**Exploring the Impact of AI Chatbots on the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Communication Classes**

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**Abstract**

 In today’s globalized context, integrating language learning with cultural understanding is essential for developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have led to the development of AI chatbots - computer programs capable of engaging users in natural language conversations - which offer new opportunities for language and intercultural learning. Among these, ChatGPT stands out as a particularly powerful AI chatbot, capable of generating contextually appropriate and culturally nuanced responses. This study investigates the effectiveness of AI chatbots, especially ChatGPT, in fostering ICC among English-major students at the University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT) through English-language practice. Two approaches were implemented: the Interactive English Communication Practice (IECP) group, in which 40 students engaged in real-time English conversations with ChatGPT; and the ChatGPT-supported Cultural Content Exploration (CCE) group, consisting of 30 students who collaboratively explored and discussed cultural materials in English with ChatGPT’s support. Analysis of ChatGPT interaction logs, reflective journals, and interviews revealed that both approaches significantly enhanced students’ ICC. IECP participants improved their language adaptability and confidence in communicating in English, while CCE participants demonstrated greater cultural awareness and analytical skills. These findings underscore the potential of ChatGPT as an effective tool for developing both English proficiency and intercultural communication skills in contemporary education.

***Keywords*:** AI chatbots*,* ChatGPT,intercultural communicative competence*,* multilingual communication*,* English language learning*,* cultural awareness

1. **Introduction**

In today’s globalized world, learning English involves more than simply mastering grammar and vocabulary. To communicate effectively, students also need to understand and respect cultural differences - a skill known as intercultural communicative competence (ICC). This competence enables learners to interact more successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between language and culture in foreign language education. Researchers have investigated how culture is presented in textbooks (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993), how learners’ beliefs influence language learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Zhang, 2010), and how language reflects identity and social context (Norton, 2000). Other studies have highlighted the benefits of integrating cultural content into language classrooms, helping students become more aware of cross-cultural differences (Fantini, 2000; Deardorff, 2006). However, most of this research has been conducted in traditional classroom environments or monolingual teaching contexts.

While more recent studies have explored the role of technology - including artificial intelligence (AI) - in language learning, most have concentrated on linguistic aspects such as accuracy, fluency, and grammar (Li & Hegelheimer, 2013; Godwin-Jones, 2018). Research on how AI chatbots can support the development of ICC, particularly in Southeast Asian educational contexts like Vietnam, remains limited. This gap persists even though AI chatbots offer new opportunities to integrate language and cultural learning, as most existing studies tend to frame chatbots as tools for practicing language rather than as cultural mediators.

Although the term AI chatbots encompasses a wide range of tools designed to simulate human conversation, this study specifically focuses on ChatGPT - one of the most advanced and widely used AI-powered chatbots to date. ChatGPT is capable of generating contextually appropriate and coherent responses in English, making it particularly suitable for supporting both language practice and intercultural communication. Therefore, in this study, ChatGPT is used as a representative example of AI chatbots to explore their impact on the development of ICC in English communication classes at HUFLIT University.

To address the identified gap, this study tests two ChatGPT-based approaches with English-major students. In the first approach, students engaged in real-time English conversations with ChatGPT. In the second, they used ChatGPT to explore and discuss cultural content in English. The findings demonstrate that both methods not only helped students improve their language skills but also enhanced their cultural awareness and confidence in intercultural communication.

This research highlights the potential of AI chatbots - particularly ChatGPT - as effective tools to support both communicative competence and intercultural awareness in today’s classrooms. To guide this investigation, the following research questions were formulated:

(1) How effective are ChatGPT-based approaches in enhancing English-major students’ intercultural communicative competence (ICC) at HUFLIT?

(2) How do students perceive the role of ChatGPT in supporting their communication confidence and intercultural understanding?

This paper begins with a review of relevant literature to establish the theoretical and empirical background. Next, the methodology section outlines the research design, participant details, and data collection procedures. The findings are then presented and analyzed, highlighting the impact of the two ChatGPT-supported approaches. Following this, the discussion explores the pedagogical implications and practical applications for language teaching. Finally, the paper concludes by summarizing the key insights and offering suggestions for future research.

### 2. Literature Review

#### **2.1. Classifications and Capabilities of AI Chatbots**

AI chatbots, defined as computer programs designed to simulate human conversation through natural language, have rapidly evolved due to advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies (Folstad & Skjuve, 2019). Generally, chatbots are classified into two primary categories: rule-based and AI-powered. Rule-based chatbots operate using pre-defined rules and scripted responses, making them effective for handling simple, repetitive tasks but limited in flexibility. In contrast, AI-powered chatbots leverage technologies such as machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and deep learning to interpret user input contextually and respond dynamically. This enables more nuanced, personalized, and interactive conversations (Adam et al., 2021).

In terms of language capabilities, chatbots can be either monolingual or multilingual. Monolingual chatbots focus on a single language, ensuring depth and accuracy, whereas multilingual chatbots incorporate advanced translation and language processing tools to function across different linguistic settings. This multilingual capacity is especially crucial in today's globalized communication landscape, where users often come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Jain et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2020).

Moreover, recent developments in chatbot technology have emphasized the importance of intercultural sensitivity. AI-powered chatbots can integrate emotion recognition and cultural adaptation algorithms, allowing them to tailor responses based not only on linguistic input but also on users’ cultural norms, emotional cues, and communication styles. These features enhance the chatbot’s role in fostering intercultural understanding by providing more empathetic and culturally appropriate interactions (Turing & Kumar, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021).

***2.2. Some typical types of AI Chatbot***

AI chatbots have diversified significantly in recent years, each type offering distinct technological affordances that influence their educational application. In the context of English language education and intercultural communication, understanding the functionality of these chatbot types is essential to evaluating their pedagogical potential.

* Rule-based chatbots operate based on fixed scripts or decision trees. They rely on pattern-matching or keyword detection to produce predefined responses (Shawar & Atwell, 2007). While these systems offer limited flexibility and lack contextual understanding, they are effective for simple language tasks such as vocabulary recall, basic grammar practice, and quiz-style interactions.
* AI-driven chatbots, in contrast, utilize Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine Learning (ML) to generate context-sensitive, dynamic responses. These systems can adapt to various linguistic inputs and simulate human-like dialogue. Examples include ChatGPT, Google Bard, and Meta’s LLaMA-based assistants. AI-driven chatbots are especially valuable in developing learners’ pragmatic and intercultural communication skills, as they support extended conversation, diverse speech acts, and cultural contextualization (Adamopoulou & Moussiades, 2020).
* Context-aware chatbots enhance this functionality by maintaining dialogue history within an interaction. This allows the chatbot to refer back to previous user input and provide coherent, personalized responses over time. Such continuity is especially useful in simulating culturally rich conversations or reflective learning tasks (Byrne et al., 2021).
* Voice-enabled chatbots integrate NLP with automatic speech recognition. These systems allow users to engage in spoken dialogue, enabling pronunciation practice, listening skill development, and real-time spoken feedback. Tools such as Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant fall into this category, and they support learners in developing fluency and prosody in oral communication (Zhou et al., 2021).
* Emotionally intelligent or social chatbots, such as Microsoft XiaoIce or Replika, are designed to maintain emotionally engaging conversations. They can detect users’ emotional states and respond accordingly, often introducing new conversation topics to simulate natural social interaction. These features are particularly relevant in fostering empathy, cultural sensitivity, and interpersonal awareness - key components of intercultural communicative competence (Li et al., 2020).
* Among AI-driven chatbots, ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, exemplifies advanced conversational intelligence and educational adaptability. It uses large-scale language models to produce responses that are coherent, contextually appropriate, and culturally nuanced. ChatGPT can simulate culturally relevant interactions, provide learners with opportunities to practice polite expressions, and adapt its responses to various registers and intercultural scenarios (Kasneci et al., 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023). Its ability to engage in extended, meaningful dialogue makes it particularly effective in facilitating reflection and role-playing in intercultural communication classes. Moreover, ChatGPT supports multimodal and collaborative learning. It can be used synchronously in classroom discussions or asynchronously for autonomous practice. Learners can use it to rehearse for debates, simulate interviews, or explore cultural norms through guided prompts and open-ended dialogue. Its flexibility also allows integration with various learning management systems and educational apps.

#### **2.3. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in Language Education**

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is increasingly recognized as a vital objective in modern language education. According to Byram (1997), ICC comprises five key components: attitudes of openness and curiosity, knowledge of social groups and their practices, skills of interpreting and relating cultural elements, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. This framework represents a shift from grammar-focused teaching toward an approach emphasizing empathy, adaptability, and intercultural understanding. Kramsch (1993) similarly emphasized that effective language learning must involve an awareness of the cultural context in which language is used. Language is not just a system of signs but a medium for social interaction shaped by cultural norms and values. Therefore, language education should prepare learners to interpret and negotiate meaning in culturally diverse situations. Institutions such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) advocate for the integration of authentic cultural materials such as interviews with native speakers, films, and real-world scenarios into curricula to help students build ICC, especially in contexts lacking immersion opportunities.

ICC development is particularly important in English language learning, where learners are often expected to communicate across multiple cultural settings. Effective communication requires not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to adapt discourse strategies according to different cultural expectations (Fantini, 2009). In this way, ICC becomes a cornerstone of global citizenship and professional communication in a multicultural world.

#### **2.4. The Role of ChatGPT in Language Learning and Intercultural Competence**

Recent advances in AI-powered tools have opened up new possibilities for language education, and among these, ChatGPT has emerged as a particularly impactful example. As a large language model developed by OpenAI, ChatGPT functions as an advanced conversational partner capable of generating contextually appropriate, coherent, and nuanced responses in English (OpenAI, 2023). Unlike earlier rule-based or limited-response chatbots, ChatGPT leverages deep learning and extensive training data to simulate authentic communication, making it especially suitable for supporting both language proficiency and intercultural communicative competence (ICC; Liang et al., 2021; Chang, 2023).

From a language learning perspective, ChatGPT offers learners a platform to practice English through real-time, interactive dialogues that mirror real-world communication. Studies on AI chatbots in general have demonstrated their ability to personalize learning, reduce anxiety, and build confidence (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020; Wang & Chen, 2022). ChatGPT enhances these benefits through adaptive, human-like interactions that match learners’ proficiency and support experimentation in a low-stakes environment (Li & Ni, 2020). As Fryer and Carpenter (2006) note, such supportive interactions can help learners engage more deeply and meaningfully with the target language.

Importantly, ChatGPT can also contribute to developing intercultural competence by exposing learners to diverse linguistic expressions and cultural scenarios. Research on chatbot-assisted learning suggests that simulated conversations, role-plays, and discussions of cultural topics help learners become more aware of pragmatic and intercultural aspects of communication (Chang, 2023; Fryer & Carpenter, 2006; Liang et al., 2021). According to Chang (2023), AI-powered tools can model culturally appropriate behaviors, offering learners opportunities to reflect on and adapt to different cultural norms during communication.

Compared to traditional AI chatbots, ChatGPT offers several pedagogical advantages: it is not limited to pre-programmed scripts, it can generate spontaneous and varied responses, and it can engage learners in extended, meaningful conversations (Heil et al., 2021). This flexibility allows for more meaningful practice of both language and intercultural skills than earlier tools provided. Although research on the use of ChatGPT specifically for ICC development remains in its early stages, its capabilities align well with findings from broader studies on AI chatbots and related technologies (Chen et al., 2023; Heil et al., 2021; Li & Ni, 2020), suggesting its strong potential in this area.

In sum, ChatGPT exemplifies how AI chatbots can serve as both language tutors and cultural mediators, preparing learners for effective communication in diverse, globalized contexts. By offering authentic, culturally nuanced, and adaptive interactions, ChatGPT provides learners with opportunities to enhance their linguistic competence while developing the awareness, sensitivity, and skills necessary for successful intercultural communication (Chang, 2023; Kukulska-Hulme, 2020).

**3. Methodology**

***3.1. The Participants***

The study involved a total of 70 English-major students from the University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT). Participants were divided into two groups according to the instructional approach employed:

* **Interactive English Communication Practice (IECP) group**: This group consisted of 40 students who engaged in real-time English communication through multilingual conversations with ChatGPT. These students were selected from intermediate-level English communication classes and had prior experience using digital communication tools. The purpose of including the IECP group was to investigate whether real-time, spontaneous interaction with AI could improve students’ fluency, confidence, and naturalness in spoken English. It also aimed to explore how such individualized, technology-mediated interaction contributes to students’ self-reflection, cultural awareness, andinterculturalcommunicative competence, while identifying potential limitations in the language learning process.
* ChatGPT-supported Cultural Content Exploration (CCE) group: This **group** comprised 30 students who engaged in collaborative exploration of cultural content with the assistance of **ChatGPT**. Participants were recruited from advanced English skills courses and demonstrated strong reading comprehension and analytical abilities.

This group was included in the study to investigate how collaborative engagement with cultural materials, facilitated by **ChatGPT**, could enhance students’ cultural knowledge, critical thinking, and intercultural analytical skills. In particular, this approach aimed to examine the impact of group-based, reflective activities on students’ abilities to compare, interpret, and relate cultural phenomena, as well as to assess the extent to which such collaborative experiences contribute to the development of teamwork, communication, and intercultural competence in a group learning environment.

All participants had completed at least two years of formal English instruction at the university level. Prior to the intervention, students were informed about the objectives of the study and provided their informed consent to participate voluntarily. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the data collection and reporting processes.

The two groups in this study were deliberately designed to represent contrasting approaches to fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The **Interactive English Communication Practice (IECP)** group emphasized individual, real-time conversational practice with **ChatGPT**, aiming to improve students’ fluency, confidence, spontaneity, and personal reflection through autonomous engagement. By contrast, the **CCE** group focused on collaborative, content-based exploration, fostering students’ teamwork, critical thinking, and intercultural analysis through group discussions and joint cultural investigations, supported by **ChatGPT**.

This design enabled the study to examine how individualized and collaborative learning environments - both supported by **ChatGPT** - contributed differently to key dimensions of ICC and how these approaches may complement one another in the development of intercultural communicative competence.

***3.2. Research Procedures***

The study was conducted over a 12-week academic semester at the University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT) using a mixed-methods research design. Data collection instruments included ChatGPT interaction logs, weekly reflective journals, a structured questionnaire, and semi-structured group interviews. After obtaining informed consent, a total of 70 English-major students were assigned to two experimental groups: the **Interactive English Communication Practice (IECP)** group (40 students) and the **ChatGPT-supported Cultural Content Exploration (CCE)** group (30 students).

* *IECP Group*

Students in the **Interactive English Communication Practice (IECP)** group engaged in weekly real-time conversations with **ChatGPT**, accessed via a web platform or mobile application. Each session lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and focused on intercultural communication topics such as festivals, social etiquette, non-verbal communication differences, educational culture, and workplace behavior in English-speaking countries.

Students were instructed to use only English during sessions and were encouraged to respond actively, ask questions, and maintain conversation flow in order to enhance their linguistic flexibility and build confidence. Chat logs were automatically recorded by the system. Following each session, students completed a reflective journal in which they described their experience, noted any new cultural insights gained, and reported any difficulties they encountered when interacting with **ChatGPT**.

### *CCE Group*

In the **ChatGPT-supported Cultural Content Exploration (CCE)** group, students worked with curated multimedia cultural materials - including videos, articles, images, and infographics - featuring the lifestyles, customs, and societal values of English-speaking countries. The lessons were conducted as group discussions, during which **ChatGPT** acted as a facilitator by posing guiding questions, offering suggestions, and providing additional information to help students explore the cultural content more deeply.

Students were organized into small groups of 3-5 members to collaborate and document their findings. Each week, they submitted a group summary and an individual reflection detailing their learning outcomes. The topics discussed included greeting customs, differences in educational systems, the role of religion in society, and the relationship between language and culture.

#### End-of-Term Assessment

At the end of the intervention, all participants from both groups took part in semi-structured interviews to provide additional qualitative insights into their learning experiences. The interviews were designed to examine students’ perceptions of their progress in intercultural communicative competence, the effectiveness of their interactions with **ChatGPT,** and their ability to apply cultural knowledge in real-world communication situations. Data from ChatGPT interaction logs, reflective journals, and interview transcripts were triangulated and analyzed using thematic coding to assess students’ development of intercultural communicative competence.

**4.** **Results**

### *****4.1. Improvements in Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)*****

After 12 weeks of targeted intervention, both student groups - **IECP (Interactive English Communication Practice)** and **CCE (ChatGPT-supported Cultural Content Exploration) -** demonstrated significant improvements in their Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). These improvements were evaluated based on key dimensions of ICC as defined by Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006), including linguistic fluency, cultural awareness, critical reflection, and collaborative skills. Each group progressed along distinct pathways, depending on their specific learning focus and mode of interaction with the AI tool.

For the **IECP group**, which participated in regular ChatGPT-facilitated conversations, a particularly notable indicator of progress was a 35% increase in student-initiated turns during interactions with ChatGPT. This substantial growth indicates that students became more engaged, autonomous, and willing to take conversational risks over time. ChatGPT’s supportive and non-judgmental environment significantly reduced learners’ anxiety and encouraged spontaneous language use. Furthermore, 87% of IECP students reported increased confidence in speaking English, which can be attributed to their ability to select discussion topics, regulate the pace of the dialogue, and practice without the social pressures typically present in traditional classroom settings.

In addition to linguistic improvements, the IECP group also demonstrated significant progress in cultural reflection. Notably, 83% of students exhibited enhanced intercultural reflection in their weekly journals, where they analyzed cultural patterns, challenged stereotypes, and linked their conversations with ChatGPT to real-life cultural experiences. These journals functioned as valuable metacognitive tools, fostering deeper intercultural awareness and personal insight. Moreover, only 8% of ChatGPT interaction logs displayed minor cultural inaccuracies, suggesting that students generally engaged with the AI responsibly. This low incidence of errors reflects the effectiveness of the guidance provided on critical AI use, reinforced by cross-checking practices and periodic instructor monitoring.

In contrast, the **CCE group** showed greater progress in analytical thinking, cultural conceptualization, and collaborative skills through their ChatGPT-supported exploration of curated cultural materials. Notably, 81% of student groups produced comprehensive cultural comparisons in their reports, demonstrating the ability to go beyond surface-level facts and explore deeper cultural values and beliefs. Additionally, 76% of students reported that ChatGPT enhanced their understanding of complex cultural concepts. Its capacity to clarify abstract ideas and provide contextualized, concrete examples made these concepts more accessible—particularly for visual and reflective learners who benefit from illustrative and explanatory support.

Collaboration skills also showed clear improvement, with 73% of students in the CCE group reporting that their ability to work in a team had improved. During group activities - such as analyzing cultural materials together and discussing their meanings - students developed important skills for effective intercultural communication, including active listening, negotiation, and seeing issues from multiple perspectives.

Interestingly, about 12% of students expressed concerns about relying too much on ChatGPT. This indicates students’ awareness of AI limitations and their effort to maintain academic independence. Instead, they understood the need to check and compare information from different sources and to maintain academic honesty which aligns with Deardorff’s (2006) idea of responsible intercultural engagement.

Overall, the results indicate that the IECP group made clear progress in fluency, confidence, and self-reflection in intercultural communication, while the CCE group showed stronger development in cultural knowledge, critical thinking, and teamwork. These complementary results suggest that combining AI with varied teaching approaches can more effectively support ICC development when used thoughtfully and responsibly.

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| ****ICC Aspects**** | ****Observed Improvements**** |
| **1. Attitudes****(Curiosity, openness, lack of prejudice)** | **- IECP: More proactive, confident****- CCE: More willing to explore, open to new perspectives**  |
| **2. Knowledge & Comprehension** | **- CCE: Deeper understanding of cultural concepts and value systems** |
| **3. Interpreting & Relating** | **- CCE: Able to compare and analyze cultural phenomena in depth** |
| **4. Discovery & Interaction** | **- IECP: Chose conversation topics and interact more naturally with ChatGPT** |
| **5. Critical Cultural Awareness** | **- IECP: Reflect on cultural experiences and critically analyzed stereotypes in journals** |
| **6. External outcomes****(Effective & appropriate communication)** | **- IECP: More natural, confident conversations in English****- CCE: Produce high-quality group reports, and demonstrate effective collaboration.** |

### *Figure 1: Development of ICC Aspects in IECP and CCE Activities*

### *****4.2.***** *Comparative Outcomes of Intercultural Communicative Competence in Two Groups: IECP and CCE*

### *Figure 2: Comparative Outcomes Across ICC Aspects: IECP vs. CCE*

###  *4.2.1. Spontaneous Spoken Interaction*

### The IECP group (n = 40) demonstrated significantly greater improvement in spontaneous spoken interaction compared to the CCE group (n = 30), with approximately 87% (around 35 students) achieving notable progress versus 58% (around 17 students) in the CCE group. This outcome was assessed through a recorded speaking test, evaluated by the instructor using a standardized rubric measuring fluency, naturalness and spontaneous speaking ability. These findings suggest that real-time, low-pressure, one-on-one practice with ChatGPT provided a safe and supportive environment, enabling students to take risks and develop their fluency. In contrast, the group-based discussions in the CCE condition may have limited individual speaking opportunities, as approximately 42% (around 13 students) did not exhibit significant gains. This underscores the importance of ensuring sufficient speaking time for each participant within collaborative learning settings.

###  *4.2.2. Cultural Knowledge Acquisition*

### Cultural knowledge showed greater improvement in the CCE group, with approximately 81% (about 24 students) demonstrating substantial gains compared to 65% (about 26 students) in the IECP group. This outcome was assessed using a standardized test consisting of multiple-choice and short-answer questions on cultural concepts, values, and phenomena, which was assessed and scored by instructors. These findings are consistent with the pedagogical assumption that collaborative, content-rich activities foster deeper cultural understanding. The group discussions in the CCE condition encouraged critical engagement with authentic cultural materials, whereas the individual, conversational practice in the IECP group appeared to provide less depth in cultural content. This evidence underscores the pedagogical value of collective inquiry for enhancing cultural learning.

###  *4.2.3.* *Critical Cultural Reflection*

### Both groups performed well in cultural reflection, with the CCE group slightly outperforming the IECP group (86%, about 26 students, compared to 83%, about 33 students). This result was assessed based on students’ written reflections, which were evaluated on their ability to identify cultural biases, compare different cultural perspectives, and suggest improvements. In the CCE group, group discussions allowed students to engage with diverse opinions and conduct deeper analysis. In contrast, the IECP group focused more on individual thinking and personal reflection. These findings suggest that both individual and group-based approaches effectively enhance cultural understanding, albeit in different ways.

###  *4.2.4. Confidence in Speaking English*

### The IECP group demonstrated substantially greater improvements in speaking confidence (87%, approximately 35 students) compared to the CCE group (62%, approximately 19 students). Confidence was measured using a standardized survey alongside raters’ observations during the speaking test, which evaluated hesitation, conversational initiation, sustained speech, and non-verbal communication. This result highlights the advantages of a supportive, judgment-free environment that allows for individual practice. In contrast, the lower confidence gains in the CCE group may be attributed to the social pressure and comparisons inherent in group settings, as indicated by the 38% (around 11 students) who appeared anxious or disengaged. These findings underline the importance of carefully structuring group activities to maintain and build individual confidence.

*4.2.5. Teamwork and Collaboration*

Unsurprisingly, teamwork and collaboration improved most notably in the CCE group, with 73% (approximately 22 students) demonstrating significant gains, compared to negligible improvement in the IECP group. This outcome was assessed through observations of group task performance, supplemented by instructor and peer evaluations that measured participation, active listening, shared responsibility, and conflict resolution. The CCE group’s emphasis on collaborative tasks and collective analysis directly fostered these competencies, although 27% (around 8 students) experienced challenges such as conflict or passive involvement. In contrast, the IECP group’s focus on individual activities offered no meaningful opportunities to develop teamwork skills. These findings confirm the value of structured group activities in promoting cooperation, while also highlighting the need for conflict resolution strategies.

In general, these findings reveal complementary benefits of the two instructional approaches. The IECP group, with its individualized, real-time practice, was particularly effective in enhancing spontaneous speaking, confidence, and personal reflection — aspects that thrive in low-pressure, autonomous environments. Meanwhile, the CCE group excelled in cultural knowledge, critical reflection, and teamwork, suggesting that collaborative, content-driven activities foster a deeper understanding of culture and collective skills.

However, each approach also presents limitations. IECP students lacked opportunities for teamwork and deeper cultural exploration, while CCE students sometimes struggled to find their voice and build confidence in a group context. These outcomes suggest that a blended approach, combining individual practice with group-based, content-rich activities, could offer a more balanced development of ICC competencies.

### *****4.3. Interview Insights*****

At the end of the 12-week intervention, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 70 participants to gather qualitative insights into their learning experiences and perceptions of the two instructional approaches. A thematic analysis of the interview data revealed three key themes: (1) increased intercultural awareness and communication confidence; (2) perceived effectiveness of interactions with ChatGPT; and (3) ability to transfer cultural knowledge to real-life communicative situations.

####  4.3.1. Enhanced intercultural awareness and communication confidence

The majority of students (approximately 80%) in both groups reported gaining a clearer understanding of communicative norms, societal values, and appropriate behaviors in English-speaking countries compared to before the intervention. In the IECP group, about 85% of students indicated that frequent one-on-one conversations with ChatGPT helped reduce their anxiety, encouraged them to speak more, and familiarized them with spontaneous interaction in simulated situations. As one student reflected: *“I didn’t know it was inappropriate to ask someone’s age in the U.S., but now I feel more confident talking about these topics.”* However, approximately 15% still reported feeling nervous when confronted with challenging topics or when ChatGPT used unfamiliar vocabulary.

In the CCE group, around 75% of students appreciated the combined support of multimedia materials (videos, images, readings) and ChatGPT’s guiding questions and explanations, which helped them visualize realistic cultural scenarios. The group discussions, facilitated by ChatGPT, also enabled them to learn from their peers and deepen their understanding through collaborative reflection. Nevertheless, about 20% admitted feeling pressured to express their opinions in front of others or feared being judged for making mistakes. As one student expressed: *“I usually waited for others to speak before I dared to add my opinion.”*

####  4.3.2. Effectiveness of interactions with ChatGPT

In the IECP group, approximately 85% of students described ChatGPT as a patient, friendly, and non-judgmental conversational partner that helped them feel more comfortable and confident when practicing English. As one student noted: *“Even when I made a lot of mistakes, ChatGPT still responded normally and encouraged me.”* However, around 10–15% of students reported that some of ChatGPT’s responses were overly long, mechanical, or included difficult vocabulary, making them challenging to follow.

In the CCE group, about 80% of students found ChatGPT effective in facilitating discussions by posing thought-provoking questions and providing relevant supplementary information, which helped keep the group focused and engaged. Nonetheless, approximately 15–20% of students expressed frustration that ChatGPT occasionally interrupted too frequently or introduced unrelated topics, which disrupted the discussion flow. As one student remarked: *“Sometimes our group was discussing something, but ChatGPT suddenly asked about something else, and we got confused.”*

####  4.3.3. Application of cultural knowledge to real-life communication

Both groups demonstrated notable progress in applying cultural knowledge to real-life communication, albeit in different ways that reflect the characteristics of each instructional approach.

In the IECP group, approximately 80% of students reported that frequent conversations with ChatGPT increased their confidence in handling real-world situations such as asking for directions, participating in festivals, or interacting online with foreigners. ChatGPT served as a safe conversational partner, allowing students to experiment with new expressions, develop communicative reflexes, and adjust their behavior to align with cultural norms in English-speaking contexts. As one student noted: *“I asked ChatGPT how to greet people at a party in the U.S., and then I applied that when I met foreign guests.”*

In the CCE group, about 70–75% of students appreciated how ChatGPT facilitated discussions, posed realistic situational questions, and provided supplementary information about cultural norms. This role helped students bridge theoretical concepts from the materials (videos, readings, images) to specific communicative scenarios, leading to a deeper understanding of appropriate behaviors in real-life contexts. As one student commented: *“Thanks to the examples and questions from ChatGPT, I understood better how to respond when someone hugs me or shakes hands in the West.”*

Overall, ChatGPT supported students in both groups to effectively transfer cultural knowledge from theory to practice, though through different mechanisms: in the IECP group, through individual practice and communicative reflexes; and in the CCE group, through collective analysis and discussion of specific situations.

**5. Discussion**

To foster intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in English communication classes, teachers can strategically integrate ChatGPT into both individual and group learning activities. In individual practice, students may engage in one-on-one conversations, picture descriptions, or role-play scenarios to enhance fluency, boost confidence, and reduce anxiety. Meanwhile, in group activities, ChatGPT can act as a virtual member or facilitator by providing feedback, guiding discussion, tracking progress and promoting equitable participation.

Moreover, teachers are also encouraged to design role-play scenarios where ChatGPT **adopts roles representing diverse cultural backgrounds**. This allows students to experience cultural diversity, recognize their own misconceptions, and adjust their communicative behaviors accordingly. In addition, after each session, students should reflect on their ChatGPT experience by **identifying cultural surprises, recognizing implicit biases, and articulating key takeaways**. For students experiencing anxiety or low confidence, ChatGPT can serve as a rehearsal partner for practicing arguments and communication strategies in advance, thereby alleviating stress and better preparing them for real discussions.

Furthermore, instructors may also use ChatGPT as a pedagogical support tool to issue reminders, suggest conflict-resolution strategies, and **motivate quieter students to participate.** Such use of the AI platform contributes to cultivating a fair, respectful, and collaborative learning environment. Moreover, the curriculum should also provide opportunities for students to engage with native or proficient English speakers - via language exchange programs, guest lectures, or online platforms - to complement their AI-based interactions and foster authentic communication.

To maximize effectiveness, teachers should configure ChatGPT to generate concise, level-appropriate responses, while utilizing prompts and simplified explanations as supportive techniques. Additionally, students should also receive explicit training in group communication skills, such as turn-taking, active listening, giving constructive feedback and encouraging inclusive participation, to improve teamwork. Finally, a blended approach that integrates analytical discussion and reflective practice through debates, simulations, role-plays, and real-time conversations can better accommodate diverse learner preferences.

In summary, these recommendations optimize ChatGPT’s role in developing intercultural communicative competence while addressing HUFLIT students’ needs for practice, accessibility, and emotional support. This, in turn, prepares them to communicate confidently in a culturally diverse and globalized world.

## **6. Conclusion**

 In conclusion, this study explored the pedagogical potential of ChatGPT in developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among English-major students through two instructional approaches: Interactive English Communication Practice (IECP) and ChatGPT-supported Cultural Content Exploration (CCE). The findings suggest that both approaches effectively enhanced students’ linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and confidence in intercultural communication, though in different ways.

 Specifically, the IECP approach proved particularly effective in fostering students’ conversational fluency, spontaneous language use, and individual confidence by providing a safe, non-judgmental environment for real-time interactions with ChatGPT. Conversely, the CCE approach supported deeper cultural understanding, critical reflection, and collaborative skills through group-based analysis of cultural materials facilitated by ChatGPT.

 These complementary outcomes highlight the dual role of ChatGPT as both a language practice partner and a cultural mediator. The results also emphasize that a blended pedagogical model - combining individual, reflective practice with collaborative, content-rich exploration - may offer a more holistic pathway to developing ICC.

 However, limitations such as over-reliance on technology, occasional student anxiety in group settings, and the lack of authentic interaction with native speakers suggest the need for careful instructional design. Future research should investigate how to optimize ChatGPT’s functionality, tailor its prompts to learners’ needs, and integrate real-world intercultural encounters to further enhance learning outcomes.

 Overall, the study contributes to growing evidence that thoughtfully integrating ChatGPT into language education can help prepare students to navigate and participate effectively in an increasingly multicultural and interconnected world.

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**Bionote**

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**Appendices**

# Survey on the Use of AI ChatGPT in Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence

Instructions for Participants:
Thank you for participating in this survey.
This questionnaire aims to collect your feedback about your learning experience using ChatGPT in English communication classes.
- Please read each statement carefully and indicate your level of agreement by marking (X) in the appropriate box.
- Your responses are confidential and will only be used for research purposes.
- For open-ended questions at the end, please write your answers in the provided space.
- There are no correct or incorrect answers. Please respond sincerely and thoughtfully, reflecting your true experiences and opinions
Likert scale:
1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

## **Section A: General Experience**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| No. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. My intercultural communicative competence improved after participating in the course.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. I feel more confident when communicating in multicultural or international contexts.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. The use of ChatGPT was beneficial to my learning experience.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. I gained specific knowledge about cultural practices in English-speaking countries.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. I encountered difficulties while interacting with ChatGPT.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. ChatGPT could be further improved to better support learning in the future.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## **Section B: IECP Group**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| No. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. My spoken English became more fluent and natural after practicing with ChatGPT.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. My confidence and willingness to speak in English improved during the sessions.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. The discussion topics helped me better understand cultural differences.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. Feedback from ChatGPT helped me self-reflect and improve my communication skills.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## **Section C: CCE Group**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| No. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. My ability to analyze, compare, and interpret cultural phenomena improved.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. Group discussions with ChatGPT support enhanced my teamwork and communication skills.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. The cultural materials helped me better understand social values and customs.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. ChatGPT effectively supported our group by asking questions, explaining, and providing information.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1. I contributed more actively to group discussions after participating in the activities.
 | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## **Section D: Open-Ended Questions**

16. Please describe a memorable experience you had when working with ChatGPT during the course.

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17. Which learning mode do you prefer: individual or group activities with ChatGPT? Why?

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18. Do you have any suggestions to improve the use of ChatGPT in English communication classes?

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**Thank you for your valuable time and feedback!**