Thai EFL teachers' self-reported levels of intercultural communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity

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Individuals must be interculturally competent and sensitive in today's globalised society to interact effectively with members of other societies. EFL teachers, as critical stakeholders in language education, must be interculturally competent and sensitive to enhance their students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and intercultural sensitivity (IS). The purpose of this research was to ascertain Thai EFL secondary school teachers' views regarding ICC, levels of ICC and IS, and the relationship between their IS and ICC. 395 Thai EFL teachers completed the ICC questionnaire and the IS scale. Additionally, six of them took part in follow-up interviews. Descriptive statistics indicated that Thai EFL teachers had good ICC and IS levels. A correlational study indicated significant correlations between the different components of ICC and IS, with the exception of the relationship between the knowledge dimension of ICC and the respect for other cultures and interaction enjoyment dimensions of IS. Finally, the implications and future research recommendations are presented to complement the results and assist the development of English language textbooks that foster a knowledge of language and cultural diversity.

Introduction

In the globalised world, people around the globe find themselves in contact with others with different backgrounds through the use of English as means of communication, the basis for recognising *English as a lingua franca*, or ELF. Several scholars (e.g., Firth, 1996; House, 1999) have defined the term 'ELF' as any use of English as a contact language, that is a vehicular language, or a common means of communication between speakers who do not share a common mother tongue. Unlike *World Englishes* which focuses on the community of Englishes, ELF overlooks the relationship between languages and speech communities, to focus more closely on uses of English in real contexts (context-bound communication). As Seidlhofer (2011) concluded, ELF "is indeed the process of language dynamics whereby the language is adapted and altered to suit changed circumstances of its use" (p. 88). As English has become one of the universal languages spoken by people around the globe, there are profound influences on education and international business due to the increasing global demand for improving English proficiency as part of the modernisation agenda in many countries.

English is necessary from kindergarten to university in Thailand (Jindapitak, 2019). With the rising usage of English as a worldwide lingua franca, non-native English speakers already outnumber native English speakers, and this trend is anticipated to continue (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Several global developments have enhanced cross-cultural interaction across languages and civilisations in the last two decades. The growing use of English among people from other cultures has turned human civilisation into a worldwide network where everyone can communicate swiftly and affordably. As a result, the role of

foreign language education has been considerably challenged, emphasising the need for international communication skills. Teaching English as a second or foreign language has several goals (Kramsch, 2013). When evaluating language learners' academic progress, we consider both communicative and linguistic competence (Hymes, 1966). According to the Ministry of Education (2009), many foreign language strands in the Thai Basic Education Core Curriculum focus on language and culture, community and global relationships, and therefore studying English as a foreign language should result in cultural awareness. Many researchers (e.g., Corbett, 2003; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) have argued that intercultural communicative competence (ICC), or the capacity to communicate successfully across cultures, should be taught alongside foreign language teaching.

Intercultural competence is becoming more important in modern society for economic and social reasons. Globalisation and internationalisation have increased the need for foreign language education, since the skills required for "intercultural dialogue" are not innate (Barrett, 2012, p. 1). The relationship between language training and intercultural competency is complex and frequently contested (Barrett et al., 2014; Candelier et al., 2012; Neuner, 2003). One highly contentious subject is how to more systematically include multicultural communication training into classroom instruction (Council of Europe, 2018). Saricoban and Oz (2014) contended that English teachers should be highly intercultural communicative to effectively educate their students. Involvement of teachers in the culture of the foreign language they teach increases ICC development in students (Sercu et al., 2005). Many nations (e.g., UK, EU, US) have included ICC into their foreign language teaching programs. With the increase in actual and virtual global relationships, the question of what language instruction is for should be revisited. However, research on Thai EFL teachers' intercultural communication skill and sensitivity is scarce, especially at the secondary school level. To address this issue, this research examines Thai EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions of ICC and their ICC and IS levels.

Literature review

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has gained prominence in recent years. On the premise of ICC, students develop attitudes and values, knowledge, interpretive and relational skills, discovery and interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness. Language learning and teaching should be based on culture and attitude. Also, intercultural communication (IC) emerged in the 1930s, flourished in the postwar years, and has continued to grow in popularity, notably in these areas. Intercultural communication is frequently defined as communication between people from different national cultures (Gudykunst, 2001).

Intercultural effectiveness (Arasaratnam, 2014) and intercultural communication competence (the latter being more frequent in Europe) are often used interchangeably (Balboni & Caon, 2014). Many scholars have attempted to define ICC, for instance, as the capacity to work successfully in another culture. Byram (1997), a key person in intercultural communication, has defined ICC as the ability to understand another

person's culture from an insider's perspective and help others understand one's own culture. Thus, the learning of English as a second language and culture may help individuals become more aware of their own culture, as it helps to explain the target language and its people to members of both cultures. To make connections, people with ICC should speak a foreign language, communicate well, and consider their own and others' needs and perspectives. Intercultural competence is the capacity to participate successfully and accurately in multicultural situations (Byram, 1997).

Apparently, ICC is vital for language teaching and learning, especially in this age of globalisation. Because English is a *lingua franca* (ELF), McKay (2003) showed that intercultural interaction is important in language learning. A questionnaire developed by Zhou (2011) was used to assess the ICC of Thai EFL teachers in this study This scale's four dimensions (knowledge, skills, attitude, and awareness; see Figure 1) are very similar to Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models of intercultural competence.
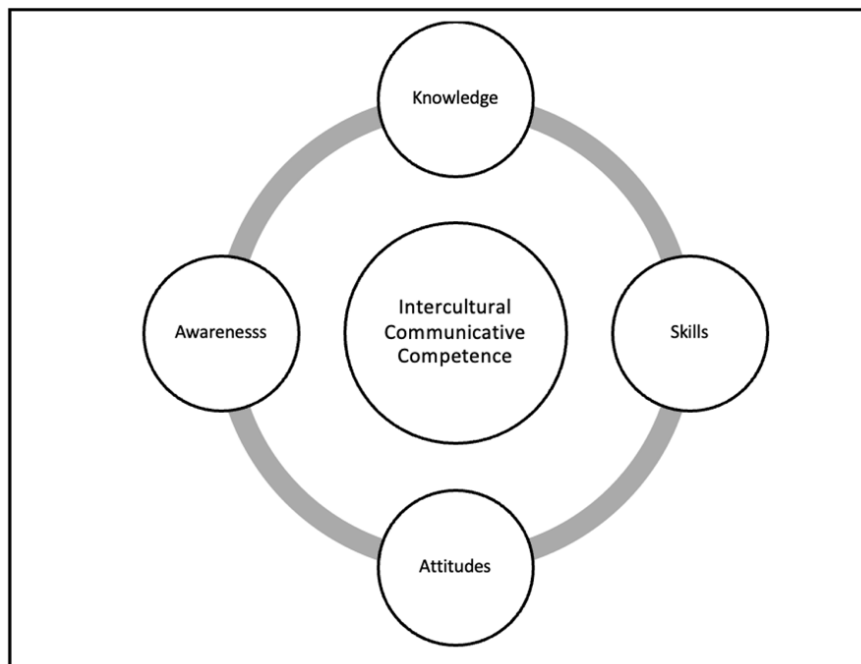

Figure 1: Zhou's (2011) four dimensions

Intercultural sensitivity (IS)

Intercultural sensitivity and acceptance are not inherent human traits. Education with strong cultural ties struggle with intercultural awareness (Bennett, 1993; Westrick & Yuen 2007). Assessing one's current level of intercultural sensitivity is the first step. Cross-cultural sensitivity is the capacity to understand things from another culture's perspective. Bennett (1993) claimed teachers can help students learn about other cultures. Before supporting students in gaining intercultural awareness, teachers must first accept and

comprehend their own worldviews. Teachers are prepared for heterogeneous classrooms and societies, as Hermans (2002) argued. According to McAllister and Irvine (2000), educators must adapt the curriculum and focus on cross-cultural learning.

Intracultural sensitivity (IS) is a pre-requisite for intercultural competence (IC) (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). Thus, a low level of IS is a high risk for ICC (Dong et al., 2008). Intercultural sensitivity is an aspect of intercultural communication skill that conveys basic empathy and respect for other people and cultures (1994). Chen and Starosta (2000) characterised intercultural sensitivity as an "active desire to understand, appreciate, and accept cultural differences" (p. 367). Communication may be challenging due to lack of intercultural awareness. Students need a varied range of skills in today's multicultural and global environment. Foreign language teachers are primarily responsible for developing oral fluency in their students' target language. Activities in every foreign language lesson should assist students to comprehend the lives, ideas, and literature of native speakers. Stern (1983) suggested teaching students not only the linguistic but also the cultural contexts. Chen and Starosta (2000) defined intercultural sensitivity as a 24 item, five-dimensional construct: (1) interaction engagement; (2) cultural sensitivity; (3) interaction confidence; (4) interaction enjoyment; and (5) interaction attentiveness. Despite rising interest in intercultural sensitivity research, few studies have been conducted on EFL teachers, particularly in Thailand.

Related studies

Despite the increased interest in intercultural communication competence and sensitivity, research on EFL teachers' ICC and IS levels is not extensive, particularly in Thailand. Yıldız (2016) evaluated 81 EFL teachers' perspectives of ICC and their teaching practices in the English language classroom. In terms of culture-teaching activities, teachers from ELT departments had a higher positive perception of ICC than instructors from non-ELT departments. Also, with reference to how often they employed culture teaching activities.when asked how often they employed cultural teaching activities, novice teachers reported a more positive perception of ICC.

Jumpakate and Hieu (2019) found that teachers are keen to include ICC-related activities into their classrooms. Smakova and Paulsrud (2020) investigated EFL teachers' attitudes towards ICC in Kazakhstan. Although Kazakhstani teachers were aware of ICC, they had not yet implemented it. Aside from ICC, much research has gone into IS levels. For example, Arcagok and Yılmaz (2020) observed that pre-service EFL teachers are comfortable with intercultural sensitivity, which is being aware of cultural differences or perspectives (Bennett, 1998). In this context, it is plausible to assume that the teacher candidates in this research valued multiculturalism. Using Chen and Starosta's (2000) scales, Kazazoğlu and Ece (2021) discovered that individuals who knew more than two languages had stronger intercultural confidence, which may help create intercultural sensitivity. Also, novice EFL teachers are eager to include multicultural aspects into their lessons. Intercultural sensitivity, according to Koch and Takashima (2021), is characterised by attitudes toward cultural diversity. While some students based their answers on own cultural experiences, others sought to comprehend and appreciate the story's foreign ideas.

Little research has been done on teachers' ICC and IS. Bon (2022) examined teachers' instructional objectives, perceptions of intercultural competence (IC), and the extent to which their teaching objectives and perceptions were reflected in their classroom practices for building their students' IC. The majority of participants in this study acknowledged IC as an important aspect of language learning; however, they did not routinely incorporate IC assessment or cultural incorporation into their teaching practices due to a lack of multicultural content in textbooks and a lack of knowledge about IC assessment and cultural incorporation. Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018) revealed that IS and ICC were closely related and had reciprocal impacts. Intercultural sensitivity and communication competence are two crucial intercultural communication traits. Communication skill raises the possibility of productive intercultural connections. Their study found strong links between ICC knowledge and IS enjoyment and appreciation of other cultures among 167 Iranian EFL teachers. Teachers' lack of cultural knowledge and interaction confidence was also noted as a key barrier to intercultural communication, with various suggestions being made for improvements.

Several studies have investigated teachers' ICC, IS levels, and their relationships in certain contexts, particularly at the tertiary level. To the researcher's knowledge, no research has been done on Thai EFL secondary school teachers. Several studies on ICC and IS levels in Thailand have been done at the tertiary level, although teaching at secondary and tertiary levels differs greatly in terms of learning goals and learning contexts. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate Thai EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions of ICC and IS levels, in order to offer empirical evidence on Thai EFL teachers' ICC and IS levels. To accomplish the purposes, specifically, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are Thai EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions toward ICC?
2. What are Thai EFL secondary school teachers' levels of ICC?
3. What are Thai EFL secondary school teachers' levels of intercultural sensitivity?
4. Is there any statistically significant relationship between Thai EFL secondary school teachers' ICC and intercultural sensitivity?

Method

Research design

This research used a mixed-methods approach (Figure 2) that collects and analyses both quantitative and qualitative data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Using more than one approach, the interview method consolidated the results to be more dependable and valid. Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) claimed that combining data from numerous sources may confirm and cross-check conclusions. To answer certain sorts of research issues, particularly those including classroom contexts, Turner (2006) suggested using mixed-methods research.
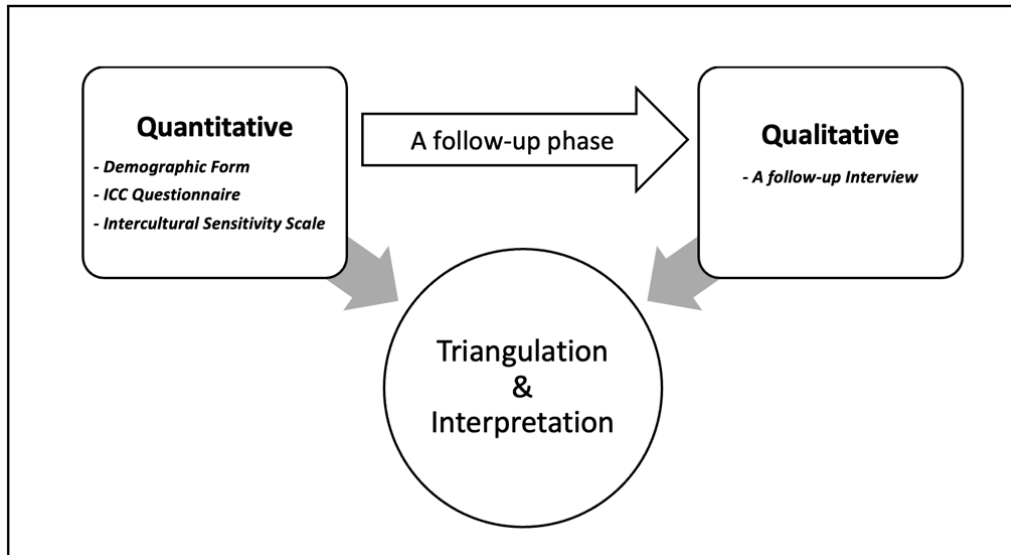
Figure 2: A mixed-methods approach in this study

Participants

In a quantitative phase, this research comprised 395 Thai EFL teachers who taught English in secondary schools. The researcher used a normal derivation with a 95% confidence level (z=1.96), a 50% population percentage, and a 5% margin of error to generate a sufficient sample size. As a result, the sample size in this study should be at least 385. The participants were all chosen through snowball sampling from people who shared a research interest with the target demographic (Frey, 2018). Interestingly, 395 participants responded the questionnaires. In a qualitative follow-up interview, six teachers were chosen at random from the questionnaire respondents to participate. Participants were chosen based on their intercultural sensitivity. Thus, there were three participants with high intercultural sensitivity and three participants with low intercultural sensitivity.

Research instruments

This research employed four instruments to collect data. To ensure their validity, three experts in English language teaching and cross-cultural communication evaluated the questionnaires and interview schedule for content, structure, clarity, and language usage. The research instruments are as follows.

1. *Demographic information form*
    Participants' ages, majors, highest qualifications and years of teaching experience were collected using this form. Demographic data may give basic participant information that can help to interpret the data.

Table 1: Demographic information about participants (N=395)

Criteria	Options	Percent	Qualitative participants
Age	20-29	47.5%	P4, P6
	30-39	16.8%	P3, P5
	40-49	16.5%	P1
	50-59	15.5%	P2
	60+	3.8%	-
Degrees	Bachelor	62.7%	P1, P2, P3, P4
	Masters	36.0%	P5, P6
	Doctorate	1.3%	-
Field of study	English language teaching	68.3%	P1, P2, P4, P6
	English/Arts	27.9%	P3, P5
	Others	3.8%	-
Teaching level	Lower secondary	37.3%	P2, P3
	Upper secondary	43.4%	P1, P4, P5, P6
Years of teaching	1-5	52.8%	P4, P6
	6-10	11.4%	P3, P5
	11-15	5.1%	-
	16-20	6.3%	P1
	21+	24.4%	P2

2. *ICC questionnaire*

This instrument aimed to assess the participants' ICC. This ICC questionnaire was created by Zhou (2011), comprising 20 items, with five items each for the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness sub-scales. One justification for adopting Zhou (2011) is that the study's coefficient alpha of .96 indicates that the questionnaire is internally highly consistent.

3. *Modified 15-item intercultural sensitivity scale (ISS)*

This instrument, created by Chen and Starosta (2000) and redesigned by Wang and Zhuo (2016), was used to assess teachers' intercultural sensitivity. The redesigned scale has five levels of agreement: strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree. The rationale for adopting and adapting this modified intercultural sensitivity scale (ISS) is because confirmatory factor analyses demonstrated that the modified version suited the data better than the original form, in time-constrained contexts (Wang & Zhuo, 2016). The scale included five sub-scales:

- Interaction engagement (7 items)
- Respect for cultural differences (6 items)
- Interaction confidence (5 items)
- Interaction enjoyment (3 items)
- Interaction attentiveness (3 items).

4. *Semi-structured interview protocol*

This instrument (Appendix A) was designed to help participants better understand ICC and how it may be included into their teaching. The interview protocol was

trialled with six Thai EFL secondary school teachers before implementation to help establish that all questions are legitimate and trustworthy.

Data collection

Before collecting data, the ICC and IS questionnaires were back translated into Thai to ensure all participants understood them. The data were collected at schools throughout Thailand at the start of the second term of Academic Year 2021/2022, during February and March 2022. In this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed which is outlined as follows.

Quantitative data
Participants in this study were sent questionnaires together with an invitation and an informed consent statement through snowball sampling to EFL teachers around the nation using *Google Forms*. Participants were requested to be genuine but remain anonymous. The questionnaire that was oversubscribed ceased accepting responses. The data collection took about four weeks.

Qualitative data
The six participants all consented to be interviewed for this research. 15-minute audio-recorded interviews were conducted through *Zoom* to facilitate their convenience. The researcher and research assistants double-checked the transcriptions.

Data analysis

The quantitative data were analysed by using descriptive statistics, namely frequency, percentages and mean, and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation). Saricoban and Oz's (2014) framework was applied to analyse ICC levels (Table 2).

Table 2: Criteria of ICC level (Saricoban & Oz, 2014, p. 526)

ICC level	Mean	Options
High	4.5-5.0	Strongly agree
	3.5-4.4	Agree
Moderate	2.5-3.4	Neither agree nor disagree
		Disagree
Low	1.5-2.4	Strongly disagree
	1.0-1.4	

To address the first research question, content analysis was used to examine teachers' perspectives of ICC. The researcher made written notes during the interviews, and the transcribed texts were read aloud to establish themes. Each theme from content analysis was tabulated. After assessing both quantitative and qualitative data, it was utilised to compare and contrast them. The ultimate interpretation was generated by triangulating the developing significances in a combined display pattern.

Ethical considerations

The research obtained ethical approval from the University's Ethics Committee and when data collection started, participants were informed of the purpose and their ethical rights. To maintain participant anonymity, no identifying information is released. The data is password-protected and only the study's researcher has access to it.

Findings and discussion

Thai EFL teachers' levels of ICC

As addressed in the first two research questions, Thai EFL teachers' levels of ICC were explored. The findings indicated that Thai EFL teachers' mean scores across all four dimensions may be categorised as high (Table 3).

Table 3: Mean scores of the four dimensions of ICC for Thai EFL teachers

Dimension	Mean	Level
Knowledge	4.65	high
Skills	3.99	high
Attitude	4.07	high
Awareness	4.46	high
Total	4.29	High

In the knowledge dimension, most respondents (M=4.65) could explain how English speakers interpret certain events in Thailand. However, very few participants reported that they could describe some important social events that shaped English cultures. This is supported by some excerpts from the follow-up interviews.

> I believe I can grasp and describe important events in Thailand's history, and I am eager to share this with others. But I am not confident in my knowledge of either English or international culture and traditions. (P1)

> In terms of content, I think I can teach English. And my students appeared to get it. Still, I know little about other cultures, including English. I know the basics, like greetings and etiquettes, but not the rest. (P2)

> Thinking back when I was studying, I don't think there weren't any courses concerning teaching cultures in a language classroom. Perhaps, they might be optional courses which I didn't take. To me, I think such courses should be required for undergrad students who are majoring in English language teaching, so the graduates will be more aware of teaching cultures in the classroom. If I had taken ones, I would have been more confident about the content for teaching. (P4)

However, some relatively junior teachers (10 or fewer years) provided different opinions towards cultural knowledge:

> Fortunately, I took a language and culture course during my undergrad. Because of this, I have some basic knowledge of how English culture affects other nations. (P3)

> I am confident in my knowledge of English culture, particularly for teaching. My undergraduate coursework taught me several things. (P5)

> I am confident in my knowledge of diverse cultures. I enjoy documentaries and there are plenty available on social media. I believe teachers should seek 'outside the classroom' knowledge to enlighten their students. (P6)

The Skills dimension shows that most respondents (M=3.99) adjusted their behaviour, body language, and gestures while dealing with English speakers. However, few participants indicated that they could identify some misunderstandings in interactions between Thai and English-speaking people. This could be elaborated by some excerpts from the follow-up interviews.

> It is not always clear to me if certain behaviours are acceptable in English culture. I may be confident in common practices like greeting foreigners. In the presence of native speakers, I may not be so convinced that my speech and actions will not create confusion. (P5)

> For foreigners, I frequently adapt my characters to their preferences. It encompasses sounds or even gestures. I want to make sure my character is suitable for them. I do not want to look bad. (P6)

While most respondents (M=4.07) expressed interest in learning about unknown parts of English culture, few respondents reported that they were willing to learn about differences between Thai and English-speaking people in their behaviour. This could be elaborated by some excerpts from the follow-up interviews.

> I like learning about other cultures. If I could, I would spend my retirement traveling and learning about various cultures. (P6)

> Because I am not confident in other cultures, I am eager to learn more. But the issue is that I am not sure where to start. There are too many options. So, I believe a platform with cultural information for teachers would be great. (P1)

> Teaching students about various cultures might help them become global citizens who have empathy for others. (P3)

In terms of Cultural Awareness, most respondents (M=4.59) believed they should not immediately judge people from other countries because their behaviour may be influenced by cultural differences, but few of them were aware of the diversity in English cultures. This could be elaborated by some excerpts from the follow-up interviews.

> Individuals grow more culturally sensitive when they meet new people from diverse backgrounds. Meeting so many foreigners has made me aware of cultural diversity. Due of our location, my students may not encounter many foreigners. What I can do is tell them stories to help them understand cultural differences and avoid stereotyping others. (P4)

> Ten years ago, I could have judged individuals from various countries based on their behaviour. The situation was exacerbated by a lack of resources. This, I feel, may worsen current difficulties, most notably bullying. As I grew older, my perspectives shifted. I am becoming more aware of it, and I am trying to raise others' awareness as well. (P1)

> People may judge others based on their actions because they feel such actions are not acceptable in our country. However, I believe we should inform them if we know them rather than passively judge them. Because they are unaware of their actions, they may continue to do so. (P2)

The levels of ICC reported by EFL teachers were explored in the first two research questions. The results showed that Thai EFL teachers had high mean scores in all key dimensions: knowledge, skills, attitude, and awareness (Table 3). This is consistent with Saricoban and Oz (2014) who found that all ICC dimensions were high in a Turkish context. The ICC dimensions were also positive and correlated. While this trend appears to contradict a previous study by Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018), which indicated that teachers' knowledge was modest, and their attitudes were high. The research found that skills were the most important dimension, followed by attitude and awareness. This discrepancy may be explained by teachers' education and experiences, which may shape ICC (Zheng, 2014). Some teachers believe their undergraduate courses expanded their cultural understanding. Further study on the link between teachers' education and experiences and intercultural communication skills may help overcome this contradiction.

Concerning the ICC, it indicates that most respondents could explain how English-speaking people interpret various events in Thailand. Conversely, fewer respondents could recall key social events that influenced English culture. A Thai EFL teacher might grasp Thai culture and events, according to Goldsmith and Dennis (2016). A possible reason is that in compulsory education, Thai history is emphasised, enabling students to subsequently recount specific events in Thailand. Several teachers expressed concern about claiming knowledge of either English or foreign culture and customs. To address this issue, Fungchomchoei and Kardkarnklai (2016) highlighted the need for professional teacher training in the teaching of intercultural competence. To guarantee ICC incorporation into English language teaching, Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak (2017) advised ELT teacher educators to add ICC into teacher education programs. Also, it seems that most respondents altered their behaviour, body language, and gestures to interact with English speakers. To buttress this claim, Major (2005) explored how Asian students adapt to an English-speaking university in the USA. A collectivist society requires societal harmony (Hui & Triandis, 1986), interpersonal sensitivity (Hui & Triandis, 1986), and conformity (Pornpitakpan, 1999). Also, research showed that most teachers believed they should not quickly criticise foreigners since their behaviours may be influenced by cultural differences. Similarly, Hinton (2000) explained how stereotyping, or judging people as members of a group rather than individuals, may result in mistyping. To enhance cultural understanding and intercultural communication competence, we should avoid judging individuals from different countries only on their behaviors. In light of this, Phongsirikul (2017) suggests that teachers should focus on intercultural competence as much as linguistic proficiency. It may be better if teachers intentionally promote

intercultural competences including cultural understanding, intercultural interactions, and cross-cultural communication.

Thai EFL teachers' level of intercultural sensitivity

As addressed in the first two research questions, EFL teachers' levels of IS were explored. The findings suggested that the mean scores for Thai EFL teachers across all dimensions were high (Table 4).

Table 4: Mean scores of Thai EFL teachers for the five
dimensions of intercultural sensitivity (N=395)

Dimension	Mean	S.D.	Level
Interaction engagement	4.13	.834	high
Respect for cultural differences	4.38	.857	high
Interaction confidence	3.82	.832	high
Interaction enjoyment	4.33	.952	high
Interaction attentiveness	3.90	.814	high
Total	4.11		High

The findings in the Interaction engagement dimension revealed that respondents enjoyed interacting with people from different cultures, but they tended to wait before forming an impression of culturally distinct counterparts. Some participants in the interview also reported some interesting points.

> In fact, I have many foreign friends. Talking with them is like learning. In my everyday life, I take what is good from them and apply it. (P2)

> When I was a kid, I was often hearing unfavourable stereotypes about people from various countries. I grew up meeting more people from other cultures and backgrounds, which opened my perspective to people from other cultures. People should be treated fairly regardless of their background. I think teachers should teach their children about this, so they do not grow up to be bad people. (P4)

For the Respect for cultural differences dimension, respondents appreciated the values of people from different cultures the most while they liked being with people from different cultures the least. This could be elaborated by some excerpts from the follow-up interviews.

> It is vital to consider complete equality for everybody. I am referring about treating people fairly and respectfully. More importantly, we should be compassionate. People's identities may emerge if we treat them with compassion. We may understand them if we express sympathy. Understanding them is much preferable than recognising them. (P2)

> While I like learning about other cultures, I dislike being surrounded by them. That does not mean they are bad people; it means I cannot behave correctly. When surrounded by foreigners, I have to work harder to act properly. (P5)

The Interaction confidence dimension revealed that respondents did not find it difficult to converse in front of people from other cultures. The dimension's cumulative mean was 3.82, indicating high. Moreover, the Interaction enjoyment dimension revealed that the respondents often felt useless when interacting with people from different cultures, but they did not get discouraged when they were among people from different cultures.

Finally, in the Interaction attentiveness dimension, the findings suggest that respondents tried to obtain as much information as they could when interacting with people from different cultures, and they were sensitive to their culturally distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during an interaction.

Overall, this research found that Thai EFL teachers are very sensitive to cultural differences and appreciated meeting individuals from other cultures. This finding is supported by Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018) and Saricoban and Oz (2014) who found that EFL teachers often exhibit strong intercultural sensitivity. According to Charoensukmongkol (2016), Thai people respect cultural experiences and like interacting with people from other backgrounds. Jitpakdee and Thapa (2012) also noted that Thai society is increasingly connecting with individuals from many cultures. Thus, the relationship between Thai society's trend and interaction engagement may be explained.

Also, Thai EFL teachers reported being confident and open to connecting with individuals from other cultures. This research supports Teng's (2011) claim that cultural openness is an increasingly important factor determining pleasure and experience, especially in international interactions. English teacher candidates appreciate engaging with people from other cultures, according to Rustandi et al. (2020). Also, while dealing with persons from other cultures, Thai EFL teachers indicated trying to learn as much as possible. This finding appears to support Pritchard and Skinner's (2002) claim that people's confidence and openness would rise if they knew what to say and could be as social as they wanted. To elaborate, Wattanavorakijkul (2020) linked participants' lack of confidence to their social and cultural opportunities. Peng (2006) believed that people need to learn how to communicate with people from various cultures successfully and politely.

The relationship between Thai EFL teachers' ICC and IS

The Pearson correlation was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the ICC and IS of Thai EFL teachers (Table 5).

Table 5 shows significant relationships between the ICC Knowledge component and the dimensions of interaction engagement, confidence, and attentiveness. It had, however, no significant relationships with the Respect for cultural differences and Interaction enjoyment dimensions, both of which had small effect sizes. The Skills component was

Table 5: The relationship between each dimension of ICC and IS (N=395)

		Engagement	Respect	Confidence	Enjoyment	Attentiveness
Knowledge	Pearson correl.	.414**	.009	.509**	-.028	.396**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.896	.000	.670	.000
Skills	Pearson correl.	.488**	-.121	.481**	-.1156*	.481**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.064	.000	.017	.000
Attitude	Pearson correl.	.411**	-.112	.292**	-.156*	.319**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.087	.000	.017	.000
Awareness	Pearson correl.	.317**	-.212**	.283**	-.210**	.332**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.001	.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correction is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

related with interaction engagement, interaction confidence, and (interaction enjoyment. In contrast, Skills showed no significant relationships with the respect for cultural differences. Furthermore, interaction engagement, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness were all significantly and positively related to the Attitudes component. In contrast, it showed no significant relationships with the respect for cultural differences. Finally, the Cultural awareness component correlated with all components.

In this study, a Pearson correlation was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the ICC and IS of Thai EFL teachers. As seen in Table 6, it is indicated that ICC and IS had a significant relationship, where there was a moderate effect size of positive correlation between ICC and IS (r(395) = .40, p<.05).

Table 6: The relationship between ICC and IS

		Total ICC	Total IS
Total ICC	Pearson correlation	1	.403**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Total IS	Pearson correlation	.403**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The ICC components correlated with the other dimensions. Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018) observed similar relationships between the Knowledge component of ICC and the aforementioned dimensions. The nature of an EFL context in their research and this study might explain these results. However, the presence of all three effect sizes, weak, moderate, and strong, warrants caution. This study's results backed up Chen and Starosta's (2000) claim that intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication skills are intricately related yet distinct. Intercultural sensitivity is required for efficient intercultural communication, whereas intercultural competence is required for successful interactions with people from other cultures. Intercultural competence and cultural sensitivity are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, as determined by Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018).

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine the ICC and IS levels of Thai EFL teachers. According to the findings, Thai EFL teachers had a high level of ICC as well as IS. A lack of interactive attentiveness on the part of teachers was the most significant hindrance to the development of intercultural communication. One explanation for this might be because Thai teachers have little opportunity to engage with individuals from different cultures. Therefore, we need to find some ways to increase the teachers' interaction attentiveness. This can be accomplished, for example, through exchange programs, sending teachers to various conferences that include participants from diverse countries, or inviting scholars from other countries to participate in workshops in Thailand, thereby providing opportunities for teachers to interact with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Pedagogical implications

The findings of this research contribute to our knowledge of the intercultural component of language education, as well as the intercultural sensitivity of EFL teachers working in a variety of settings. As both language learners and teachers of language education will benefit from ICC training, it should be integrated into the curriculum. For a variety of reasons, including increasing their knowledge of sociocultural variation in language learning and instruction, English language teachers in EFL contexts may benefit from ICC training and professional development programs.

Limitations and recommendations

Some limitations in this research may impact how the research results are interpreted. Firstly, future research using a sample of English teachers larger than the 395 participants in this research may be necessary to establish more precise and valid results, to corroborate this study's consistency and generalisability. Secondly, data were obtained utilising a questionnaire and an interview. Additional research, such as focus groups or stimulated recalls, may be conducted to further elucidate intercultural communicative competence in these foreign language circumstances. With surveys, moreover, it was very simple for respondents to provide preferred responses rather than completely accurate responses. Thus, the study's findings are credible to the degree that participants were responsive and honest. It is worth noting that, lastly, variables such as ethnic background, gender, experience, educational qualifications, and field of study may all have an effect on teachers' ICC and IS; hence, future research should pay special attention to these variables.

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Appendix A: Semi-structured interview protocol

1. Do you have any experience of living in other countries?
2. Can you tell me about your beliefs on the objectives of EFL teaching?
3. Can you tell me about your beliefs on the objective(s) of cultural teaching?
4. How much time has been devoted to cultural teaching?
5. Please share some of your cultural teaching practices regarding English and Thai cultures.
6. Is there anything that you want to know more about cultural teaching?
7. How do you think educational institutions should promote intercultural communicative competence to the students?
8. What are the problems or barriers in promoting intercultural communicative competence to the students?
9. What are your recommended solutions to tackle those barriers?

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