



## Exploring Intercultural Competence Among Chinese English Majors in Thailand

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Received 09/08/2024

Revised 18/08/2024

Accepted 18/09/2024

### Abstract

**Background and Aim:** Intercultural competence (IC) is considered to be one of the critical competencies necessary for talent in today's world. This study is qualitative, and it is conducted with the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (AIE) to enhance the intercultural competence of Chinese English major students by having them critically reflect on their intercultural experiences during their education abroad in Thailand. Although plenty of research is related to IC in educational stay-abroad programs, only a few of them have conducted empirical research on the usage of AIE in IC development, especially those beyond the American or European context. Therefore, the study first aims to identify elements of intercultural competence demonstrated in three students' real-life intercultural encounters in Thailand. Meanwhile, it also explores the feasibility of using AIE interviews instead of the written form for future large-scale studies to help participants reflect critically on their intercultural encounters.

**Materials and Methods:** The interview data from three students were analyzed. The model of *Intercultural Competence in AIE* was employed to examine the main aspects of intercultural competence (attitudes, knowledge, skills, and action orientation) manifested in students' intercultural interactions. The narratives were categorized and reconstructed using MAXQDA 2022 according to these thematic frameworks.

**Results:** The findings revealed that three students generally had a negative attitude towards intercultural encounters for various reasons, such as feeling "surprised." While all four aspects of intercultural competence were reflected in their experiences, the focus was mainly on attitudes and specific skills. Additionally, the students showed a strong interest in further developing their intercultural knowledge. Compared to the written form, the oral interview proved to be more flexible, allowing the researchers to remind participants of past events and engage in follow-up discussions. Moreover, some opaque questions in the written form were more easily accepted in the oral format, and participants could double-check questions anytime.

**Conclusion:** This study contributes empirical study about the application of AIE in education abroad programs, especially for Chinese English major students going to Thailand. Significantly, this study represents an initial attempt to explore the possibility of conducting the AIE interview for future research.

**Keywords:** Intercultural competence; The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters; Chinese English Major students; Thailand

### Introduction

In the context of globalization, intercultural competence (IC) is considered to be one of the critical competencies necessary for talent in today's world, because most people work and live in a multicultural environment and inevitably get along and cooperate with people from different cultural backgrounds (Zhang & Yao, 2020). The goal of this endeavor is "global citizenship education" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, [UNESCO], 2014), that is, empowering learners to face and resolve global challenges actively and ultimately to be proactive contributors to a "more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world" (p. 15). An intercultural encounter, where individuals bring their own socially and culturally shaped worldviews and communication styles (Kramsch, 1998), is an ideal starting point for evaluating one's intercultural competence. These encounters allow individuals to reflect on their cultural identity and intercultural competence based on their experiences and interactions with others from different cultures (Holmes & O'Neill, 2010).

Moreover, intercultural competence does not automatically increase by simply being in a foreign culture (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012); in other words, immersing in a culture without reflection limits the development of intercultural competence (Paige, 2015). Reflection, according to Deardorff (2006), is vital to developing learners' intercultural competence. Therefore, in the context of intercultural education, it is valuable to encourage students to reflect on their intercultural experiences. This reflection not only helps their personal growth and enhances their lives, but it also positively impacts the world around them. Furthermore, the benefits of such reflection extend to future participants and other stakeholders, including faculty and program administrators (Houghton, 2014; Ottoson et al., 2018). The *Autobiography of*





*Intercultural Encounters* (AIE) (Byram et al., 2009) is a self-reflective as well as an educational tool that supports the development of the IC by analyzing a specific intercultural encounter within a series of questions (Barrett, 2008; Deardorff, 2015). Meanwhile, the AIE is grounded in a framework of intercultural competence that includes four key components: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and action (Byram et al., 2009; Council of Europe, 2013), which is regarded as the theoretical foundation of this paper. However, the effectiveness of AIE needs additional studying and investigation, whereas there is an apparent shortage of AIE empirical research in the field of English language teaching and education as well, with approximately 20 research.

Thailand has a high level of higher education and internationalization among Southeast Asian countries and has a lot of cooperation and exchange programs with China, especially with Yunnan Province (Zhang & Hu, 2016). According to Nation Thailand, over 14,000 Chinese students were enrolled in 102 Thai universities in 2020. Thai universities have become attractive alternatives to Western institutions for Chinese students (Wang et al., 2023, p. 46). On the one hand, the proliferation of English-medium instruction programs from primary to tertiary levels (Savski & Vencer Compendio, 2022) has attracted many Chinese students. Those international learning and internship platforms create a unique multicultural atmosphere, and provide students with opportunities for studying overseas, internships, and even employment (Tan et al., 2017). On the other hand, English is regarded as a lingua franca even as the ASEAN lingua franca in Thai higher education (Nomnian, 2014), so English major students, compared with other major students from China (except Thai language major students), should have more advantages and confidence in language communication during their education abroad in Thailand. Their language skills, confidence and willingness to communicate in new environments, and cultural awareness and adaptability contributed to this advantage. Therefore, English major students might have equal and more harmonious communication in Thailand, which will significantly develop their intercultural competence. Overall, this study seeks to identify the elements of intercultural competence displayed in three students' real-life intercultural encounters in Thailand, contributing to an empirical investigation into the application of the AIE model, particularly in the context of Chinese students educational staying in Thailand, a country outside the "BANA" (Britain, Australasia, and North America) region (Holliday, 1999, p. 4). Additionally, the study explores the feasibility of using AIE interviews, rather than written forms, for future large-scale studies to encourage participants to critically reflect on their intercultural encounters.

## Objectives

The study concerns the process of learners' intercultural competence development, and two objectives are as follows:

1. To identify key elements of intercultural competence (attitudes, knowledge, skills, and action orientation) shown in participants' real-life intercultural encounters in Thailand. The *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* is utilized extensively as both an educational tool and a research instrument to examine these competence components.
2. Compared with the written AIE form, the study also explores the possibility of conducting the AIE interview for future larger-scale research to help students critically reflect upon their intercultural encounters.

## Literature Review

### 1. Intercultural Competence (IC)

When competence is understood not merely as a collection of skills but as the integration of attitudes, knowledge, understanding, and skills applied in action within an intercultural setting, it becomes intercultural competence (Barrett et al., 2014).

Over the last fifty years, a considerable volume of literature has explored the concepts of intercultural competence and its various related terms (Deardorff, 2015). In foreign language education, the terms intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence are frequently used. While some scholars argue that these two concepts are distinct (with intercultural communicative competence encompassing intercultural competence) (Byram, 1997; Wen, 2014), there is a growing consensus among scholars and educators that intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence are equivalent and can be used interchangeably (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2000; Peng & Wu, 2017). This paper adopts the term "intercultural competence," treating intercultural communicative competence and intercultural competence as core, interchangeable concepts while respecting the original terminology used



by authors when discussing related items. Overall, there is a consensus that intercultural competence consists of three interconnected and interdependent dimensions: attitude, knowledge, and skills. Attitude is the prerequisite for successful intercultural communication, knowledge provides the foundation, and skills ensure effective intercultural communication (Gu, 2017).

Compared with Western countries or regions such as Europe and the United States, IC research in China started late and has only gradually increased over the past two decades (Hu, 2013). Some researchers have conducted theoretical and empirical studies on IC composition and dimensions (Dai, 2019; Sun, 2016), IC model/scale construction, and other aspects (Peng et al., 2020; Zhang & Yao, 2020). Some have discussed how to cultivate college students' IC from the aspects of foreign language competitions (Gu & Jocuns, 2024; Yu, 2021; Zhang et al., 2018), foreign language classroom environment, teaching syllabus and content, curriculum setting and teaching methods (Chen & Li, 2017; Liao & Li, 2017). Others have explored the factors that affect the cultivation of college students' IC from the perspective of attitude, motivation, awareness, cultural sensitivity, and other abilities (Gao, 2016; Wu et al., 2017). Obviously, in the Chinese database, few studies are pertinent to the influences of educational abroad experience on students' intercultural competence (Pan & Yang, 2021), especially for English major students, which is one of the research gaps for this study.

## 2. The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE)

AIE serves as both a self-reflective and educational tool that aids in the development of IC by analyzing a specific intercultural encounter through a series of questions (Barrett, 2008; Deardorff, 2015). In particular, the AIE requires users to reflect on one significant intercultural experience and engage in a process of self-analysis and evaluation. It can be utilized independently by individuals as well as employed as a pedagogical tool by teachers and educators (Jackson, 2012).

According to Byram et al. (2009), there were two main approaches to recording the experience using the AIE. The first approach involved participants writing (by hand or computer) their answers in the written format of the AIE, and it could be done either entirely privately or during/after a discussion with a teacher or other mentor. It is important to note that not all questions in the AIE need to be answered, and "it is not a questionnaire" (Barrett & Byram, 2022, p. 24). The second approach involved conducting interviews, which serve as an oral version of the AIE.

The AIE, as an educational tool for guiding narrative accounts, is based on a theoretical framework of intercultural competence that encompasses four essential components: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and action (Byram et al., 2009; Council of Europe, 2013). The new AIE model builds upon Byram's original five components of IC by reorganizing them and introducing some enhancements. Méndez García (2017) noted that a fundamental aspect of IC was the orientation towards action following reflection, which was also a core principle of AIE. As Jackson (2012) pointed out, while the main categories in AIE were similar to other descriptions of IC, the emphasis on taking action was crucial. Consequently, action has been added as a new category in the IC model, reflecting that taking action may result from all the other components. The elements of IC in the AIE are illustrated in Table 1, adapted from the AIE supporting document "Notes for Facilitators" (Byram et al., 2009) and the AIE online course (Council of Europe, 2013).

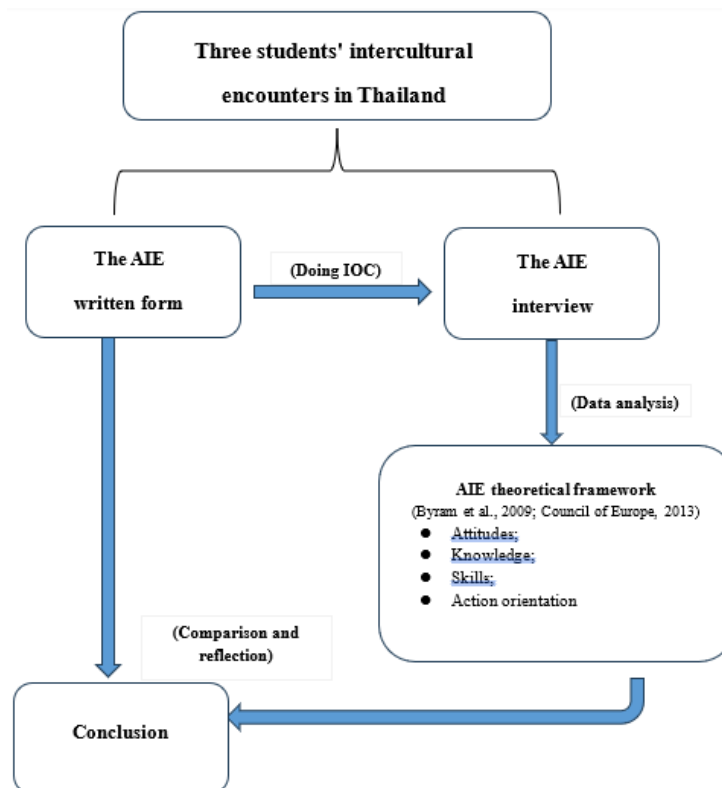
**Table 1** Intercultural Competence Components in the AIE

Elements	Details
Attitudes	Acknowledgement of identities
	Respect for otherness
	Empathy
	Tolerance of ambiguity
Knowledge	General knowledge
	Specific knowledge
Skills	Skills of discovery and interaction
	Skills of interpreting and relating
	Communicative awareness
	Behavioral flexibility

Elements	Details
	Critical cultural awareness
Action orientation	Taking action as a result of IE itself or doing the AIE

Empirical studies and research related to AIE highlighted its potential as a tool for enhancing intercultural competence across various contexts (Andawi et al., 2019; Matsumoto, 2017; Méndez García, 2017) and age groups (Riviuccio, 2021; Ruest, 2020). However, few studies have been conducted beyond European or American areas, and those studies also reveal challenges, such as the limited impact on adolescents and the need for more extended and comprehensive applications. Therefore, this study builds on the existing literature by focusing on a non-traditional, non-English-speaking country setting, contributing to the broader understanding of intercultural competence in diverse educational environments. Meanwhile, this study marks an initial effort to investigate the feasibility of using the AIE interview for future large-scale research, to help students critically reflect on their intercultural encounters.

## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## Methodology

This study was conducted with AIE to develop Chinese English major students' intercultural competence by critically reflecting upon their intercultural encounters during education abroad in Thailand. According to Smorti (2011), self-narratives could yield positive effects for narrators, provided they are equipped with the tool to reflect on their memories. In this study, the AIE tool focused on the process rather than the outcomes, emphasizing critical reflection, intercultural thinking, and an individual's approach to others. This approach offered a comprehensive view of how a person's intercultural competence developed (Deardorff, 2015). The participants were selected using convenience sampling techniques (Creswell, 2012).





Since the authors work at Y University, it is more convenient to reach out to participants and gather materials related to the programs. Three participants (S1-S3) were all English major students from Y University in Yunnan Province with an English level roughly at the bottom of B2 or C1 (CEFR standard). Because all cross-border exchange programs across universities in Yunnan Province had either been suspended or transitioned to online formats due to COVID-19, those participants were part of the last group at Y University taking the education abroad programs in Thailand. Two of them learned English in Thailand as exchange students, and the other student taught Mandarin Chinese at local schools as an educational intern. They participated in the research for the AIE written form during their final semester of college. They were interviewed after graduating from Y University.

The study had two main sections. Data from the written form of AIE were collected first, followed by the oral interview. WeChat (a Chinese social media application) was applied in the study because of the participants' graduation situation, as well as WeChat's convenience in file transfer and voice calls for interviews. English was the primary language used in the AIE's written and oral forms. The study was conducted after students returned to China after finishing their education abroad in Thailand.

Section One: Getting Data from the AIE Written Form. After getting permission from participants, the researchers contacted them via WeChat, stating the background of the study and explaining tips for filling out the AIE. The AIE (in Word form) was sent to students, and they were asked to type their answers in English and return the form to the researchers within two weeks.

Section two: Getting Data from the AIE Interview. Several months later, researchers had a one-on-one oral interview with them utilizing a voice call. The majority of interview questions came from the original official AIE form, and a few new questions were related to the follow-up discussions of former questions. Interviews were recorded and dialogues were transcribed into text form for subsequent data analysis. For the sake of reliability and validity of the interview, questions originated from the written form, and the researchers only deleted some repetitive ones and made a few order changes. Meanwhile, those semi-structured interview questions had been put through the Indexes of Items of Objective Congruence (IOC) in the researchers' department before the interview. One thing that should be stressed is that the researcher had sent the interview-question sheet to participants in advance, so students had preparation. As a result, two students had similar answers to their written ones, and even one student had almost the same answer (S2).

Based on the discussion and reflection, the interview data from three students were analyzed. The model of "Intercultural Competence in AIE" (Byram et al., 2009; Council of Europe, 2013) was employed to examine the aspects of IC manifested in students' intercultural interactions. During these interviews, participants engaged in discussions with researchers, and the conversations were recorded. The interviews were then transcribed, converting the spoken language into written form. Notably, one author did the transcriptions, and the other author conducted the peer debriefing, which added to the credibility of the findings. The narratives were categorized and reconstructed using MAXQDA 2022 (Release 22.2.0) according to these thematic frameworks, specifically for four key components of IC: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and action orientation.

## Results

Three students' intercultural encounters were put into the "IC in AIE" model and then analyzed together. Table 2 below shows the general information about the three intercultural encounters, which was adapted from Méndez García (2017), and Table 3 demonstrates the details of the IC component in students' actual encounters.



**Table 2** An Overview of Students' Intercultural Encounters

Students	Student's background	Title	Summary	Emotions
S1	an intern to teach Chinese at a Thai school	Preparing teaching materials	Helping Thai teachers prepare teaching materials, but Thai teachers were not satisfied.	<i>This event surprised me; I felt quite strange and confused.</i>
S2	an exchange student for English learning at a Thai university	Prayer before meal	Having dinner with an American friend, and watching her praying	<i>I felt surprised and tense.</i>
S3	an exchange student for English learning at a Thai university	An embarrassing experience in a hotel	The hotel owner invited them to join the party, but they refused	<i>At first, I was very happy and a little surprised; and then I felt a little embarrassed; I felt regret.</i>

As illustrated in Table 2, two students experienced intercultural encounters with occidentals in daily life situations, while only one had such encounters with locals in a school setting. When describing their emotions and feelings towards these encounters, they predominantly used words or phrases that inclined to the negative side, such as "strange," "confused," "tense," "embarrassed," and "regretful." Interestingly, all of them used the word "surprised" to describe their feelings.

**Table 3** IC Components in Three Students' Intercultural Encounters

Elements	Details	Excerpts from Participants
Attitudes	Acknowledgement of identities	<b>S1:</b> ① <i>Thai teachers are very professional;</i> ② <i>In Thai schools, Thai teachers usually dress formally;</i> ③ <i>I find Thai people pay more attention to details when they are doing their work or tasks;</i> <b>S2:</b> <i>I thought foreigners usually pray before eating;</i> <b>S3:</b> ① <i>They had brown hair and all spoke English, so I guess they were from Europe or America.</i> ② <i>I know that people in Thailand are very simple and friendly, and businessmen don't play any tricks on visitors; they always show their courtesy to us.</i>



Elements	Details	Excerpts from Participants
	Respect otherness	for <b>S3:</b> ① <i>I realized that different people have different cultural backgrounds;</i> ② <i>I know that people from different places may think differently about the same thing.</i>
	Empathy	<b>S2:</b> ① <i>I will think that when I am praying, whether my friend will follow me or feel uncomfortable or not;</i> ② <i>he thought we would be afraid to pay for it;</i> <b>S3:</b> <i>I think for the hotel owner, it is a normal experience.</i>
	Tolerance ambiguity	of <b>S2:</b> <i>I didn't follow her, and I just closed my eyes;</i> <b>S3:</b> <i>I thought they maybe just showed their courtesy, but they didn't want to invite us. Or they may want to attract us to pay for more drinks.</i>
Knowledge	General knowledge	<b>S1:</b> <i>Now I have an intercultural course, so I realized the importance of having a positive attitude towards cultural differences.</i>
	Specific knowledge	<b>S2:</b> <i>I thought foreigners usually pray before eating;</i> <b>S3:</b> <i>I have been learning English for many years, and I can talk to them in English.</i>
	Skills of discovery and interaction	<b>S2:</b> <i>I tried to find out by asking questions at the time and looking on the internet;</i>
Skills	Skills of interpreting and relating	<b>S1:</b> <i>We prefer content or the accuracy of the information. While Thai teachers prefer details, there is a big gap between Chinese and Thai people's concepts;</i> <b>S2:</b> <i>Some things were different from my group. Foreigners like to read the Bible, but my group will not. In China, people usually don't pray before eating;</i> <b>S3:</b> <i>In China, businessmen always attract people to spend money on their goods.</i>
	Communicative awareness	<b>S1:</b> <i>I noticed that their facial expressions had slightly changed;</i> <b>S3:</b> <i>I noticed that they were very happy; the hotel owner didn't show any surprise.</i>
	Behavioral flexibility	<b>S1:</b> <i>I just went to Thai teachers with a smile and asked what was wrong with our work;</i> <b>S2:</b> <i>I closed my eyes;</i> <b>S3:</b> <i>I changed my language to English.</i>



Elements	Details	Excerpts from Participants
	Critical cultural awareness	<b>S2:</b> <i>Some knowledge cannot be learned by teachers.</i>
Action orientation	Taking action as a result of IE itself or doing the AIE	<b>S1:</b> <i>I want to learn more knowledge about cross-culture;</i> <b>S2:</b> <i>I shared my experience with my classmates;</i> <b>S3:</b> <i>But now I know that we have to be kind. That will make you make a lot of friends.</i>

As can be seen from the table above, students most frequently expressed competencies related to "attitude" within the four dimensions of IC. Specifically, when it comes to "acknowledgment of identities," the authors found that after several months of study or internship abroad, students had deepened their knowledge and understanding of Thailand, Thai people, and other cultures, forming their judgments and perceptions. For instance, S1 observed that "Thai teachers are very professional," they "usually dressed formally," and "pay more attention to details." S2 and S3 noted that "people in Thailand are very simple and friendly," and foreigners in Thailand usually pray before meals. S3, noticing that these foreigners had brown hair and spoke English, guessed they were likely from Europe or America. When referring to "respect for otherness," "tolerance of ambiguity," and "empathy," S3 clearly expressed an understanding that "people with different cultural backgrounds maybe think differently about the same thing," enabling her to infer the hotel owner's thoughts from multiple perspectives. S2 demonstrated strong empathy, putting herself in her friend's shoes, which led her to take the action of "closing my eyes."

In terms of "knowledge," only S1 noted the importance of having a positive attitude towards cultural differences, attributing this understanding to the intercultural courses in her postgraduate studies. S2 and S3 simply relied on their language skills as English majors and stereotypes, such as being able to communicate in English and believing that foreigners usually pray before meals.

Regarding "skills," only one student sought clarification from her friend and online resources for questions she was confused about. When addressing cultural differences, the students tended to focus on the differences between the two countries /cultures rather than considering similarities. For example, when S1 talked about education in China and Thailand, she mentioned all the cultural differences. S2 highlighted, "there were some things which were different from my group," and S3 compared businessmen in China and Thailand. In terms of "communicative awareness" during intercultural encounters, they were mainly sensitive to others' emotions, attitudes, and communication styles. For example, S1 was attuned to subtle changes in Thai teachers' expressions, which helped her adapt her subsequent actions. S3 noticed people's happiness and the hotel owner's facial feedback. Concerning "behavioral flexibility," all three students quickly and adaptively adjusted their behavior (e.g., smiling, closing their eyes, switching to English) to meet others' expectations. However, these three students demonstrated limited critical cultural awareness during encounters, with only S2 reflecting that "some knowledge cannot be learned by teachers."

Concerning "action orientation," after experiencing some intercultural encounters, these three students expressed their desire to share their experiences with peers who have not gone abroad and to learn more intercultural knowledge in the future. S3 even said that she would be kinder to make more friends.

## Discussion

According to the interview, three students generally held a generally negative attitude towards intercultural encounters for various reasons, such as feeling "surprised." While the four aspects of IC were reflected in their actual intercultural encounters, the focus was mainly on attitudes and certain skills. Additionally, they showed a strong interest in furthering their intercultural knowledge in the future. The findings indicate that three participants might not have been insufficiently prepared for their studies or internships in Thailand. Such preparation involves various aspects such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which could affect the depth and quality of their intercultural encounters in Thailand. Meanwhile, three students demonstrated limited critical cultural awareness during their encounters. Those findings and





discussions could help educators draw on the insights gained from the participants' experiences, and then might better facilitate the development of intercultural competence among students.

In the Chinese context, Zheng and Li (2016) were the only researchers who conducted action research to develop and design an effective teaching model called the "Reflective Intercultural Teaching Model" (p. 6), which utilized the AIE written form in a college English course. This study contributes to an empirical study about the application of AIE in education abroad programs, especially for Chinese English major students going to Thailand, a non-English-speaking country.

While analyzing the participants' AIE written forms, the researchers encountered several potential issues. First, the AIE form consisted of approximately twenty pages of subjective questions, which participants found time-consuming and demanding to answer. Only one student managed to submit the form on time, while others took around three weeks. This delay could be attributed to participants' busy academic schedules and the substantial workload posed by the AIE form. In addition, the original AIE form is shown to be somewhat complicated. Some questions were repetitive or difficult to comprehend, leading participants to skip or overlook certain items. Although each question provided numerous prompt words, this abundance of prompts likely contributed to confusion rather than clarity. Finally, considering the influence of the pandemic and the passage of time, the most recent group of students from Yunnan universities had an educational stay abroad experience in Thailand in 2019. Due to the extended time interval, students tended to forget specific details about events or recall them with little clarity.

Compared with the written form, the oral interview tended to be more flexible, and it was easy for the researchers to remind participants to think about past events and do follow-up discussions. Moreover, some opaque questions in written form could be more acceptable, and participants could double-check questions anytime. Those were the reasons why the authors used interview data for detailed analysis finally.

## Conclusion

After describing and critically reflecting on their unique encounter, three students could develop their IC and "stages of being intercultural competent," (Kilianska-Przybylo, 2012, p.126) and finally make some positive changes in the future, which are significant parts of the English language teaching. It also helps students to make the utmost of this unique opportunity. Meanwhile, this study contributes to empirical study about the application of AIE in education abroad programs, especially for Chinese English major students going to Thailand, a non-English-speaking country. This study is also an initial attempt to explore the possibility of conducting the AIE interview for future larger-scale research to help students critically reflect upon their intercultural encounters. Certainly, there are some limitations of the study, such as the small sample size and the potential impact of cultural and contextual factors on the generalizability of the results.

## Recommendations

### 1. For teachers:

Language teaching is responsible for preparing learners to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds by teaching them the necessary skills, attitudes, and knowledge (Byram & Wagner, 2018). Therefore, teachers should help students enhance their cultural knowledge, particularly in accessing, understanding, and applying general knowledge. In this study, general knowledge refers to concepts and theories related to culture, the relationship between culture and language, and intercultural communication. Integrating basic intercultural theories (such as iceberg theory, high-context vs. low-context cultures, tight and loose cultures, and face-negotiation theory) into practice can significantly improve learners' communication effectiveness, reduce misunderstandings, and foster mutual respect.

On the other hand, considering special knowledge acquisition, it is crucial to help students recognize the difference between generalizations and stereotypes. Students should realize that knowing some specific cultural knowledge about a particular country is only a starting point, and much more information is required to determine if their ideas or perceptions apply to an individual or situation (Jackson, 2014).



Meanwhile, foreign language teaching should not attempt to provide fixed representations of other cultures but should focus on equipping learners with the intercultural competence to access and analyze cultural practices and meanings they encounter. Providing information about a country only equips learners with sociocultural competence (Byram, 2021).

2. For program coordinators:

This study might serve as a helpful reference or guideline for program coordinators both in China and Thailand. They can better understand students' situations and problems, and then provide the necessary support (training, consultation, etc.) before and after coming to Thailand or other countries. Students, therefore, could be more confident and qualified in a new context. Most importantly, a seminar PowerPoint for students (who plan to go to Thailand for educational purposes) could be designed, which will greatly benefit students' IC cultivation both at home and in education abroad. In a word, educational managers and program coordinators, based on the results of the study, could place particular emphasis on improving the effectiveness of those international programs, providing more benefits for students in the future, from academic or educational benefits to personal benefits, even future-oriented benefits.

They could try to monitor students' emotions and intercultural competence performance before, during, and after their overseas educational programs. Track their progress in all areas, increase communication between instructors and students, and implement ongoing intercultural competence training throughout the program to create a continuous feedback loop.

3. For AIE researchers:

Based on the study, several adjustments and implications were made for future research. First, the AIE interview form was adopted instead of the written one, and participants should not have received the questions sheet in advance. Then, clear guidance is crucial, directing each participant to share only a singular intercultural encounter with personal significance, rather than discussing broader social phenomena. Last, focusing exclusively on one institution is deemed impractical, more participants from different universities should be involved.

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