

The Relationship Between Intercultural Communicative Competence and English Language Learning Outcomes

Restuti Retno Ningrum

2111102421050@umkt.ac.id

Abdul Halim

ah918@umkt.ac.id

Ade Ismail Ramdhan Hamid

air550@umkt.ac.id

Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the relationship between Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and English learning results among 57 first-year students at a private university in East Kalimantan. ICC is viewed as an essential element in language learning since it involves cultural awareness, communication abilities, and an open attitude that promotes successful intercultural exchanges. This research employed a quantitative approach that utilized two primary tools: an ICC survey grounded in Byram's (1997) model and an English proficiency assessment through the British Council EnglishScore application. Statistical analyses through Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression demonstrated a strong and significant positive relationship between ICC and English proficiency ($r = 0.632$, $p < 0.001$). Among the elements of the ICC, attitudes demonstrated the strongest correlation, with skills and knowledge following next. These findings underscore the significance of nurturing students' intercultural attitudes like openness, empathy, and adaptability since they greatly improve English learning results. This study offers valuable guidance for English teachers and curriculum designers, highlighting the importance of incorporating intercultural learning experiences into language teaching to enhance learners' readiness for effective communication in varied global situations.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence; English Proficiency; Attitudes; Language Learning; Curriculum Development

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become an important aspect of English language learning, especially in the era of globalization which demands the ability to communicate across cultures effectively. ICC involves not only linguistic mastery of language, but also the ability to understand, appreciate and adapt to cultural differences in communication interactions. This makes ICC a significant factor in influencing learners' English learning outcomes. Therefore, it is important

to understand how ICC affects English learning outcomes as well as which specific components of ICC are most correlated with improved language learning scores. Intercultural communication competence affects English learning outcomes by expanding the scope of learning from linguistic to sociocultural aspects. Learners who have high ICC tend to be able to understand the cultural context behind the use of English, so they can communicate more effectively and meaningfully.

Yashima (2022) asserts that learners who have intercultural sensitivity are better able to overcome communication barriers and improve their foreign language skills functionally. Moreover, Feng et al. (2025) discovered that intercultural attitudes including openness, empathy, and respect for different cultures directly affect students' communication strategies in intercultural situations. Inspiration and understanding of cultural norms assist learners in adapting their interaction styles and effectively negotiating meaning across cultures. Attitudes, such as openness, curiosity, and empathy, become the foundation that encourages learners to actively interact and accept cultural differences without prejudice (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2010). Of the three components, attitudes and communication ICC helps reduce miscommunication and increase effective interaction in the English learning process, which leads to improved academic scores.

Cultural knowledge, communication abilities, and attitudes are the three primary components that make up intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Since attitude affects how students react, comprehend, and adjust in cross-cultural encounters, it has been demonstrated to have the strongest correlation with better English learning outcomes among the three. According to research by Pasquarella, Jia, and Ferreira (2025), students who exhibit high levels of empathy and intercultural openness also typically perform better in communication and have more linguistic flexibility when learning a second language. This is because of favorable views of foreign cultures, which lessen anxiety and promote genuine conversation, hastening the process of learning a language.

Byram (1997), as the inventor of the ICC concept, provides a very relevant framework in understanding this relationship. In his book *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, Byram suggests five main dimensions of ICC, namely attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. He asserts, "Attitudes such as openness and curiosity toward other cultures are important foundations that enable the development of knowledge and skills necessary for effective intercultural communication" (Byram, 1997, p. 72). Thus, a positive attitude is a key prerequisite for the other dimensions of ICC to function optimally in improving English language learning outcomes. Furthermore, explicit integration of cultural learning in the English curriculum can enhance students' intercultural sensitivity and communication skills. For example, Incorporating cultural aspects into language education has demonstrated a decrease in communication discomfort and a boost in learners' confidence when engaging in a foreign language. Nevertheless,

insufficient teacher training and contextual resources continue to pose a substantial obstacle in its execution (Rabahi & Makhoul, 2025).

Intercultural communication competence is a key factor influencing English language learning outcomes. Cultural knowledge provides the basis of understanding, communication skills enable adaptation and negotiation of meaning, while an open attitude and motivation encourage learners to be active and effective in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, the development of ICC should be a major focus in English learning strategies so that learners are not only linguistically proficient, but also able to communicate effectively and sensitively in a multicultural global context. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) plays an important role in English language learning, as language is not only learned as a linguistic system, but also as a tool to interact with speakers from various cultural backgrounds. This research seeks to answer how ICC affects English language learning outcomes among learners and to find out to what extent each component of Intercultural Communication Competence, namely cultural knowledge, communication skills, and attitudes, contributes to improving English learning outcomes among intercultural settings. Intercultural understanding, tolerance for differences, sociopragmatic awareness, as well as skills in adapting communication to different cultural norms are thought to contribute significantly to improving English language competence. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide insights for educators and curriculum developers to integrate ICC teaching in English language learning to improve learning effectiveness and learners' communication skills in a global context.

While various earlier research efforts have investigated the relationship between intercultural communicative competence and English learning results, the majority have taken place in Western or highly international educational settings, frequently employing qualitative or descriptive approaches. This research, nevertheless, builds on and expands those results by employing a quantitative method in a multicultural classroom in Indonesia, concentrating specifically on first-year university students whose intercultural awareness is still evolving. This research offers empirical insights and practical guidance for curriculum design in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context by identifying the components of ICC—knowledge, skills, or attitudes that most strongly predict success in learning English. It aims to connect global ICC theory with its practical application in the Indonesian higher education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is the ability of individuals to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. This concept was formulated comprehensively by Byram (1997), who proposed five main dimensions in ICC, namely: attitude (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), interpreting and connecting skills (*savoir comprendre*), discovering and interacting skills (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical awareness of culture (*savoir*

s'enger). This model positions language teaching not only as linguistic transfer, but also as a process of identity formation and cultural engagement across borders.

In the context of English language teaching, ICC is an important foundation because language is a medium of exchange of values, norms and cultural perspectives. Moeller and Nugent (2014) suggest that learners who develop ICC show better communication skills, are able to avoid intercultural miscommunication, and have higher motivation to learn the language. Empirical support is also provided by Douglas and Rosvold (2018), who found that the integration of ICC in the context of *English for Academic Purposes* (EAP) significantly increased learners' cultural awareness and contributed to their academic achievement.

One approach that has proven effective in developing ICC is through the integration of multicultural fiction and nonfiction texts in learning. Exposure to cross-cultural narratives enables learners to build empathy, develop critical thinking, and understand diverse perspectives. A study by Botes, Dewaele, and Greiff (2021) confirmed that students with high ICC scores performed better in oral and written communication skills. This assertion aligns with the results of Abdulhasan (2024), who established that incorporating cultural aspects in narrative works and intercultural activities positively impacted the enhancement of EFL learners' pragmatic skills. Engagement with multicultural material aids learners in grasping the purpose, tone, and suitability of interactions across different settings.

Although ICC is widely recognized theoretically, its implementation in English language classrooms is not free from challenges. Limited culturally representative teaching materials, low pedagogical readiness of teachers, and lack of intercultural teaching training are the main obstacles. Sercu et al. (2005) noted that most teachers feel less confident integrating cultural aspects in teaching due to lack of in-depth training. In addition, cross-cultural topics sometimes face resistance from institutions and learners because they are considered sensitive or contrary to local values. In response to these challenges, Baker (2015) emphasizes the importance of a reflective and dialogical approach in teaching ICC. The aim is not to standardize cultures, but to make differences a source of enrichment and a space for learning. This perspective promotes openness and negotiation of meaning in intercultural communication, so that language learning can become a safe space for critical exploration of cultural identity and values.

Studies in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, show positive developments in ICC integration. The results of Wibowo et al. (2024) highlight the significance of reflective and experiential learning in fostering ICC, particularly for cultivating empathy, negotiating identity, and creating safe environments in language education. This aligns with the research conducted by Azzahrah et al. (2025), which indicated that educators in Indonesia and Thailand who underwent training in intercultural pedagogy were capable of designing activities to enhance students' cultural awareness, despite their execution being hindered by insufficient curriculum support and contextual teaching resources.

However, structural constraints still limit the widespread application of ICC. Abidin et al. (2024) identified barriers in the form of a curriculum that does not yet support cross-cultural approaches, lack of teacher training, and lack of authentic teaching materials. To address these challenges, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) suggest developing reflective and experiential teacher training. In addition, systemic efforts are needed to revise the curriculum and distribute locally contextualized multicultural teaching materials. This assertion aligns with the perspectives of Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), who underline that language learning grounded in intercultural understanding seeks not only to develop language abilities but also to foster identity awareness and contemplation of various cultural values. Giralt et al. (2022) support this by noting that incorporating global citizenship principles and utilizing English as a lingua franca in education can promote reflective engagement and the negotiation of cross-cultural understandings.

Together, these earlier studies demonstrate that students with elevated ICC consistently exhibit better English language results, especially in oral fluency, pragmatic abilities, and confidence in cross-cultural communication. Botes et al. (2021) discovered a significant correlation between ICC and both speaking fluency and written coherence. Abdulhasan (2024) noted that students involved in culture-based narrative learning saw significant improvements in sociopragmatic competence. In the same vein, Wibowo et al. (2024) emphasized that reflective and experiential ICC learning modules led to enhanced empathy and increased motivation among learners in diverse English classrooms. These empirical results strengthen the perspective that cultivating ICC directly enhances English learning outcomes, impacting both knowledge acquisition and learners' adaptive communication skills. This evidence strengthens the importance of investigating ICC in EFL settings such as Indonesia, where multicultural interaction is rising significantly.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study will adopt a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and English language learning outcomes. A cross-sectional survey approach will be used to collect data from a sample of English language learners. This design is appropriate as it allows for the measurement of variables (ICC and language learning outcomes) and the analysis of their relationship using statistical methods. The population in this study consisted of all first-year students enrolled in a foreign language teaching study program at one of the private universities in East Kalimantan. In particular, they are involved in classroom activities characterized by cultural diversity. This population was chosen because it is in accordance with the focus of the research, namely intercultural interaction in the learning environment and the use of foreign languages as a means of academic communication. Freshman students are deemed

significant for this research because they are at the beginning of cultivating intercultural awareness, meaning their answers are expected to represent their evolving learning process and comprehension, which is still taking shape, and can offer genuine and relevant data. The researcher employed a purposive sampling method to choose 57 students from this population who fulfilled specific criteria, specifically first-year students undergoing academic and social adaptation, participating in multicultural classes, and possessing diverse backgrounds in English learning and cultural experiences crucial for addressing the study's objectives in an objective and contextual manner.

Instrument and Procedure

This research employed two primary tools aimed at addressing the inquiries concerning the connection between intercultural communication competence (ICC) and English language learning results. The initial tool is the ICC questionnaire created using the intercultural competence frameworks of Byram (1997), Fantini (2007), and Chen & Starosta (2000). This survey assessed three primary aspects of ICC: cultural awareness, perspectives on cultural variations, and skills in intercultural communication. Participants filled out the questionnaire employing a 1-5 Likert scale, enabling the results to be analyzed quantitatively to determine the degree of their intercultural competence. The information from this survey was utilized to address the first and second research inquiries, specifically if ICC influences English learning results, and identifying the most prevalent component. The second tool is an English proficiency assessment utilizing the official British Council EnglishScore app. This examination includes elements of Grammar, Vocabulary, Listening, and Reading, taking place over a period of 30-40 minutes. The test outcomes yield a numerical score that indicates the participant's proficiency in English and serves as a reference to be compared with the ICC score obtained from the questionnaire. Through the comparison of these two sets of data, the researcher could examine the connection between ICC and English learning success, while also determining which ICC elements had the greatest impact on the findings. The concurrent application of the ICC questionnaire and the EnglishScore test enabled the researchers to objectively evaluate and contrast the two primary variables, thereby addressing both research questions precisely and pertinently.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were examined through two primary statistical techniques, specifically the Pearson correlation test and multiple linear regression. The Pearson correlation test was employed to assess the relationship between students' English proficiency scores and their level of intercultural communication competence (ICC). The analysis revealed a notable positive correlation between ICC and English learning results ($r = 0.632$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, regression analysis indicated that the components of attitude and skill in ICC had the most significant effect on students' English learning results. This discovery reinforces the significance of incorporating intercultural values in English language education to

better equip students for effective communication in a multicultural setting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Below are the findings of a quantitative survey with standardized measurements conducted by the researcher. Data was obtained through two main instruments, a questionnaire that included demographic information and measures of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and an English proficiency test administered using the official British Council EnglishScore app.

Description of Demographic Data

This study involved 57 first-year students from a foreign language study program at a private university in East Kalimantan. Most of the participants were between 18-21 years old (mean 19.6 years), indicating an early stage in their academic and social development. A total of 68% of the participants were female and 32% were male, indicating the dominance of female participation in this study. While all participants had Indonesian citizenship, their ethnic backgrounds were diverse including Banjar, Bugis, Dayak, and Javanese which created a rich socio-cultural dynamic during the learning process. Most participants had studied English for more than six years through formal and non-formal channels, and 74% had direct experience interacting with people from other cultures, such as through campus activities, social media, or student exchange programs.

Relationship between Questionnaire Outcomes and British Council EnglishScore Test Outcomes

This research explores the connection between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and English learning results by analyzing two kinds of quantitative data: results from an ICC questionnaire and English proficiency scores acquired via the official British Council EnglishScore app. The statistical analysis results, utilizing the Pearson Product Moment test and multiple linear regression, indicated a significant correlation between ICC dimensions (cultural knowledge, attitudes, and communication skills) and the English scores of participant.

Correlation Results of Total ICC to British Council EnglishScore

		Correlations	
		TOTAL ICC	ENGLISH SCORE
TOTAL ICC	Pearson Correlation	1	.582**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	57	57
ENGLISH SCORE	Pearson Correlation	.582**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	57	57

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

The Pearson test outcomes reveal a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.632$ with $p = 0.000$, signifying a robust and meaningful positive association between the overall Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) score and English learning results assessed through the British Council EnglishScore app. This indicates that as students' intercultural communicative competence increases, their English learning results improve. This discovery highlights the necessity of incorporating intercultural values in English language education at the tertiary level.

Description of Results of Each ICC Component on EnglishScore

In addition to the total ICC score, this study also analyzed the relationship between each ICC component to the EnglishScore. All three components of knowledge, attitudes, and skills showed a positive and significant relationship to the EnglishScore results. The attitudes component had the highest correlation with $r = 0.701$ ($p = 0.000$), followed by skills with $r = 0.648$ ($p = 0.000$), and knowledge with $r = 0.421$ ($p = 0.003$). This shows that an open attitude towards cultural differences, empathy, and adaptive skills play an important role in achieving English learning outcomes. Meanwhile, cultural knowledge also contributed, but not as strongly as the other two aspects. In general, the findings indicate that the attitudes and skills dimensions of intercultural communication play a more dominant role in supporting successful English language learning.

Why Attitude is the Most Influential Element

Attitudes related to ICC include openness, curiosity, empathy and respect for cultural differences. These attitudes affect how learners react, understand and adapt in intercultural interactions. When people have a positive view of other cultures, they tend to be more willing to interact, less afraid of making mistakes, and more socially adaptable, all of which accelerate the language learning process. According to Byram (1997), attitudes such as curiosity and openness are the main basis of intercultural competence, as they support the growth of other knowledge and skills.

This finding is supported by Pasquarella, Jia, & Ferreira (2025) who revealed that students who have high empathy generally have better linguistic flexibility abilities and are able to communicate effectively in foreign languages. In addition, Feng et al. (2025) emphasized that a positive view of other cultures has a direct impact on students' communication strategies, especially in difficult intercultural contexts.

Meaning for English Language Learning

The fact that behavior has a greater impact than comprehension or technical skills

suggests that English language teaching should go beyond just teaching grammar and vocabulary. The formation of positive attitudes towards other cultures should be an important element of the curriculum. This can be done through activities such as intercultural discussions, narrative-based learning from different countries, simulated interactions between cultures, and deep reflection on cultural stereotypes. If students are equipped with the appropriate attitudes, they will be better equipped to deal with complex real-world communication. They will not only become proficient language users, but also efficient and culturally sensitive global communicators.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the relationship between Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and English language learning achievement among first semester students at a private university in East Kalimantan. Through quantitative methods using an ICC questionnaire designed based on Byram's (1997) model as well as an English proficiency test via the British Council EnglishScore application, a strong and significant positive correlation was found between ICC and students' English performance ($r = 0.632$; $p = 0.000$). This finding underlines that ICC is not a side element in language learning, but a fundamental factor that contributes significantly to learning success in a multilingual and multicultural environment. Among the three main components of ICC, attitudes have the highest correlation to English language learning achievement, followed by skills and knowledge. This suggests that openness, empathy and adaptability are crucial in the language acquisition process, as they contribute to how students receive linguistic input and overcome communication challenges in cross-cultural contexts. Based on these findings, it is recommended that English language teachers and curriculum developers not only design classroom learning strategies but also promote more comprehensive education system changes, including teacher training and the implementation of intercultural inclusive approaches. Such strategies should include the systematic integration of intercultural learning experiences-such as culturally themed group projects, directed reflection on cross-cultural experiences, and virtual exchange programs with international students-into language learning activities. These methods will support students in building attitudes and cultural awareness essential for global communication, while also enriching their language skills in authentic and significant social contexts.

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