultural learning should extend beyond memorizing information about other cultures and should encourage students to critically reflect on cultural perspectives and their own positioning.

Intercultural Communication Education and Student Development

Intercultural communication courses provide structured opportunities for students to develop cultural knowledge, awareness, and reflective skills. Unlike incidental exposure to cultural diversity, formal coursework can systematically address cultural values, communication patterns, stereotypes, and perspectives. Karras (2017), for example, found that participation in an intercultural communication course was associated with increased intercultural sensitivity among university students. Research in Thailand also demonstrates the importance of

intercultural learning. Thongprayoon et al. (2020) highlighted the significance of intercultural communicative competencies among Thai undergraduate students, while Wattanavorakijkul (2020) found that international experience was related to Thai university students' intercultural sensitivity. Rattanaphumma and Visuttakul (2022) likewise emphasized the contribution of international experiences to multilingual and intercultural development. More recently, Namfah and Kulsitthiboon (2025) demonstrated that intercultural awareness among Thai tertiary EFL students can be deliberately developed through inquiry-based learning and digital platforms. Baker (2024) also emphasizes the close relationship between language learning and intercultural development. Although these studies indicate that intercultural learning opportunities may enhance awareness and sensitivity, much previous research has focused on international experiences, study-abroad programs, or specific instructional approaches. Less attention has been given to whether enrolment in a formal intercultural communication course itself is associated with differences in intercultural awareness among students within the same university context. This provides a basis for the present study.

Course Enrolment and Intercultural Awareness

The present study first examines whether students who enrolled in an intercultural communication course demonstrate higher levels of intercultural awareness than those who did not. This objective is based on the assumption that structured coursework provides conceptual knowledge and opportunities for reflection that may strengthen students' understanding of cultural differences. From Deardorff's (2006) perspective, intercultural education may develop openness and respect, increase cultural knowledge, and strengthen skills for interpreting and analysing intercultural situations. Students who have studied intercultural communication may therefore demonstrate greater awareness than those without comparable coursework. However, course enrolment should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of causation because students may differ in previous intercultural experiences, language backgrounds, international exposure, and personal interests. The present study

therefore focuses on examining differences and relationships rather than assuming that course participation alone determines intercultural awareness.

Attitudes Toward Intercultural Communication

Students' attitudes toward intercultural communication are another important aspect of intercultural development. Positive attitudes such as openness, curiosity, respect, and willingness to engage with cultural differences are central to intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a complementary perspective by proposing that behavioural intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Applied to intercultural communication, students with positive attitudes toward intercultural interaction may be more willing to engage with people from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, TPB helps explain the potential relationship between students' attitudes and their willingness to participate in intercultural communication, complementing the intercultural competence frameworks of Deardorff (2006) and Byram (1997).

Theoretical Framework of the Present Study

The framework focuses on three areas: differences in intercultural awareness between students who enrolled and did not enroll in the course, the relationship between course enrolment and intercultural awareness, and students perceived attitudes toward intercultural communication. Although previous research suggests that intercultural education can enhance cultural knowledge, openness, self-awareness, and reflection, limited evidence exists among Thai university students. This study therefore addresses this gap by examining course enrolment, intercultural awareness, and students' attitudes within a Thai higher-education context.

Research Methodology

Research Method

In this study, the mixed research method was used to collect the data. A questionnaire was employed in this study to explore the intercultural awareness. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews provided further insights into participants' viewpoints. Both research methods, including questionnaire analysis and in-depth interviews, were used to obtain a deeper understanding of the research problem from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Data Collection

For the purpose of the study, questionnaire was carried out to a sample of fourth-year students who study at Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep. A purposive sampling was employed to select the fourth-year students to participate in this study. The sample consisted of 150 people studying in various majors in the Bachelor of Arts program. Undergraduates in this program were selected as the data source because the faculty offered the “English for Cross-Cultural Communication” course which emphasized the use of English for intercultural communication and provided practical training for undergraduates in applying English across diverse situations.

The data were collected from 150 fourth-year students using a fifteen-item structured questionnaire and 20 participants who completed the questionnaire were selected for a seven-question semi-structured interview. The questionnaire aimed to explore students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours related to interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. The participants were divided into two groups, 75 students who had enrolled in the intercultural communication course and 75 who had not. Purposive sampling was employed to select fourth-year students in the Bachelor of Arts program who met the study criteria. For the qualitative phase, 20 questionnaire respondents were selected from both groups, with

approximately equal representation, to obtain in-depth insights and allow comparison between students with and without formal exposure to the intercultural communication course within the same institutional context. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and was conducted in Thai to ensure clear expression of the participants' views.

Before participating in the study, all participants were informed about the research procedures, the objectives of the study and the expectations of their participation. The researchers ensured that the data were protect throughout the collection process. The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB No. NU-IRB-NRE/0022). All participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

Instrumental Development

The mixed research method was applied to collect and analyse data in this study. A questionnaire was used to collect the quantitative data for this study. A questionnaire was developed in order to explore the undergraduates' intercultural experiences and measure their awareness of intercultural competence. The questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical constructs from Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence and Byram's (1997) Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence. The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was also examined using Cronbach's alpha. The overall reliability coefficient was $\alpha = 0.96$, indicating excellent internal consistency. Participants were asked to degree each statement by their level of agreement: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. The questionnaire emphasized five different dimensions of intercultural awareness including cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, attitudes toward cultural differences, intercultural communication skills, and behavioural engagement.

In order to obtain more qualitative data, seven semi-structured interview questions were developed based on Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Deardorff's attitude elements. The interview items were also adapted from the questionnaire dimensions to further explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours related to interacting with people from

different cultural backgrounds. This approach allowed the researchers to gain deeper insight into students perceived attitudes, experiences, and interpretations beyond the structured survey responses.

Data analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were examined for the descriptive statistics including, mean and standard deviation of the participants' experiences and awareness in answering 15 questions. Moreover, the independent samples t-test was used to examine whether students who enrolled in an intercultural communication course demonstrated higher awareness than those who did not enrol.

Additionally, the Pearson correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between enrolment and awareness scores. In other words, correlation indicated the strength and direction of the relationship between enrolment and awareness scores across all students.

For the interviews, thematic analysis was used to analyse responses regarding fourth-year students perceived attitudes toward the concept of intercultural communication. These insights may suggest the development of the "English for Cross-Cultural Communication" course and help better prepare graduates to work in the diverse cultural environment.

Results

The findings are presented according to the three research objectives and are divided into quantitative and qualitative results. The quantitative analysis examined differences in intercultural awareness between students who had enrolled in an intercultural communication course and those who had not, as well as the relationship between course enrolment and intercultural awareness. The qualitative analysis explored fourth-year students perceived attitudes toward intercultural communication through semi-structured interviews.

A total of 150 fourth-year students participated in the study. Of these, 75 students (50%) had enrolled in an intercultural communication course, while 75 students (50%) had not. The sample comprised 111 female students (74%) and 39 male students (26%).

Intercultural Awareness of Course-Enrolled and Non-Enrolled Students

Students' intercultural awareness was measured using a 15-item, five-point Likert-scale questionnaire ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items assessed five dimensions: cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, attitudes toward cultural differences, intercultural communication skills, and behavioural intentions and engagement. As shown in Table 1, students who had enrolled in the intercultural communication course reported higher mean scores across all 15 items than students who had not enrolled. Among the course-enrolled group, the highest mean score was for "I am open to learning from people of different cultural backgrounds" ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.66$), followed by "I actively avoid making assumptions about people based on their culture" ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.76$) and "I enjoy engaging in conversations with individuals from different cultures" ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.67$). For the non-course-enrolled group, the highest mean was found for "I believe cultural differences should be respected and valued" ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.88$), followed by "I am open to learning from people of different cultural backgrounds" ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.81$). Overall, the descriptive results indicate higher levels of intercultural awareness among students who had enrolled in the course.

Table 1 Fourth-Year Students' Intercultural Awareness

Statement	Course-Enrolled	Non-Course-Enrolled
	Mean (Std. Deviation)	Mean (Std. Deviation)
I understand the basic values and beliefs of cultures other than my own.	4.37 (0.61)	3.64 (0.75)
I can describe how cultural norms influence communication styles.	4.28 (0.71)	3.64 (0.80)



Statement	Course-Enrolled	Non-Course-Enrolled
	Mean (Std. Deviation)	Mean (Std. Deviation)
I am aware of how my cultural background influences my communication.	4.43 (0.62)	3.77 (0.81)
I reflect on cultural assumptions when interacting with people from other cultures.	4.49 (0.62)	3.97 (0.80)
I am open to learning from people of different cultural backgrounds.	4.59 (0.66)	4.01 (0.81)
I enjoy engaging in conversations with individuals from different cultures.	4.51 (0.67)	3.83 (0.81)
I believe cultural differences should be respected and valued.	4.52 (0.66)	4.13 (0.88)
I try to understand things from the perspective of someone from another culture.	4.49 (0.69)	3.97 (0.80)
I can identify misunderstandings caused by cultural differences.	4.09 (0.82)	3.71 (0.78)
I can adjust my behaviour when communicating across cultures.	4.32 (0.76)	3.73 (0.79)
I seek opportunities to interact with people from different cultures.	4.28 (0.85)	3.81 (0.83)
I am motivated to improve my intercultural communication skills.	4.24 (0.80)	3.83 (0.81)
I would be interested in working in a multicultural environment.	4.29 (0.78)	3.80 (0.84)
I value the ability to work with people from different cultural backgrounds.	4.41 (0.76)	3.85 (0.87)

Statement	Course-Enrolled	Non-Course-Enrolled
	Mean (Std. Deviation)	Mean (Std. Deviation)
I actively avoid making assumptions about people based on their culture.	4.51 (0.76)	3.96 (0.86)

Difference in Intercultural Awareness by Course Enrolment

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether intercultural awareness differed significantly between students who had enrolled in the intercultural communication course and those who had not. As presented in Table 2, the course-enrolled group reported a higher overall intercultural awareness score ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.55$, $n = 75$) than the non-course-enrolled group ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.66$, $n = 75$).

The difference between the two groups was statistically significant, $t(148) = 5.54$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size ($d = 0.90$). Thus, students who had enrolled in the intercultural communication course demonstrated significantly higher intercultural awareness scores than those who had not enrolled.

Table 2 Group Statistics for Intercultural Awareness

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Course-Enrolled	75	4.39	0.55	0.064
Course-non-enrolled	75	3.84	0.66	0.076

Relationship Between Course Enrolment and Intercultural Awareness

To address the second research objective, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between course enrolment and intercultural awareness. Course enrolment was coded as 0 = non-enrolled and 1 = enrolled, while intercultural awareness was treated as a continuous variable.

The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between course enrolment and intercultural awareness, $r(148) = .41, p < .001$. The coefficient of determination was $R^2 = .17$, indicating that course enrolment was associated with approximately 17% of the variance in intercultural awareness scores. These findings demonstrate a moderate positive relationship between participation in the intercultural communication course and students reported intercultural awareness.

Table 3 Correlation Between Course Enrolment and Intercultural Awareness

	Course Enrolment	Intercultural Awareness
Course Enrolment	1	.41**
Intercultural Awareness	.41**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	-	< .001
N	150	150

Note: Course enrolment was coded as 0 = non-enrolled and 1 = enrolled. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The qualitative findings addressed the third research objective by exploring fourth-year students perceived attitudes toward intercultural communication. Seven semi-structured interview questions were analysed thematically. The analysis generated four main themes: (1) understanding of intercultural communication, (2) perceived importance for future careers, (3) positive attitudes and communication anxiety, and (4) perceived needs for developing intercultural competence.

1) Understanding of Intercultural Communication Participants generally understood intercultural communication as interaction between people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Many participants emphasized the use of English as a shared language for communicating with people from other countries. They also associated intercultural communication with exchanging cultural knowledge, understanding different values and practices, and adapting communication styles to different cultural contexts.

For example, S4 from the course-enrolled group described intercultural communication as communication with people who have different languages, cultures, and ways of thinking, while S12 from the non-enrolled group emphasized the use of English as a common language for mutual understanding. Participants also identified cultural adaptation and awareness of differences as important components of effective intercultural communication.

2) Perceived Importance for Future Careers Participants generally perceived intercultural communication as an important practical skill for their future careers. Eighteen of the 20 interviewees indicated that the ability to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds would be important in their future employment. Participants particularly associated this competence with working in international or multicultural environments.

However, two participants (S14 and S19), both from the non-enrolled group, expressed neutral views because they did not expect to work abroad or interact regularly with international colleagues or customers. Overall, the interview findings showed that most participants viewed intercultural communication as relevant to their future professional lives.

3) Positive Attitudes and Communication Anxiety Participants reported both positive and challenging experiences when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. Positive responses included curiosity, enjoyment, confidence gained through interaction, and opportunities to learn about other cultures. At the same time, several participants reported anxiety, nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and limited confidence when communicating in intercultural contexts.

For example, S2 from the course-enrolled group reported feeling nervous because of concerns about pronunciation, whereas S11 from the non-enrolled group described feeling anxious but also enjoying the experience and learning how to communicate more effectively. Similarly, S15 reported enjoying intercultural interaction despite limited language ability and viewed communication as an opportunity to exchange ideas and learn about unfamiliar cultures.

4) Perceived Needs for Developing Intercultural Competence Participants identified several factors that could support more effective intercultural communication, including

stronger English-language proficiency, greater awareness of cultural differences, improved communication skills, and more frequent opportunities to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Students who had not enrolled in the course also expressed interest in studying intercultural communication. For example, S18 indicated that taking such a course could provide greater knowledge about international people, cultures, and languages. Students who had enrolled in the course generally reported positive attitudes toward their learning experiences, particularly in terms of becoming more open-minded and adaptable. Nevertheless, some participants noted that opportunities to apply intercultural communication skills in authentic situations were limited.

Overall, the quantitative findings demonstrated significantly higher intercultural awareness among course-enrolled students and a significant positive relationship between course enrolment and intercultural awareness. The qualitative findings further indicated that students generally perceived intercultural communication positively and regarded it as an important competence for academic, social, and future professional contexts, while also recognizing language barriers, anxiety, and limited opportunities for authentic intercultural interaction.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that intercultural communication course enrolment is associated with higher levels of intercultural awareness among fourth-year students. Regarding the first research objective, students who had enrolled in an intercultural communication course reported significantly higher intercultural awareness than those who had not enrolled. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that structured intercultural instruction can enhance intercultural awareness and sensitivity (Karras, 2017; Namfah & Kulsitthiboon, 2025). The difference between the two groups may be explained by students' exposure to intercultural concepts, classroom discussions, cultural comparisons, and opportunities for reflection provided through the course.

The findings are also consistent with Deardorff's (2006) process model of intercultural competence, which emphasises the development of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal outcomes. Through intercultural communication courses, students may develop greater cultural self-awareness, openness to different perspectives, and understanding of cultural differences. Similarly, Byram's (1997) model highlights knowledge, attitudes, interpreting and relating skills, and critical cultural awareness as important components of intercultural competence. Therefore, the higher awareness among students who completed the course suggests that formal instruction can provide an important foundation for intercultural development.

Regarding the second research objective, the results demonstrate a significant relationship between course enrolment and students' intercultural awareness. However, this relationship should not be interpreted as evidence of a direct causal effect. Students who chose to enrol in the course may have already been more interested in cultural diversity or motivated to develop intercultural competence. Nevertheless, the significant difference between the groups suggests that structured intercultural education is an important factor associated with students' awareness. These findings support previous research indicating that intercultural competence can be developed through systematic educational experiences rather than relying only on incidental contact with other cultures (Karras, 2017; Namfah & Kulsitthiboon, 2025).

At the same time, the findings suggest that classroom instruction alone may not be sufficient to develop all aspects of intercultural competence. Students reported limited opportunities to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds in authentic situations. This limitation may reduce their opportunities to apply classroom knowledge to real communication. Similar findings have been reported in Thai EFL contexts, where students have limited exposure to authentic intercultural interaction (Namfah & Kulsitthiboon, 2025). Baker (2024) also emphasises the importance of connecting theoretical understanding with practical intercultural experiences. Thus, classroom instruction may strengthen awareness and

knowledge, while experiential learning is needed to further develop practical communication skills.

Regarding the third research objective, the findings show that fourth-year students generally held positive attitudes toward intercultural communication. Most students recognised intercultural communication as an important competence for their future careers and for working in multicultural environments. This finding supports Thongprayoon et al. (2020), who highlighted the importance of intercultural communication competence for university students preparing to work in increasingly diverse professional contexts. The students' positive attitudes suggest that they recognise the relevance of intercultural communication beyond the classroom.

The findings can also be considered in relation to Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior. Positive attitudes toward intercultural communication may encourage students to develop intentions to engage in intercultural learning and interaction. However, positive attitudes alone may not result in effective intercultural behaviour. Students also need opportunities, confidence, knowledge, and practical skills to communicate successfully across cultures. Therefore, universities should provide learning environments that allow students to move from positive attitudes and theoretical knowledge toward actual intercultural engagement.

From a pedagogical perspective, universities should consider integrating intercultural communication into undergraduate curricula. Courses should address cultural knowledge as well as openness, cultural self-awareness, critical thinking, interpreting skills, and adaptability, consistent with the frameworks of Deardorff (2006) and Byram (1997). In addition, experiential activities such as collaborative projects with international students, intercultural workshops, online intercultural exchanges, and guest lectures could provide students with opportunities to apply classroom knowledge in authentic contexts. Such activities may help reduce the gap between theoretical understanding and practical intercultural communication.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, participants were drawn from only one university, limiting the generalisability of the findings. Second, students were not

necessarily randomly assigned to the course; therefore, pre-existing differences in interest or motivation may have influenced the results. The findings should consequently be interpreted as an association rather than a definitive causal relationship. Third, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire data, which may reflect students' perceptions rather than their actual intercultural behaviour. Future research should include multiple universities, longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs, and qualitative methods such as interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals. These approaches could provide deeper insight into how formal instruction and authentic intercultural experiences jointly contribute to students' intercultural competence.

Conclusion

This study examined the intercultural awareness of fourth-year students and investigated the role of intercultural communication course enrolment in its development. The findings addressed all three research objectives. First, students who had enrolled in an intercultural communication course demonstrated significantly higher levels of intercultural awareness than those who had not, indicating the potential value of structured intercultural instruction. Second, course enrolment was positively associated with students' intercultural awareness, suggesting that greater exposure to intercultural communication education may contribute to increased awareness of cultural differences, perspectives, and communication practices. Third, students generally recognized the importance of intercultural communication for their future careers; however, they also identified limited opportunities for authentic intercultural interaction and language-related anxiety as challenges.

Overall, the findings highlight the important role of intercultural communication education in preparing university students for culturally diverse academic and professional environments. Although classroom-based instruction appears to strengthen intercultural awareness, it should be complemented by experiential learning activities that provide opportunities for meaningful interaction with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Integrating both theoretical knowledge and authentic intercultural experiences into university curricula may therefore help students move beyond awareness toward the

development of practical intercultural communicative competence. This study contributes to the growing body of research supporting intercultural education as an important component of higher education and graduate employability.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, universities should strengthen intercultural communication education by integrating intercultural content and experiential learning into undergraduate curricula. Activities such as intercultural discussions, collaborative projects, cultural exchange, simulations, and authentic communication tasks can help students apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts.

Second, the study contributes to the Body of Knowledge by demonstrating that formal intercultural communication instruction is associated with higher intercultural awareness and should be complemented by meaningful intercultural experiences. The findings also support the application of Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence and Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Thai higher education context.

Third, teachers and educational institutions should provide students with more opportunities to interact with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Such opportunities may increase confidence, reduce language-related anxiety, and strengthen intercultural communicative competence.

Finally, future research should involve larger and more diverse samples across universities and academic disciplines. Longitudinal and experimental studies are recommended to examine the long-term effects of intercultural communication courses and specific teaching strategies. Further qualitative research could also explore students' intercultural experiences and challenges in greater depth.

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