INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES: 
A CASE STUDY OF MULTILINGUAL WORKPLACES 
IN THAILAND 

BY 
TANSITA MAHAYUSSNAN 

AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL 
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE 
OF MASTER OF ARTS IN CAREER ENGLISH FOR 
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION 
LANGUAGE INSTITUTE 
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ENTITLED

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was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Career English for International Communication on June 21, 2022

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the intercultural communication challenges that the employees working in multilingual workplaces in Thailand faced as well as how they overcame the challenges. A total of 40 employees consisting of 20 Thai employees and 20 foreign employees who worked in English tutorial schools in Thailand for more than a year and had high English proficiency were chosen as participants. The research instruments in this study were a self-assessment questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The self-assessment questionnaire was adapted based on Byram’s Intercultural Communicative Competence model which concerned knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural awareness. The self-assessment questionnaire was used for the purpose of exploring the intercultural communication challenges and the semi-structured interview was also employed in order to investigate the intercultural communication challenges as well as how to overcome the challenges for in-depth information. The data from the questionnaire was analyzed through SPSS program for descriptive statistics in mean score, standard deviation (S.D.) and percentage. The conceptual content analysis was also employed to analyze the data from the semi-structured interview.
The findings showed that the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) was necessary in language teaching and conducting educational assessments. From five dimensions of Byram’s ICC model, the employees were highly competent in critical cultural awareness the most ($\bar{x} = 4.47$), followed by skills of discovery and interaction ($\bar{x} = 4.45$). The skills of interpreting and relating were also demonstrated as high ($\bar{x} = 4.41$), followed by having positive attitudes towards multicultural people ($\bar{x} = 4.28$) and knowledge on cultural differences ($\bar{x} = 4.05$) accordingly. Thus, the knowledge of ICC was considered the area where the employees lacked, which resulted in the occurrence of challenges in their workplace. The findings from the interview revealed that the employees found it challenging to simplify the language used in the workplace, especially in classrooms with various students. With the aim of overcoming challenges, the employees were required to develop this unconscious knowledge of ICC by observing students’ reactions before responding and simply asking their colleagues who dealt or had experience with teaching various groups of students before. Another challenge found was specifically happened when employees had to provide feedback to students as students’ perceptions towards receiving constructive feedback were different due to the differences in cultures. This challenge was due to the insufficiency of ICC conscious knowledge and could be overcome by doing research or self-study on cultural differences in order to best select the appropriate communication styles that match individuals. The employees were also suggested to be more open-minded and adaptive to different intercultural contexts in order to become a competent communicator.

**Keyword:** Multilingual workplaces, Intercultural communicative competence (ICC), Intercultural communication challenges, Employees
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

In the society where people from different countries and cultures live together, one of the important aspects of any social interaction is the ability to communicate effectively. Hamilton (2010) defined communication as the process of people sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings with each other in commonly understandable ways. In every workplace, communication plays a significant role as people in the workplace exchange thoughts or information most of the time. Communication success is more likely for communicators who can avoid potential misconceptions and misconceptions occur when intercultural communicators are not aware of the differences in cultures. Asante et al. (2002) defined culture as a group’s shared collective meaning system through which the group’s collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs and thoughts are understood. Thus, it’s important for intercultural communicators to understand the relationships between communication and culture as the language used, the ways we communicate or the use of nonverbal cues are influenced by cultures, especially those who work in the same organization.

Thailand is considered the multicultural society where multicultural people gather. Companies in Thailand have increasingly taken up multiculturalism as the key concept because it helps improve the productivity, creativity and company’s reputation. As a result, Thailand has become the hub for big corporations. With the increasing of the multinational companies in Thailand, undoubtedly, ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) is one of the several reasons for company expansion as Thailand is considered a great place for business investment. The goals of ASEAN are to strengthen the region, provide opportunities, and ensure the readiness for changes. This expansion is advantageous for potential employees to express their performances at the global scale. In addition, more job opportunities are provided for people from different countries, especially in the field of education. There are numerous language institutes located in Bangkok and elsewhere. These can be small private language schools, international schools that follow the UK and US school curriculum and universities or
institutes that provide English language training to companies (Methanonpphakhun, 2016). Therefore, the native English teachers and staff are in great demand in Thailand with expectation that they can assist Thai students in developing language proficiency (Wangkijchinda, 2011).

For many years, the English tutoring school has been well-accepted by Thai students. As English becomes the world’s lingua franca, English is not only for the native speakers anymore. With the rising demand of foreign teachers and staff in Thailand, those who are fluent in English from neighboring countries can find employment and become a part of the multilingual organization. Consequently, they encounter diversities inescapably as they work closely with the multicultural teams. Communication in the workplace is one of the main challenges that they face. The term of English as a lingua franca (ELF) is often used when it is chosen as a target language of communication and considered to be a medium of intercultural communication between speakers with different first languages (Seidlhofer, 2010).

The intercultural communication occurs among people who work in the multicultural organization as well as the challenges it brings. Barnet and Lee (2002) identified the intercultural communication as the exchange of cultural information between groups of people from different cultures. Lustig et al. (2017) also suggested that intercultural communication is a symbolic process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings. Employees who work in English tutorial schools have diverse intercultural communication styles. Apart from this, they also have different views on work and hierarchy, and show different behaviour regarding time management, work norms, decision making, and problem solving (Behfar et al, 1983). As a result, it is challenging for staff working in English tutorial schools to develop good cross-cultural communicative skills and avoid confusion. Misperceptions, misinterpretations and misjudgments of the information are common misunderstandings in intercultural communication. Employees from various cultures and backgrounds have diverse perceptions, interpretations and assessments of events that affect them in different ways. With these differences, the chances of the message being delivered accurately are low. That could potentially lead to communication breakdown and conflicts in workplace, which has the impact on the organization in a big scale.
It is vital to acknowledge cultural differences and problems that may arise in order to facilitate communicators and lead to good intercultural communication. Information on intercultural correspondence and the capacity to utilize it adequately can also assist with spanning social contrasts. For Thai employees, they have a wide scope of English abilities with different abilities in using English for both daily and work situations whereas foreign employees, who are already fluent in English, might possibly have other challenges. Therefore, this study will explore the intercultural communication challenges employed by both Thai and foreign employees working in English tutorial schools in Thailand. In addition. This study will explore how employees handle intercultural communication challenges in order to relieve issues and help with accomplishing more agreeable useful relations, which results in the success of an organization.

1.2. Research Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

1) To explore the intercultural communication challenges faced by employees working in English tutorial schools in Thailand.

2) To investigate how employees handle intercultural communication challenges.

1.3. Research Questions

This study aims to provide answers for the following questions:

1) What are the intercultural communication challenges faced by employees working in English tutorial schools?

2) How do employees handle intercultural communication challenges?

1.4. Definition of Terms

The definition of Terms for this study are as follows:

1.4.1 Communication refers to the act of expressing, exchanging and sharing data, ideas, thoughts or emotions both verbally and nonverbally from one to another person through a channel in English.
1.4.2 **Intercultural communication** refers to the exchange of ideas and exchanges between people from many cultures in the workplace through a channel by using English as a medium.

1.4.3 **Lingua franca** refers to the use of English language as the means of communication in intercultural communication for speakers of different native languages.

1.4.4 **Challenge** refers to a scenario, problems or hurdles that the employees encounter in the multicultural workplace and must overcome it for better productivity.

1.4.5 **Culture** refers to a group of people’s way of life, the beliefs, values, customs, attitudes and behaviors they accept and that are passed along by communication and imitation.

1.4.6 **Multilingual workplace** refers to English tutorial schools that operate in Thailand where people from diverse cultures, linguistics and backgrounds work together across all departments.

1.5. **Scope of the Study**

This study focused on the intercultural communication challenges that both Thai and foreign employees working in English tutorial schools found in order to find out how they handle them effectively. The sample of the study was 20 Thai employees and 20 foreign employees who have been working in English tutorial schools in Thailand for more than a year, took the placement test and reached the certain level which indicates that they have high English proficiency.

1.6 **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in the following ways:

1) The findings on intercultural communication challenges that employees working in an English tutorial schools experience will help prevent them from a breakdown in communication and misunderstandings as now the tutoring schools in Thailand, especially English tutoring schools are in high demand. Also, people from diverse cultures and backgrounds are hired to work in English tutorial schools because they promote understanding of the ever-changing world along with the new future of English language teaching trends.
2) The findings on how employees handle the intercultural communication challenges and obstacles can be used to explore the more effective ways to deal with them when experiencing communication obstacles at work, which will lead to better productivity for intercultural communicators that benefit students in learning English language.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters as follows:

1) Chapter one introduces the background of the study, research questions, research objectives, definition of terms, scope of the study, significance of the study and this organization of the study.

2) Chapter two introduces the related concepts of intercultural communication, intercultural communicative competence (ICC), intercultural communication challenges, language competency and the previous related studies.

3) Chapter three introduces the details of participants, methods, research instruments, data collection and data analysis.

4) Chapter four introduces the results and discussion of the study.

5) Chapter five introduces the conclusion and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature in 4 main areas with a summary: (1) Intercultural communication, (2) Intercultural Communicative Competence, (3) Intercultural communication challenges, (4) Language competency and (5) Previous related studies.

2.1. Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is viewed as face-to-face interaction by sharing thoughts, ideas and attitudes with each other in commonly comprehensible ways between people who have different cultural backgrounds (Winnuwat, 2011). Even though people working in the organizations these days do not likely to have face to face interactions as frequently as usual, the intercultural communication still occurs through different channels. Intercultural communication involves international business activities such as teaching, making decisions, delegating tasks, conducting an interview and negotiating. It does not necessarily mean exchanging only meanings and information but also one’s cultural perspective along with individual interpretation inductively. The purpose of studying intercultural communication is to understand the relationships between culture and communication because the ways we communicate, the language and nonverbal behaviors we use, are influenced by cultures (Suthipiyapathra, 2009). A great understanding of both different cultures and languages of people from different countries are crucial for those who want to be successful in intercultural communication. Without intercultural awareness, which is based on cultural knowledge, the intercultural communication cannot be learned. Therefore, knowledge of intercultural communication, as well as the ability to apply it successfully, can aid in bridging cultural divides, resolving issues, and fostering more peaceful productive relationships among co-workers.

As the majority of employees working in English tutorial schools in Thailand are Asians and Westerners, the differences in communication styles are obvious. Although English is used as a main medium of intercultural communication, Asians
and Westerners interpret verbal and nonverbal cues differently. The differences in communication styles are divided into two categories based on cultures, which are high context and low context. Asians are considered a high context culture whereas Westerners are considered a low context culture. The key aspect that influences how people from different cultures communicate and perceive messages is the differences in the high and low context culture framework. Furthermore, some multinational companies use this notion as a training tool to aid in improving coworker communication. It promotes corporate intercultural communication by knowing the distinctions between two culture traits so that the people from different cultures can communicate effectively and prevent lost messages.

2.1.1. The high context culture

The high context culture is known for emphasizing oral communication, loyalty and relationships. They prefer nonverbal communication, implicit goals as well as indirect approaches. As previously stated, nonverbal communication is just as vital as verbal communication. The body languages, facial emotions and gestures convey a lot of information. As a result, the receiver bears the burden of comprehension, which might lead to misunderstanding when communicating thoughts or information. This concept is found in collectivistic cultures, for example, Japan, France, Spain, China and more.

2.1.2. The low context culture

Individualistic cultures, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany and others have low context culture traits. People from low-context cultures tend to communicate in a direct, clear and simple manner with non-verbal communications having a minor impact on little information. It is the sender’s job to ensure that the recipient understands the message. The information is based primarily on facts and actual evidence. They are also adaptable and receptive to diverse situations. When compared to person in the high context cultures, they are more likely to have a short-term relationship.
2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

The term “Intercultural Communicative Competence” has been defined in various ways. According to Byram (2012), Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) refers to using a foreign language to properly communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds, and values the relationship between language and culture. It is an individual’s ability to communicate effectively through the cultural diversity. People who work in a culturally diverse environment, like multicultural teams, require a high level of intercultural competence (Dowling & Welch. 2005; Gertsen.1990; Milten. 2004). That is the reason why people from different cultures find it difficult to communicate and interact as well as they want. To be interculturally competent, a person must possess intercultural knowledge, attitude, skill and awareness. ICC was classified in various ways by different researchers. Lázár et al. (2007) defined ICC as the communicative abilities, competences, skills and attitudes of speakers in terms of linguistic and cultural identities in multicultural situations. In addition, Chen and Starosta (1996) described ICC as the abilities and competencies of speakers, namely intercultural sensitivity (affective process), intercultural adroitness (behavioral process) and intercultural awareness (cognitive process). One of the intercultural competence approaches was put forward by Byram. Byram sees ICC as the term that covers five crucial components such as linguistic competence, intercultural competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence. All of which make it possible for people to interact with people from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This ICC approach is applicable for this study as it serves intercultural speakers who work in education and professional settings as a core principle in supporting learners with knowledge, skills and attitudes toward learning English. Byram’s ICC approach is illustrated below (see figure 1).
This approach includes five abilities (savoirs) which are intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness. These dimensions are necessary as it helps intercultural speakers develop intercultural communicative competence. Each dimension details are discussed below.

2.2.1. **Attitudes**

According to Byram et al. (2002), attitudes refer to curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own. The intercultural speakers must descend from their own perspectives to recognize diverse cultural orientations in order to get a comprehensive view of different cultures, values and a broader global understanding.

2.2.2. **Knowledge**

The understanding of various social groups’ differences and the ability to identify its function are required for the intercultural knowledge. This will lead to a better understanding of social, individual interaction behaviors and processes. It is about gaining and developing a certain finesse for this complexity of all culture
groupings, rather than acquiring knowledge about the target culture or language. Byram classified intercultural knowledge into two groups which are conscious and unconscious. Conscious knowledge involves knowledge that can be adapted whereas unconscious knowledge involves the ideas and processes of interactions with others.

2.2.3. Skills of interpreting and relating

Skills of interpreting and relating are the abilities to interpret the information or incidents from different cultures. The successful intercultural speakers need to have the ability to interpret, explain, compare and relate the information that they receive to their own cultures. The main focus is on how speakers use existing knowledge rather than observing interactions.

2.2.4. Skills of discovery and interaction

Byram defined this component as the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to implement knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction, whereas the skill to interact is to manage these different interpretations and discoveries in a real-time conversation constrained by time and mutual perceptions.

2.2.5 Critical cultural awareness

When dealing with people from different cultures, the culture evaluation is required. It is necessary that communicators understand their own beliefs or values and how it affects others. Thus, critical awareness can be defined as being aware of the viewpoint from which decisions are made, how that viewpoint was obtained and how others may arrive at other conclusions. Byram suggested that critical awareness is an important element in language teaching as it can be used to foster students’ values towards democratic citizenship.

2.3. Intercultural Communication Challenges

In multicultural environments, people from many different cultures tend to bring their own language, beliefs, culture and attitude with them. When working with a team, they tend to be willing to share information and communicate with a person
who has a similar language, culture and attitude more than with a person who has
different cultural and linguistic background due to several reasons. Therefore, with
many people from different cultures trying to understand one another and work together
effectively, it becomes a challenge that one needs to overcome in order to maintain
great relationships with co-workers and communicate effectively. Challenges in
intercultural communication are often due to the fact that people have different
perceptions and attitudes towards other people’s language and culture, particularly in
linguistically and culturally diverse context (Phumpho & Nomnian, 2019). Challenges
in intercultural communication can be interpreted as situations or something that
interferes with communication between people from different cultures which can
possibly lead to communication breakdown. When dealing with intercultural settings,
one must minimize the differences until the information provided is at least similar. It
is difficult to comprehend others until we are familiar with their ways of life.

According to Vivatananukul (2016), communicative obstacles are divided into
three categories. The first category is cognitive obstacle. As English is used as the main
medium in the education setting, speakers whose native language is not English mostly
have problems translating the language from one to the other languages. In addition, to
use the language appropriately in the context is something that speakers are unaware
of, as well as the formality of English language. Also, without having enough cultural
knowledge and experience when communicating, misinterpretation and
misunderstanding occur. The second category is affective obstacle. With the differences
in ages, races, genders or religions, people tend to judge others and think that the others’
behaviors and opinions are difficult to understand. The factors that cause affective
obstacle are stereotypes, bias, prejudice and negative attitudes. Another category that is
considered communicative obstacle is behavioral obstacle. The nonverbal cues such as
facial expressions, gestures, movements and tone of voice are as important as verbal
cues. Without recognizing the differences in other peoples’ cultural backgrounds and
understanding their behaviors and messages, the effective communication can be
hindered.
2.4. Language Competency

Language, as we all know, plays a crucial part in human communication across cultures. It’s considered as the major problem when it comes to communicating in multicultural teams. Language troubles in intercultural communication can be caused by distinctions in semantics and pragmatics. Semantics is the study of meaning in language, and how words relate to each other (Steenhuis, 2019). People from different cultures tend to carry word associations from their own language and understandings, which results in communication confusion. Pragmatics is the actual formulation of a message depending on the social, situational, and conversational context (Chen et al, 2006). The speaker might assume that the listener does not need clarification and the message is misinterpreted because of this assumption, which results in communication confusion as well. This assumption of similarities is one of the six stumbling blocks in intercultural communication by Barna (1976).

The ability and knowledge of English in four different skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading, is referred to as language competency. As a result, language competence is a crucial talent for working in an international environment, where people from many cultures must collaborate, communicate ideas and interact with coworkers, supervisors and customers. Misunderstandings and bad communication can lead to the downfall of a company or a project. Despite the fact that English is a compulsory subject taught in schools beginning in primary school, mastering the language is difficult.

Hymes (1972) argued that language competence is applicable in different communicative situations. As a result, people are required to gain a high level of English language competence. For Thai employees who work in an international workplace and use English as lingua franca, English native-speakers might assume that people in the field of business are already familiar with the culture-specific rules and they all are proficient in English. This assumption can cause the feeling of anxiety among people and it can be challenging.

2.5. Previous Related Studies

Various studies of intercultural communication challenges and communication problems have been conducted. These previous related studies are as follows:
In 2020, Jhaiyanuntana conducted the study of intercultural communication challenges and strategies on the Thai undergraduate hotel interns. The researcher explored the challenges and how Thai undergraduate interns used strategies to overcome intercultural communication challenges at a demonstration hotel. The self-assessment questionnaires and a focus-group interview were used as the research methods. The data were categorized and interpreted using the five key domains based on Byram’s ICC model, which are knowledge, skills to interpret and relate, skills to discover and interest, attitudes, and cultural awareness. The result revealed that the most needed competencies for hotel interns to tackle ICC challenges were critical cultural awareness, attitudes, knowledge, skills to interpret and relate, and skills to discover and interact, respectively. The result encouraged the interns to make an effort in learning about the cultural diversity, appreciate cultural differences, and being prepared to adjust. Second, opening their minds to embrace such cultural differences was the strategy for attitude challenge. In order to overcome knowledge challenge, asking for help from colleagues and using body language in communication were suggested. Lastly, the strategies used to interpret, relate, discover, and interact were to plan ahead of time for any obstacles and observe how more experienced colleagues addressed problems and use them as a model for the future.

Puapuntuma (2020) conducted the study of English barriers and factors affecting communication among Thai software consultants working in a multinational IT company. The research instruments included a questionnaire, an English proficiency test and an interpersonal skill test for intercultural sensitivity. The survey was completed by 95 Thai software consultants who work for a multinational IT organization. 61 people have agreed to take the CEFR level B2 English proficiency test, which was adapted from the CEFR free online test. Three respondents with a background in the target group completed an interpersonal skill exam to assess their intercultural sensitivity in five areas: interaction delight, interaction engagement, interaction intensity, interaction confidence and respect for cultural differences.

The discovery was broken down into three halves. According to the survey result, all respondents had a good educational background. The primary finding of an English proficiency test was that they were able to communicate effectively in English. Their focus, though, was vocabulary. In summary, Thai software consultants...
demonstrated effective intercultural communication competence by being open-minded, having a strong attitude toward people from different cultures, recognizing cultural differences and seeking to preserve relationships among surrounding people, according to the interpersonal skill test for intercultural sensitivity scale.

Laohachaiboos (2011) also conducted the study of intercultural communication obstacles in a Japanese company. From 600 Thai staff who worked in Toyota Tsusho (Thailand) at the head office and Bangpakong branch, 100 staff were drawn as the sample. The researcher developed a questionnaire to find out the intercultural communication obstacles and English language proficiency along with the interview. As a result, the highlighted obstacles found in communication were the differences in languages, followed by the differences in traditional way of life, working attitude and social etiquette respectively. The differences in the high and low context cultures appeared to have the effect on work as Japanese focus on work and details while Thais are more concerned about relationships. Regarding their English language proficiency, the findings revealed that they struggled with different accents and pronunciations of non-native English speakers the most, followed by the problems in writing and speaking due to the limited knowledge, vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, the researcher proposed that these obstacles could be overcome by providing the intercultural communication and English language training for employees.

The result from the questionnaire regarding their English proficiency matched the result from the study of barriers of English communication between Thai officers and foreign customers of Bangkok Bank company by Chayarak (2014). The most serious problem was the ability to listen to different accents and pronunciations when communicating. Another significant problem is to be able to speak with correct grammar and express complex ideas. Chayarak also investigated strategies that Thai officers used to solve listening and speaking problems. The result showed that the majority chose to seek the overall meaning of the message and pay more attention to nonverbal messages when they have trouble listening to foreign customers. In order to solve speaking problems, the most used strategy was describing and paraphrasing the message even though they do not know the exact words, followed by avoiding topics that are difficult, trying to imitate customers’ pronunciations and asking for help directly from customers.
This was similar to the study of intercultural communication of Thai employees in international organizations by Winnuwat (2011). This study investigated the intercultural communication problems of 100 Thai employees in international organizations, surveyed Thai employees’ attitude toward their foreign co-workers and the scope of written and oral communication problems faced by Thai employees who have been working in the international organizations for longer than a year. The findings found that the main issue was a lack of confidence among Thai employees when confronted and dealing with conflict at work, followed by the language barriers in all four skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading. The researcher discovered that having a chance to communicate, exchanging thoughts, providing feedback, understanding other cultures and being open-minded to acquire and understand the different cultures or opinions were the most effective factors in developing successful communication and working relationships. Some respondents said that having more opportunities to exchange information and engage with foreign coworkers will help them improve their speaking and listening abilities. Language training was also suggested as a way to improve their reading and writing abilities. The goal of this study was to assist not only Thai personnel, but also everyone working in global firms in efficiently working across cultures.

In summary, the previous related studies above are concerned with communication barriers and intercultural communication occurred which in the multinational environment. According to the findings, people who work or study in the multinational places had difficulty adapting to different cultures and developing four key English language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. This leads to the development of my research, which investigated the intercultural communication challenges in an education setting which is English tutorial schools, as it has never been done before in order to facilitate employees working in that field to have the effective and successful intercultural communication.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes five sections: (1) the participants, (2) research design, (3) research instruments, (4) data collection and (5) data analysis.

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 40 employees working for more than a year in various English tutorial schools in Thailand, as the participants would have had substantial amount of time to establish relationships and communicate interculturally in the organization. They met the predetermined criteria of using English as a medium of communication with foreign speakers at their workplaces and they also reached the certain level which indicated that they had high English proficiency. The 40 participants were 20 foreigners who are the managers, English coaches and content developers. Also, another 20 Thai employees included those who are managers, English tutors and assistant coaches as this diverse group of participants and job positions reflects different work cultures, conditions, communication frequency and the level of formality. The demography of participants was presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demography of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demography of participants</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 29 years old</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 – 39 years old</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years old or above</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nationality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ref. code: 25646321040260FGV
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational background</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree or higher</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working experience</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 3 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 6 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 years or above</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of communicating</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2 times / week</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 4 times / week</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 4 times / week</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 Research Design

This study used a mixed-method research approach to gain a better understanding of connections and contradictions between qualitative and quantitative data (Shorten & Smith, 2017). Also, it allows participants to freely share their experiences and answer across the research process. For quantitative data, the self-assessment questionnaire was used with the purpose of assessing employees’ perceptions of intercultural communication based on Byram’s ICC model and finding the intercultural communication challenges. Byram’s ICC model consists of five areas: knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural awareness. It promotes the concept of
communicative approach which should be considered in language teaching context in order to provide learners with both linguistic and intercultural competence. The questionnaire was developed in English as the majority of employees working in English tutorial schools have high English proficiency.

Following the questionnaire, the qualitative data from the semi-structured interview was also used as it provides standardized information and observation of nonverbal reactions could be used as supplementary information. Questions could also be explained if necessary (Kumar, 2018). Questions for the semi-structured interview were provided in English which asked about how employees handle challenges that occur in intercultural communication.

3.3 Research Instruments

The self-assessment questionnaire consisting of 29 questions in total was adapted based on Byram’s ICC model and separated into three parts as follows:

**Part 1: Personal Information** Six questions in this part referred to personal information of the participants which included gender, age, educational background, working experience and frequency of communication with foreigners.

**Part 2: Self-assessment questions** 22 questions in this part were developed based on Byram’s ICC model with regard to their perceptions of intercultural communication mentioned in a self-assessment of Byram’s intercultural experience (Byram et al. 2002, p. 31-32). This part included a five-point Likert scale to analyze the questionnaire in terms of the intercultural communication challenges found and measure five intercultural competence dimensions which are knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural awareness. The five-point Likert scales was used to rate the different opinions and each item is rated on a range of scores from 1-5 points as well as the score’s interpretation as follows:
Part 3: Solutions to intercultural communication challenges

An open question in this part was developed to explore methods or ways that the participants generally use when coming across intercultural communication challenges.

Moreover, the qualitative data from this semi-structured interview was used as it enables the researcher to observe participants’ perspective which are aligned with the questionnaire and was interpreted based on five key domains of Byram’s ICC model. Three participants were chosen to attend the semi-structured interview if they met the criteria as follows: (1) three participants were required to use English as the main medium to communicate at work (2) three participants were employees from different nationalities and (3) three participants have worked in multilingual workplaces in different departments. One participant was a foreign teacher and another two participants were personal tutors. The questions were prepared in English by the researcher. The participants were asked five questions in order to identify the challenges as well as the solutions that they use to overcome challenges.

### Data Collection

In order to gather quantitative data, eighty questionnaires were distributed to the participants, forty for foreign employees and forty for Thai employees who had at least one year experience working in English tutorial schools. The data were collected in March-April 2022.

For qualitative data, the semi-structured interview was recorded for the confidentiality and convenience of the participants in April 2022.
3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed by descriptive statistics data analysis (SPSS program) which included mean scores and standard deviation (S.D.) in order to analyze the findings of the research. For the semi-structured interviews, the information from the interviewees was collected to verify and support the findings. In order to analyze the qualitative data, conceptual content analysis was employed as a tool based on participants’ experiences and words. The word categories were coded based on its occurrence from an open question as well as the semi-structured interview. The results were carefully interpreted from the words’ presence and categories in order to draw generalizations and conclusions of this study. The data from the semi-structured interviews was presented in descriptive format.
CHAPTER 4  
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 

This chapter reports the result of the study based on the data collected from forty foreign and Thai employees working in English tutorial schools in Thailand. The findings are divided into two parts as follows:

4.1 The Intercultural Communication Challenges Found
4.2 Suggestions on How to Overcome Intercultural Communication Challenges

4.1 The Intercultural Communication Challenges Found

In part 2 of the questionnaire, 22 questions were adapted from Byram’s ICC model in order to measure the participants five intercultural competence dimensions, which are attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness accordingly. The questions in this part also studied the intercultural communication challenges that occurred among employees. Two main challenges were found and were caused by the lack of knowledge of ICC and cultural differences. The employees struggled in finding the appropriate way to give the constructive feedback when assessing students’ performance. Because the students were from different cultures and backgrounds, their perceptions towards receiving feedback were the area which the employees had to be aware of. Moreover, they found it challenging when they had to find the suitable English words and expressions used in the classroom context as the students’ English proficiency were mostly low to moderate. As a result, these challenges affected the employees’ competence regarding internal communication. The summary is provided for each dimension separately in Table 2-6 below.
Table 2

Employees’ Attitudes towards ICC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I have a positive view of people from different cultures</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am curious to understand foreign cultures in order to know how to respond and interact appropriately</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am open to other people’s viewpoints</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I treat everyone in my workplace equally no matter what their religion or nationality</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I feel nervous when I have to be around people in an intercultural context</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mean score</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.28</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.41</strong></td>
<td><strong>Very high</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 2, it illustrates that employees had highly positive attitudes towards people from different countries and cultures (\( \bar{x} = 4.28 \)), particularly in terms of how to treat people equally and the curiosity in understanding different cultures in order to respond and interact appropriately. Despite the fact that attitudes towards multicultural people are the sensitive topic, they felt comfortable being around people in an intercultural context. However, when giving constructive feedback to students or expressing their thoughts on the topic discussed, the counterpart found it too direct and perceived it as an attack. This finding was supported and aligned with the interview data from participant 1 as explained below:

“Recently, we received the feedback that our feedback seems to be too direct and they can’t really think in a supportive way. That’s why the pressure came, plus with the difficulty of that particular model that affects the learner.

(S. Pongkanta, personal communication, April 7th, 2022)
As a result, when employees deal with foreign students or try to solve the conflict with others in the company, they have to adjust their communication styles to match the counterpart in order to develop understanding and reach a consensus because the attitudes towards people’s communication styles are different, which affected the message interpretation. As suggested by McLeod (2018), the way that attitude influences how we react, talk, or think is called behavioral attitude. In English tutoring schools, as most of the employees are Westerners, they tend to communicate directly. Asian’s communication style, in contrast, tend to be indirect. See the comparison of working with Thais and Europeans below:

“In Europe, we tend to be very impatient. We want things to get done very fast. We want action. We want results and if we don't see that in Europe, we will often raise our voice and then we will get things done.”
(K. Mouton, personal communication, April 13th, 2022)

The interviewee also described and compared his experience working with Thai students and employees as following:

“In Asia, if you raise your voice, you basically lose your faith. People will lose their respect for you and you won’t get anything done.”
(K. Mouton, personal communication, April 13th, 2022)

Therefore, it can be said that the different attitudes towards others’ communication behaviors also cause the obstacles, which is challenging for employees to overcome it in order to communicate successfully and reach consensus.

Table 3
Employees' Knowledge of ICC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>$\bar{x}$</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I understand body languages and facial expressions</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 shows that employees also had high knowledge of ICC as shown that they were aware of people’s different mindsets ($\bar{x} = 4.65$). Followed by having great knowledge on how to behave properly ($\bar{x} = 4.60$). Moreover, they had great knowledge and understanding on people’s body languages, facial expressions and correct manners to use when communicating with multicultural people at work ($\bar{x} = 4.45$). However, it is still challenging for them, especially when teaching foreign students. Even though they were able to find appropriate words to explain ideas or thoughts ($\bar{x} = 2.13$), they still had to downgrade and simplify the language used every time when communicating, particularly with students because most of the students have low English proficiency, while a number of students have moderate English proficiency. Thus, it takes considerable time and effort through study and elaboration as described below:

“Sometimes, words that are so simple to us, even when we are thinking that we’re down grading words that are so simple to us, can seem like a huge thing for my students.”

*(F. Mallick, personal communication, April 9th, 2022)*

As seen above, the problem with using the appropriate words choices mainly occurred when teaching students rather than communicating with co-workers. To be
able to understand why the student asked such a question, even though it is a basic common terminology, it is necessary for employees to acknowledge where the students come from and be equipped to answer. Moreover, some of the participants found that they had to carefully choose or rephrase keywords to make sure that it is understandable for both parties to avoid misunderstandings.

**Table 4**

*Employees’ Skills of Interpreting and Relating*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I understand what my foreign bosses, colleagues and students need</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I can interpret body language and facial expressions when they show confusion or hesitation</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am able to compare and contrast my own culture and foreign cultures</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 displays the employees’ skills of interpreting and relating, which shows that most of the employees had very high abilities to interpret the information and relate it to their own understandings. They were able to interpret the body languages and facial expressions when their co-workers or students show hesitation or confusion (\( \bar{x} = 4.50 \)), followed by the very high ability to compare and contrast their own cultures to other cultures (\( \bar{x} = 4.43 \)). Despite having great understandings on what their co-workers and students need (\( \bar{x} = 4.33 \)), some of them were stressed when they need to react or respond to that request or needs. This obstacle usually occurs with non-native English speakers when they cannot overcome self-doubt about their English abilities, which may stem from their past experiences from work or study. When non-native English speakers receive new information in the language that they are not familiar with, the process of interpreting and translating occurs. By the time they come up with the proper response, the conversation has moved on. Nonetheless, focusing only on the core message, not
other elements, for example, intonation or accents, and paying more attention to nonverbal cues to see if it matches the words they speak also helps as it increases clarity.

Table 5

*Employees’ Skills of Discovery and Interaction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I know how to deal with conflicts at work properly</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I know how to respond to my foreign bosses, colleagues and students’ body languages properly</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am able to adapt to new cultural environment</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am able to adapt to different communication styles in my workplace</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I like to listen and observe other people during conversation</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 5, most of the participants agreed that during conversation, they prefer to listen and observe the others (\( \bar{x} = 4.65 \)). Moreover, they were able to adapt themselves to new cultural environments (\( \bar{x} = 4.63 \)) and the different communication styles in their workplace respectively (\( \bar{x} = 4.50 \)). In terms of responding to individual’s body language, the participants had high knowledge and are aware that not all body language conveys the same meanings in various cultures (\( \bar{x} = 4.28 \)). Lastly, in terms of dealing with conflicts, they also had great knowledge on how to deal with conflicts properly at work.

As the skills of discovery and interaction refer to the ability to operate certain skills in real-time communication and interaction, the employees had to develop or apply several skills to overcome the challenges mentioned in the sections of the attitudes and knowledge of ICC. It is required that the employees have to put more
effort on mutualizing different perceptions when giving or receiving constructive feedback and choosing the suitable English level for individuals in order to communicate and deal with interactions appropriately.

Table 6

*Employees’ Critical Cultural Awareness of ICC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I can distinguish cultural differences among people in my workplace</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I understand the various cultural expressions of people in my workplace and my students</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I like to learn new cultures from my foreign bosses, colleagues and students</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am aware of the impact of culture context on people’s interaction</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mean score</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.47</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.50</strong></td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 displays findings of employees’ critical cultural awareness of ICC. It reveals that the employees preferred to learn new cultures from surrounded people at work the most (\( \bar{x} = 4.68 \)). In addition, they were mindful of the impact of different culture context on their interaction with others that might happen (\( \bar{x} = 4.60 \)), followed by the high ability in distinguishing cultural differences among surrounding people at work (\( \bar{x} = 4.43 \)). While other areas of employees’ critical cultural awareness of ICC were interpreted as very high, the understanding of employees’ various cultural expressions was interpreted as high (\( \bar{x} = 4.20 \)). It is because the employees had to familiarize themselves with the surroundings first, especially in the classroom, where there are various groups of students as described below.
In order to understand how people react or behave in a particular way, time, patience and flexibility are required. By being more soft-spoken, patient and adaptive, it helps them develop more understanding of the situation at hand, which includes the understanding of other people’s different cultural expressions. Therefore, it is not only challenging for the employees to find the appropriate word choices to suit individuals’ English ability, but also to choose the communication style that is understandable for the classroom, yet does not bore the students.

4.2 Suggestions on How to Overcome Intercultural Communication Challenges

In the third part of the questionnaire, thirty eight participants gave recommendations on how they overcome intercultural communication challenges at work. The recommendations were reported as the following:

1) **Being an active listener and observer** Most of the participants suggested that being an active listener and observer helps assess the situation at hand, rather than jumping to conclusions or asking right away. The body languages and facial expressions also played a significant role as they are universal. When involved in conversations, the participants listened to other people attentively as it is the way to show genuine interest in people or the topic discussed. This will develop a personal connection and keep the conversation going. The participants also suggested that by observing how the counterpart communicates and handles the situation first, they learned how to behave properly and made sure that they did not do or say anything that would contrast to the specific behaviors they observed. By doing so, it allows them to understand a little about each other. Interpreting meaning and intention are the difficult part of the process. Therefore, the effective communicators require patience and time to develop the skills of interpreting and relating.
2) **Asking and seeking for clarification** In order to develop understanding of their colleagues and students in work and study context, another simplest way, apart from being an active listener and observer, is asking and seeking for clarification. As suggested from the participants, asking open and direct questions helps prevent misunderstandings. They also preferred the counterpart to ask more directly as a default. The technique seeking for clarification did not apply only in the work-related conversation, but also in the personal conversation where they exchanged their cultural perspectives and thoughts on certain things. Engaging in small talks, as a part of the personal conversation, allows them to gain more knowledge about the individuals and the cultural differences. Moreover, when expressing thoughts, they tried to express them as clearly as possible and made sure the others get them right. In seeking for clarification, it helps them get a better perspective on the matter in order to approach individuals as culturally appropriately as possible, especially when teaching. Asking students what they understand or why they think that way assisted them in building the rapport with the students as well.

3) **Being clear, open-minded and adaptable** Besides using as direct and clear language as possible, most of the participants also recommended being clear and direct in terms of intentions and expressions. When they found that they lacked cultural knowledge, they did not hesitate to be open about it and tried to lower their own cultural context to the best of their abilities when expressing themselves. They acknowledged that there was a disconnect, then worked together to surmount the problem. It was also important to be adaptable to any cross-cultural context and keep a positive mindset with little expectations. The participants believed that adapting and familiarizing themselves with others’ communication styles as fast as possible would be significantly useful as they could formulate the strategy to deal with similar incidents in the future, which led to the effective communication with their colleagues and students. One participant found that when teaching Thai students, the students were outspoken and not fast at response, so he needed to change his approach and make the students feel that they were not left behind. In addition, being open-minded and having willingness to learn new things are as crucial as being adaptable. Doing some research on various cultures or how to handle multicultural people were suggested as one of the solutions to handle challenges as well.
4) **Having a moderator in the middle** One of the participants encountered a problem in asking for direct feedback from their international colleagues. The colleagues were too shy to give constructive feedback and tried to meet him half-way. Thus, he asked for help from a moderator for the first few weeks and found that he was able to understand and handle the unfamiliar situations better. Other participants recommended having a moderator in the middle to lay out the conversation, state clear intentions from both sides and explain cultural differences that may contribute to the challenge. Then, the moderator had both parties decide again on their compromise. When in doubt, they usually ask the moderator a question without adopting an assumption. If possible, they also preferred having the moderator who has a similar experience, or cultural background.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents (1) summary of the study, (2) summary of the findings, (3) conclusion and (4) recommendations.

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study was conducted to find out the intercultural communication challenges faced by employees working in English tutorial schools in Thailand. It was also to investigate how the employees handle intercultural communication challenges found in the workplace with the purpose to improve the employees’ intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

5.1.1 Subjects, Materials and Procedures

The participants of this study were employees working in English tutorial schools in Thailand for more than one year. The participants were 40 employees, 20 Thai and 20 foreign employees.

The instruments for data collection were a self-assessment questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The self-assessment questionnaire was separated into three parts. The first part was the participants’ demographic information comprising of the gender, age, nationality, educational background, working experience and frequency of communicating with foreigners. The second part was 22 self-assessment questions developed based on Byram’s ICC model. The purposes of the self-assessment questions in part two were to explore intercultural communication challenges and measure employees’ five intercultural competence domains including knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural awareness. The last part of the questionnaire was one open question asking for solutions to overcome intercultural communication challenges.

The procedures of this study were divided into two main data collection areas. For the quantitative data collection, the self-assessment questions were written in English. 40 questionnaires were distributed and collected two weeks later, starting from the beginning of April to the middle of April, 2022. The findings were analyzed by the
SPSS program and presented in both percentages and descriptive format. For the qualitative data collection, three chosen participants took part in a semi-structured interview. The three participants were asked five questions in order to gain in-depth insight into the underlying challenges that they faced from their experiences by using conceptual content analysis to analyze the results. The interviews were recorded in the middle of April, 2022 and kept confidential.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The summary of the findings is divided into two parts as follows:

5.2.1 The intercultural communication challenges found

The results from the questionnaire that was developed from Byram’s ICC model in five different intercultural competence dimensions showed that the employees working in English tutorial schools were highly competent in critical cultural awareness the most ($\bar{x} = 4.47$), followed by skills of discovery and interaction ($\bar{x} = 4.45$). The participants also demonstrated a high level of interpreting and relating skills when receiving new information or interacting with students in the classroom ($\bar{x} = 4.41$), followed by having positive attitudes towards multicultural people ($\bar{x} = 4.28$) and having knowledge on cultural differences ($\bar{x} = 4.05$) accordingly.

As a result, the area of ICC that employees working in English tutorial schools had to work on the most is the knowledge of ICC and cultural differences. One of the main challenges they found was the ability to downgrade the language used in teaching students. The employees had to simplify the language used to the certain level where students get the most out of it in order to create the purposeful and supportive classroom. In addition, for the better understanding of social and individual interaction behaviors of their students, the employees had to spend more time doing research on various cultural differences as the preparation for the class beforehand. The participants also found giving constructive feedback challenging as the students found that the feedback received was too direct and unsupportive. Thus, they needed to adjust their communication styles to match with individuals and be open-minded to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own. In terms of interpreting and relating skills, despite having high English proficiency, most Thai employees often
struggled to interpret English information into their mother language. Therefore, they had to often ask the foreign colleagues for the sake of clarity. Another area that the participants had to put more effort on is the adaptability. Time and patience were required in order to develop understandings of the real-time situation, particularly in the classroom with various students. They needed to observe, adapt and customize their approach to establish credibility with students, which leads to the effective classroom environment.

5.2.2 Solutions to overcome intercultural communication challenges

The results from the last part of the questionnaire indicated the solutions that the participants generally use to overcome the intercultural challenges. 42% of the participants agreed that listening attentively to the counterpart and acting as a mediator help them understand the way of thinking of others so that they could respond properly. Observing others and following their examples also assist the employees in fitting in the new cultural context. Another long-term solution that three interviewees and 39% of the participants suggested was to be open-minded and adaptable to any circumstances. Being open-minded enough to learn new work norms of people from different cultures helps expand their knowledge of ICC. Furthermore, being adaptable to any circumstances allowed them to experience new communication approaches from their co-workers and students. 23% of the participants suggested that asking for clarification using direct and clear language was beneficial as it allows each other to explain their standpoints. It was found that when expressing themselves, they lowered their own cultural context to the best of their abilities for both sides to understand and come to conclusions. Lastly, a few participants also preferred having the moderator who has similar experiences or backgrounds in the middle of the conversation to help solve communication problems that might happen, until the participants are familiar with the new work environment and able to handle the problems better.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the ICC is significantly crucial for employees working in English tutorial schools to work across cultures and needs to be integrated into language teaching to facilitate students and conduct educational assessments. Having positive
attitudes towards multicultural people allows them to get a comprehensive view of different cultures. Having adequate intercultural knowledge supports effective interactions and becoming a competent communicator, both consciously and unconsciously. In addition, the skills of interpreting and relating are advantageous as the employees could develop clearer understanding of the intercultural context in a short amount of time by relating new information to their existing knowledge. The skills of discovery and interaction are also necessary and required for them to be competent in applying new cultural practices and managing the different interpretations under the constraints of real-time communication. Lastly, the last dimension of Byram’s ICC model is the critical cultural awareness. Byram discovered that when the critical cultural awareness (CCA) is added to the study of a foreign language, students who are given the chance to explore CCA in the language classroom attain proficiency in the skill of evaluation.

To meet the ICC challenges and become a competent communicator in five domains, the employees are advised to seek out the different communication approaches and styles to apply it with each counterpart from a different culture. Also, being open-minded to other people’s viewpoints and curious to learn new cultural norms facilitate them in overcoming the attitude challenge. To overcome the knowledge of ICC challenge, which was the main challenge the employees found, the employees should acquire more knowledge of students’ cultural and educational background so that they can be equipped to choose appropriate approach or words that match students’ English proficiency level to explain the ideas or concepts discussed. Asking the colleagues who have met the students before with the purpose to find out students’ backgrounds is also suggested. After that, they could use the observation to create the strategy to deal with challenges and gain more unconscious knowledge of ICC. To overcome the skills of interpreting and relating challenge, it was found that by simply asking the speaker to clarify more or focusing on the key message, it helps shorten the process of interpreting so that they can immediately relate the information received to their own knowledge. Moreover, the skills of discovery and interaction challenge can be overcome by observing new perspectives and others’ interactions from the real-time conversation before responding and trying to integrate new knowledge with what they already have. When in doubt, asking the experienced co-workers who have dealt with
the similar conflicts before or having a moderator in the middle to lay out the conversation for both sides are also suggested. Finally, to achieve the critical cultural awareness, it is recommended that the employees learn more cultural differences to get a better perspective on the matter by doing research on cultural differences or engaging in small talk with their colleagues. By being consciously and explicitly aware of cultural differences in the language classroom, it encourages students to embrace, understand and accept people from other cultures better.

The findings on intercultural communication challenges as well as how to overcome it were partially aligned with the previous studies from Jhaiyanuntana (2020) and Laohachaiboon (2011). Jhaiyanuntana studied the perceptions of Thai undergraduate hotel interns towards intercultural communication drawing upon Byram’s ICC model and suggested that the interns had to make an effort in learning about the cultural diversity as it helped overcoming the knowledge and critical cultural awareness challenges. Laohachaiboon also suggested that with the limited knowledge, grammar and vocabulary of the counterpart led to the intercultural communication challenges.

5.4 Recommendations

According to the results and the conclusion of this study, the recommendations for further study are presented as follows:

1) Due to the time constraint, the number of the participants in this study was only 40 Thai and foreign employees working in English tutorial schools in Thailand. Therefore, the further study may include more participants in order to gain more generalized information from the larger population.

2) To verify the reliability and validity of the results, the semi-structured interview should be conducted with more participants from the different departments. The upper-level employees should also be invited as they have many working experiences and might provide distinctive perspectives that would benefit the further study.

3) As the objectives of this study are to explore only the intercultural communication challenges as well as how to overcome them, the further study should
also look into the skills or competencies needed for employees, as it is beneficial for the employees to overcome any kind of challenges that might occur in the future.

4) Most of the items from the self-assessment questionnaire in this study mainly focused on measuring the intercultural communicative competence of the participants. Therefore, the further study might consider adapting or generating more items to focus more on the intercultural communication challenges as well.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX
APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

This self-assessment questionnaire is a part of an independent study submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Career English for International Communication, Language Institute, Thammasat University. This questionnaire aimed to identify the intercultural communication challenges and the solutions to intercultural communication challenges of employees working in English tutorial schools in Thailand. Your response will be confidential and used solely for academic purpose.

Part 1: Personal information

1. Gender  ○ Male  ○ Female
2. Age  ○ 20-29 years old  ○ 30-39 years old  ○ 40 years old or above
3. Nationality  ………………….
4. Educational background  ○ Vocational certificate  ○ Bachelor’s degree  ○ Master’s degree or higher
5. Working experience  ○ 1-3 years  ○ 4-6 years  ○ 7 years or above
6. Frequency of communicating with foreigners  ○ 1-2 times a week  ○ 3-4 times a week  ○ Over 4 times a week

Part 2: The self-assessment questions of the intercultural communication challenges

Please select the degree that best describes your perspectives towards intercultural communication in workplace.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>5 (Strongly Agree)</th>
<th>4 (Agree)</th>
<th>3 (Moderate)</th>
<th>2 (Disagree)</th>
<th>1 (Strongly Disagree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I have a positive view of people from different cultures</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>I am curious to understand foreign cultures in order to know how to respond and interact appropriately</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>I am open to other people’s viewpoints</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>I treat everyone in my workplace equally no matter what their religion or nationality</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>I feel nervous when I have to be around people in an intercultural context</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>I understand body languages and facial expressions</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>I know the correct manners to use when communicating with my foreign bosses, colleagues and students</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>I am aware of the different mindsets of my foreign bosses, colleagues and students</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I know how to behave properly with my foreign bosses, colleagues and students</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>I cannot find appropriate words to explain my ideas or thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I understand what my foreign bosses, colleagues and students need</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I can interpret body language and facial expressions when they show confusion or hesitation</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>I am able to compare and contrast my own culture and foreign cultures</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>I know how to deal with conflicts at work properly</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>I know how to respond to my foreign bosses, colleagues and students’ body languages properly</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>I am able to adapt to new cultural environment</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>I am able to adapt to different communication styles in my workplace</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>I like to listen and observe other people during conversation</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I can distinguish cultural differences among people in my workplace</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I understand the various cultural expressions of people in my workplace and my students</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I like to learn new cultures from my foreign bosses, colleagues and students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I am aware of the impact of culture context on people’s interaction</td>
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</table>

This is the end of the questionnaire