The 3rd ASEAN School of Business Network International Conference 2026

www.aseansbn.org August 6-7, 2026 Pathum Thani, Thailand

Exploring Cultural Awareness Through Peer Dialogue: Study of Liberal Arts Students in Private University

Bo Bo Oo[1], Shwe Wint Hlwa[2], Gary Ambito Torremucha[3]*

[1,2,3]Rangsit University, Pathum Thani, Thailand

*Corresponding Author: garyrsu@gmail.com, gary.t@rsu.ac.th

ABSTRACT

As ASEAN advances toward a more digitally connected and globally integrated future, higher education institutions play a critical role in preparing graduates with intercultural competence and collaborative communication skills. This study investigates how structured peer dialogue within a Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) environment promotes cultural awareness among Liberal Arts students at a private university in Thailand. Guided by Byram's Intercultural Competence Model, Sociocultural Theory, and the Internationalization at Home framework, the study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design over an eight-week period involving 33 undergraduate students. Quantitative data were collected using an Intercultural Competence questionnaire measuring five dimensions: attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Qualitative data were obtained through reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, dialogue transcripts, and classroom observations. Descriptive statistics revealed high overall intercultural competence (M = 4.07), with attitudes demonstrating the highest mean (M = 4.41). Regression analysis identified interpreting and relating and discovery and interaction as the strongest predictors of overall intercultural competence. Thematic analysis further revealed five major themes: increased confidence, improved intercultural communication, enhanced cultural awareness, greater openness to diversity, and a stronger sense of global community. The findings demonstrate that structured peer dialogue provides an inclusive and sustainable approach to developing intercultural competence within domestic higher education. The study contributes to internationalization practices by highlighting peer-assisted learning as a scalable strategy for preparing culturally responsive graduates capable of collaborating effectively in an increasingly interconnected ASEAN region.

Keywords: Intercultural Competence, Peer-Assisted Learning, Cultural Awareness, Internationalization at Home, Higher Education.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.64458/asbnic.v3.180

Introduction

Universities now have the responsibility of preparing students for meaningful participation in culturally diverse and globally interconnected societies (Deardorff, 2006). The expectations placed on higher education institutions to foster intercultural competence (henceforth IC) have increased significantly due

to the rapid internationalisation of education, which includes student mobility, cross-border collaboration, and multicultural classrooms (Jackson, 2015). Intercultural competence is defined as the combination of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable individuals to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural boundaries (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). As societies become more diverse, IC is increasingly viewed not only as an academic outcome but also as a critical life skill necessary for global citizenship and employability (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

However, the mere presence of cultural diversity on university campuses does not guarantee meaningful intercultural interaction (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). Research consistently shows that students tend to remain within familiar linguistic or cultural networks, even in diverse educational environments (Arkoudis et al., 2013). Without intentional opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and dialogue, students may not develop the deeper awareness and communicative flexibility needed for effective intercultural communication (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). This challenge highlights the need for structured pedagogical approaches that actively promote intercultural engagement rather than if diversity alone will lead to learning outcomes (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

One promising approach is peer-assisted learning (PAL), a collaborative learning model that emphasizes student-to-student interaction through discussion, problem-solving, and reciprocal teaching (Topping & Ehly, 2001). PAL promotes active participation, shared responsibility, and meaning negotiation, all of which are essential for developing intercultural competence (Vygotsky, 1978). Through peer dialogue, students are exposed to diverse perspectives, communication styles, and cultural interpretations, making PAL an effective platform for fostering cultural awareness (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Empirical evidence from the uploaded intercultural competence dataset further supports the potential impact of interaction-focused learning environments (Deardorff, 2006). Students at Private University reported high to exceedingly elevated levels across all five IC dimensions attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness writing down a strong readiness for intercultural learning (Byram, 1997). These findings highlight the importance of examining how specific pedagogical strategies, such as peer dialogue within PAL environments, contribute to the development of cultural awareness (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Considering these considerations, this study aims to investigate how peer dialogue eases the development of cultural awareness among Liberal Arts students at Private University (Beelen & Jones, 2015). By focusing on students' lived experiences, the study seeks to deepen understanding of how intercultural learning occurs within domestic higher education contexts (Jackson, 2015). The findings are expected to contribute to both theoretical and practical discussions on intercultural education (Creswell, 2014).

Background of the Study

Universities are increasingly recognizing the importance of producing graduates who can navigate cultural differences effectively and ethically in a globalized world (Deardorff, 2009). Globalization has significantly influenced education, the workforce, and everyday life, creating a demand for individuals with strong intercultural competencies (Jackson, 2015). As a result, intercultural competence has become a central educational aim, particularly in disciplines such as Liberal Arts, communication, and social sciences (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In Thailand, universities are actively adopting internationalization strategies to respond to these global demands (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

Traditionally, study abroad programs have been considered the primary means of developing intercultural competence (Jones, 2013). However, access to such programs is often limited due to financial, institutional, and personal constraints (Deardorff, 2006). This limitation has led to unequal opportunities for intercultural learning among students (Beelen & Jones, 2015). In response, the concept of Internationalization at Home (IaH) has appeared as an alternative approach (Beelen & Jones, 2015). IaH

emphasizes the integration of intercultural learning into domestic educational environments through curriculum design, classroom interaction, and peer collaboration (Jackson, 2015).

IaH has become particularly relevant in Thai universities, including Private University, where institutions are working to internationalize their curricula and learning environments (Beelen & Jones, 2015). The Faculty of Liberal Arts plays a significant role in this effort by offering programs in English, communication, translation, and cultural studies (Jackson, 2015). These programs expose students to diverse perspectives and encourage intercultural engagement (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Despite these initiatives, research writes down that Thai students often stay hesitant to engage in intercultural interaction due to language anxiety, fear of misunderstanding, and limited cross-cultural experience (Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

Within this context, peer-assisted learning appears as a promising pedagogical strategy (Topping & Ehly, 2001). PAL creates structured opportunities for collaboration, dialogue, and knowledge exchange among students (Vygotsky, 1978). These interactions ease the development of communication strategies and cultural understanding (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Evidence from the uploaded dataset shows that students at Private University prove high to exceedingly important levels across all IC dimensions, showing a sturdy foundation for intercultural learning (Byram, 1997). This suggests that peer-based learning environments may be particularly effective in supporting intercultural competence development (Deardorff, 2006).

Research Problem

Despite the growing recognition of intercultural competence as a key educational objective, limited research has examined how cultural awareness develops within domestic Thai higher education environments (Creswell, 2014). Much of the existing literature focuses on study abroad programs, leaving a gap in understanding how intercultural learning occurs within everyday classroom settings (Jackson, 2015). This creates a need for research that explores how students develop intercultural competence through local and accessible learning experiences (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

In Thailand, cultural homogeneity and traditional hierarchical classroom structures may limit opportunities for open dialogue and intercultural interaction (Chantanaroj & Grey, 2019). Even in culturally diverse institutions such as Private University, students often remain within their own linguistic or cultural groups (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). This behavior reduces opportunities for meaningful intercultural engagement and limits the development of cultural awareness (Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

Furthermore, while peer-assisted learning is widely used to improve academic performance, its role in fostering cultural awareness through peer dialogue remains underexplored (Topping & Ehly, 2001). This gap is particularly significant in light of the uploaded regression analysis, which shows that all five IC subdimensions significantly predict overall intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). Among these, interpreting and relating, as well as discovery and interaction, are the strongest predictors, emphasizing the importance of communication and interaction skills (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Since these skills are actively developed through peer dialogue, there is a clear need to investigate PAL as a mechanism for promoting cultural awareness (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to investigate how peer discussion helps liberal arts students in Thai universities become more culturally conscious. In particular, the research aims to:

1. Examine how pupils interact with their peers in PAL settings.
2. Look at how peer contact affects cultural awareness growth.
3. Determine the communication techniques that students acquire via cross-cultural discussion.

Research Questions

The following research questions serve as the study's compass:

1. What is the peer dialogue experience of liberal arts students in peer-assisted learning settings?
2. What role does peer discussion play in fostering cultural awareness?
3. What communication techniques do students learn from interacting with people from different cultures?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides important insights into how peer interaction can serve as a powerful mechanism for developing cultural awareness within domestic higher education settings, where structured intercultural learning opportunities are still emerging (Deardorff, 2006). As universities face growing expectations to prepare students for participation in culturally diverse and globally interconnected societies, understanding the processes through which cultural awareness develops has become increasingly essential (Jackson, 2015). By focusing on peer dialogue as an intentional pedagogical strategy, this study demonstrates that intercultural learning can be cultivated through meaningful interaction rather than relying solely on exposure to cultural diversity or study abroad programs, which often reach only a small portion of the student population (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

Focusing on Private University contributes to a deeper understanding of intercultural competence in Southeast Asian higher education, where empirical studies remain limited (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). As a private Thai university with increasing international engagement, Private University provides a suitable environment for exploring how intercultural learning occurs within a multicultural yet predominantly domestic campus (Beelen & Jones, 2015). The findings therefore offer a contextually rich illustration of how Thai institutions can cultivate global citizenship skills by embedding intercultural dialogue within everyday academic practices rather than depending exclusively on overseas mobility initiatives (Deardorff, 2009).

The study also offers practical contributions to teaching and curricular design by identifying the specific ways peer dialogue enhances students' cultural awareness such as through perspective-sharing, meaning negotiation, and reflective communication which aligns with sociocultural theories of learning that emphasize social interaction as a catalyst for development (Vygotsky, 1978). These insights can inform the creation of peer-assisted learning models, structured classroom activities, and institutional policies that encourage active intercultural engagement (Topping & Ehly, 2001). As universities worldwide seek cost-effective and inclusive approaches to internationalization, the outcomes of this study highlight peer dialogue as a scalable and sustainable strategy for fostering intercultural competence among all students, not only those who participate in international programs (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

Furthermore, this research addresses a critical gap in current literature by providing empirical evidence from a Thai Liberal Arts context, where intercultural competence development has been underexplored (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Given that Liberal Arts programs emphasize communication, critical thinking, and cultural literacy, the study contributes to disciplinary knowledge by showing how these academic strengths can be leveraged to promote intercultural growth (Byram, 1997). This adds greater nuance to existing models of intercultural competence, which often rely heavily on Western institutional data (Deardorff, 2006).

Ultimately, the study advances theoretical and practical understanding by showing that cultural awareness is not solely the outcome of international exposure but can be intentionally cultivated through structured peer interaction in domestic academic environments (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). By illustrating how intercultural learning unfolds at Private University, the study provides valuable guidance for similar institutions seeking to strengthen their approaches to Internationalization at Home and better prepare students for the complexities of global citizenship (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

Theoretical Significance

The study backs up sociocultural theories of learning, especially Vygotsky's (1978) claim that social interaction co-constructs knowledge. It is consistent with Byram's (1997) IC framework, which highlights key cultural awareness, abilities, and attitudes as crucial elements of intercultural competence. The study expands the theoretical knowledge of how interaction influences IC development by focusing on peer dialogue.

For students who might not have the chance to study abroad, PAL programs provide an extremely affordable and accessible method of international learning. By putting such tactics into practice, Private University's continuous initiatives in educational innovation and internationalisation can be strengthened.

Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

Cultural awareness has become a central focus in higher education as institutions respond to the increasing demands of globalization and multicultural engagement (Deardorff, 2006). The expansion of global interconnectedness has significantly influenced universities, requiring students to develop competencies that enable effective communication across cultural boundaries (Jackson, 2015). As higher education environments become more diverse, students are exposed to a wide range of cultural perspectives, which creates opportunities for intercultural learning (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). However, research indicates that students often remain within familiar social and linguistic groups, limiting their interaction with culturally different peers (Kimmel & Volet, 2012).

This tendency reduces the potential for meaningful intercultural engagement and highlights the need for structured learning approaches (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). Scholars argue that diversity alone does not guarantee intercultural competence without intentional pedagogical intervention (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Peer dialogue has emerged as an effective educational strategy because it promotes active interaction, reflection, and shared understanding among students (Topping & Ehly, 2001). This approach aligns with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize the importance of social interaction in knowledge development (Vygotsky, 1978). Through dialogue, students can negotiate meaning and develop deeper cultural awareness (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Therefore, this literature review aims to synthesize key theoretical frameworks and empirical studies related to intercultural competence and peer learning (Byram, 1997). These perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for examining cultural awareness among students at Private University (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

Byram's Intercultural Competence (IC) Model

Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence is widely recognized as a foundational framework for understanding intercultural learning in education. The model conceptualizes intercultural competence as a multidimensional construct involving attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Byram, 1997). It emphasizes that intercultural competence is not static but develops through interaction and reflection (Deardorff, 2006). The first dimension, attitudes, includes openness and curiosity toward cultural differences (Byram, 1997). The second dimension, knowledge, refers to understanding cultural practices and social perspectives (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). The third dimension, interpreting and relating, involves the ability to make sense of cultural phenomena (Byram, 1997). The fourth dimension, discovery and interaction, refers to the ability to acquire new cultural knowledge through communication (Deardorff, 2009).

The fifth dimension, critical cultural awareness, involves evaluating cultural practices critically (Byram, 1997). Research shows that these dimensions are interconnected and collectively contribute to intercultural competence development (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In higher education, Byram's model has been widely used to assess students' intercultural learning (Deardorff, 2006). Studies indicate

that structured interaction, such as peer dialogue, can enhance these competencies (Jackson, 2015). However, challenges remain in measuring abstract components like critical cultural awareness (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, most applications of Byram's model have been conducted in Western contexts (Beelen & Jones, 2015). This creates a need for research in Asian settings, including Thai universities (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). Applying this model to Private University provides valuable context-specific insights (Deardorff, 2006).

Sociocultural Theory (SCT)

Sociocultural Theory, developed by Vygotsky (1978), explains learning as a socially mediated process. According to this theory, knowledge is constructed through interaction with others (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Language plays a central role as a tool for communication and meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978). The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) describes the difference between independent learning and supported learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Within the ZPD, learners benefit from guidance provided by more knowledgeable peers (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Scaffolding supports learners as they develop new skills through interaction (Topping & Ehly, 2001). This process highlights the importance of collaboration in learning environments (Creswell, 2014).

In intercultural contexts, dialogue allows students to negotiate meaning and challenge assumptions (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Through interaction, learners develop cultural awareness and communication skills (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). SCT emphasizes that learning occurs through shared experiences and social engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). In higher education, peer-assisted learning reflects SCT principles by promoting collaboration (Topping & Ehly, 2001). Studies show that peer dialogue enhances both cognitive and intercultural development (Jackson, 2015). Therefore, SCT provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding peer dialogue (Deardorff, 2006). This is particularly relevant in multicultural settings such as Private University (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

Internationalization at Home (IaH)

Internationalization at Home (IaH) refers to integrating intercultural learning within domestic educational settings (Beelen & Jones, 2015). It provides an alternative to study abroad programs, which are often inaccessible to many students (Deardorff, 2009). IaH ensures that all students can develop intercultural competence regardless of mobility opportunities (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Universities implement IaH through curriculum design and classroom interaction (Jackson, 2015). Peer engagement is a key component of IaH strategies (Topping & Ehly, 2001).

These strategies promote interaction among culturally diverse students (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). Research shows that IaH enhances cultural awareness through everyday learning experiences (Deardorff, 2006). It encourages students to engage with global perspectives locally (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In multicultural universities, IaH is particularly effective (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Students benefit from structured intercultural interaction (Jackson, 2015). However, implementation varies across institutions (Creswell, 2014). There is limited research on IaH in Southeast Asia (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). This highlights the need for context-specific studies in Thailand (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). The application of IaH at Private University provides an important research context (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

Peer Dialogue as a Mechanism for Cultural Awareness

Peer dialogue is defined as structured interaction among students aimed at exchanging ideas and perspectives (Topping & Ehly, 2001). It plays a critical role in collaborative learning environments (Vygotsky, 1978). Through dialogue, students engage in meaning-making and reflection (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Research shows that peer dialogue enhances cultural awareness (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). It exposes students to diverse viewpoints and encourages perspective-taking (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Dialogue also supports the development of communication skills (Jackson, 2015). Students learn to adapt their communication strategies in intercultural contexts (Deardorff, 2006). Peer interaction fosters empathy and respect for cultural differences (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). In internationalized campuses, peer dialogue promotes inclusion (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

It helps bridge cultural gaps between students (Topping & Ehly, 2001). Structured dialogue is more effective than informal interaction (Creswell, 2014). It encourages critical thinking and reflection (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In the context of Private University, peer dialogue provides opportunities for intercultural engagement (Jackson, 2015).

Research Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite extensive research, several gaps remain in the literature (Creswell, 2014). There is limited research focusing on Liberal Arts students in Thailand (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). Few studies examine intercultural competence in Southeast Asian contexts (Beelen & Jones, 2015). There is also a lack of integration between Byram's model, SCT, and IaH (Deardorff, 2006). Peer dialogue has not been widely studied as a primary mechanism for cultural awareness (Topping & Ehly, 2001). Existing research often focuses on study abroad programs (Jackson, 2015). Domestic classroom interaction remains underexplored (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). There is a need for empirical studies in Thai universities (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). Specifically, research at Private University is limited (Beelen & Jones, 2015). These gaps justify the need for the present study (Creswell, 2014).

Summary

This literature review has examined key frameworks related to intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). It has highlighted the importance of social interaction in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). It has also emphasized the role of Internationalization at Home (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Peer dialogue has been identified as a key mechanism for cultural awareness (Topping & Ehly, 2001). Despite these insights, research gaps remain in Thai contexts (Kimmel & Volet, 2012). This study addresses these gaps by focusing on Private University (Deardorff, 2006). The findings contribute to both theory and practice (Creswell, 2014). Intercultural competence is built through engagement, introspection, and conversation (Deardorff, 2006; Byram, 1997). Sociocultural theory and Byram's model are two theoretical frameworks that highlight the significance of cooperation and communication in this process(SCT).

However, little study has been done on how peer interaction fosters intercultural competency in domestic university settings, especially in Thailand. By concentrating on University students and examining how peer conversation fosters cultural understanding, our study closes this gap. The investigation is further supported by the empirical data, which emphasises the significance of interaction-based skills in the development of intercultural competence.

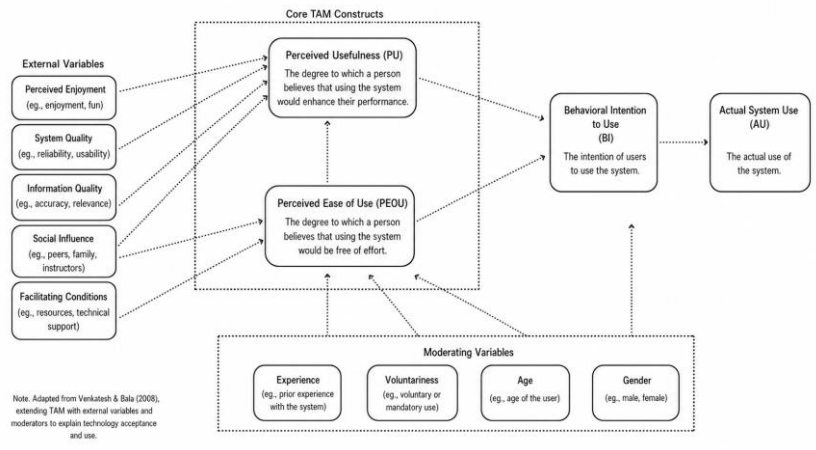


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Method

Research Design

This study used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to investigate how structured peer discussion helps Private University Liberal Arts students become more culturally conscious. Because PAR emphasises collaborative inquiry, iterative cycles of reflection, and transformative learning all crucial for examining socially constructed phenomena like intercultural competence it was chosen as the best methodological approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

According to Deardorff (2006), intercultural competence is a dynamic, progressive process that develops by interaction, meaning negotiation, and thoughtful engagement with cultural differences. The intricacy of this process is frequently missed by traditional study designs, especially those that just use quantitative measurement. PAR, on the other hand, enables participants to actively participate in the development of their own intercultural awareness while also contributing to the research process by integrating action and reflection. The study is theoretically based on Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which holds that language and other cultural artefacts assist learning through socially mediated interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). According to this concept, learners co-create meaning, question presumptions, and absorb new cultural viewpoints through peer discourse, which acts as a key mediational mechanism (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Because both SCT and PAR stress the value of interaction in social and cognitive growth, their dialogic nature is hence highly compatible.

The study also makes use of Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which defines intercultural competence as consisting of five interconnected dimensions: critical cultural awareness, attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpretation and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction. Byram highlights that these characteristics grow via reflective discourse and experience learning, which makes PAR the perfect methodological framework for putting this concept into practice in educational contexts. Three iterative PAR cycles, each comprising the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection, were used to organise the study. The validity of the results and the efficacy of the intervention were both improved by this cycle strategy, which made it possible to continuously improve peer dialogue activities based on participant feedback and new insights (Stringer, 2014). Crucially, instead of concentrating only on results, this methodology allowed the researcher to capture the process-oriented aspect of intercultural learning.

Research Context and Participants

Institutional Context

The study was carried out at Private University's Faculty of Liberal Arts, a private institution well-known for its dedication to multicultural education and internationalisation. Both domestic and foreign students from all throughout Southeast Asia and beyond make up the institution's diversified student body. Although variety offers a great chance for cross-cultural communication, as previous studies have shown, diversity by itself does not ensure significant cross-cultural engagement (Kimmel & Volet, 2012).

The university is a suitable setting for conducting Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) activities because of its emphasis on collaborative learning and communicative pedagogy. Additionally, the study is consistent with the Internationalisation at Home (IaH) principles, which aim to integrate intercultural learning into domestic educational settings so that all students have access to chances for intercultural growth (Beelen & Jones, 2015).

Participant Profile

The study involved fifty undergraduate students enrolled in Liberal Arts degrees. Purposive sampling was used to choose participants, guaranteeing that they were enrolled in classes that included peer interaction, group projects, and discussion-based learning.

The following was the makeup of the participants:

- Thirty-eight Thai pupils
- Twelve foreign students, mostly from Vietnam, China, Laos, and Myanmar

Because students contributed a variety of cultural perspectives, communication styles, and experiences to the peer dialogue activities, this diverse sample offered a rich framework for studying intercultural communication processes.

Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from Private University's institutional research ethics council. Participants received comprehensive information regarding the goals, methods, and ethical precautions of the study. Before any data was collected, each participant provided written informed consent. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality, and all information was safely kept in password-protected files. In compliance with ethical research norms, participants were made aware of their freedom to leave the study at any moment and without consequence (Creswell, 2014).

PAR Cycles and Research Procedures

The study was divided into three iterative PAR cycles and ran for eight weeks. The four phases of planning, action, observation, and reflection were followed in each cycle, enabling the gradual development of intercultural competency through organised peer discussion. Figure 2 provides a thorough summary of each cycle's goals, activities, learning procedures, and data sources.

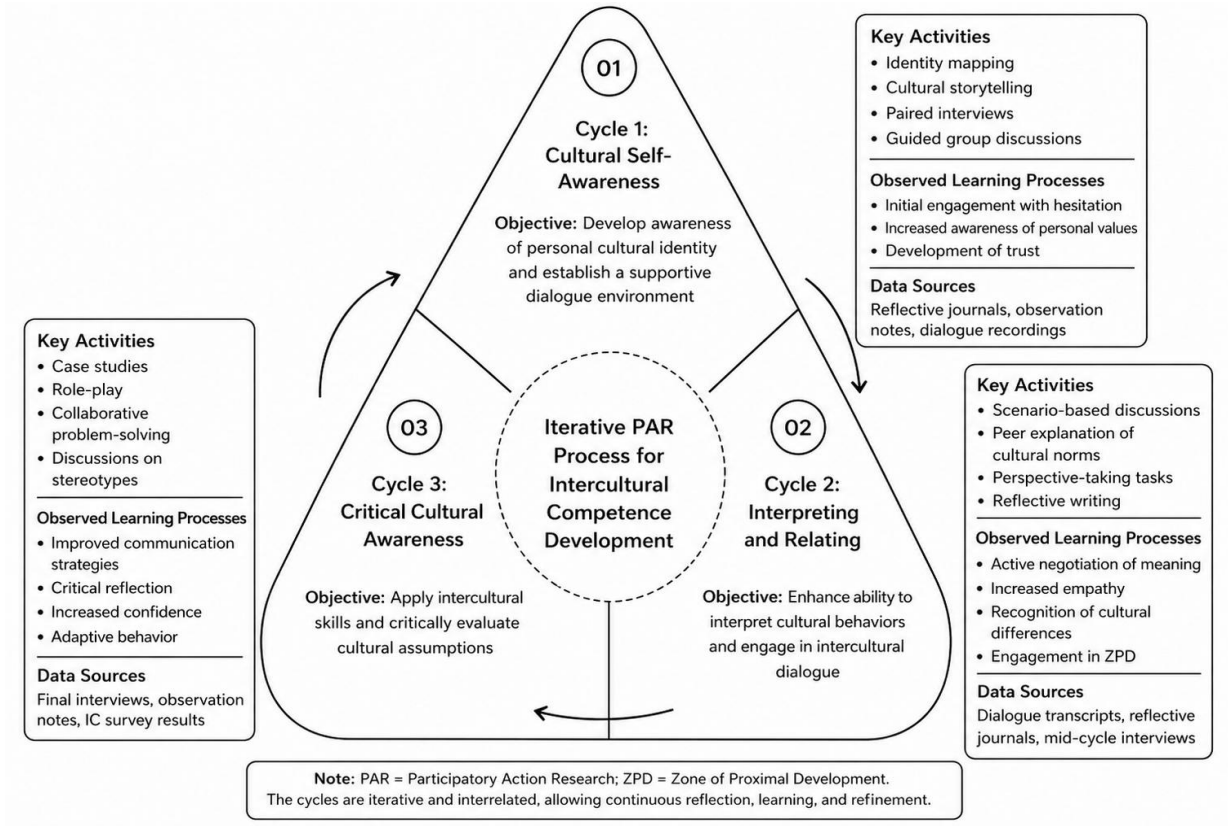


Figure 2. Summary of PAR Cycle

The PAR cycles were created to support a gradual development of intercultural competence, starting with self-awareness and ending with critical cultural reflection, as shown in (Figure 2). Byram's (1997) framework and SCT's focus on scaffolded learning via social interaction are reflected in this process.

Data Collection Methods

Both the quantifiable results and the actual processes of intercultural learning were captured using a convergent mixed-methods approach.

Gathering Quantitative Information

An Intercultural Competence (IC) Subscale Instrument, modified from the uploaded dataset, was used to gather quantitative data. Five dimensions were evaluated by the instrument:

- Views
- Understanding
- Interpreting and Connecting
- Exploration and Communication
- A critical understanding of culture

Students' intercultural competency was measured by administering the questionnaire both before and after the session. Strong correlations between IC aspects were found using correlation analysis, which confirmed the instrument's construct validity. The significance of peer communication was highlighted by regression analysis, which found that interpretation and interaction-related skills were the best indicators of total competency.

Gathering Qualitative Information

To fully convey the breadth and complexity of students' cross-cultural experiences, qualitative data was gathered:Reflective notebooks that record the development of cultural awareness,transcripts of conversations that document patterns of interaction,semi-structured interviews that delve into individual perspectives,observation notes documenting the dynamics of the classroom. These data sources made it possible to gain a sophisticated knowledge of how peer interaction led to the development of cultural awareness.

Table 1. Summary of Data Collection

Instrument	Type of Data	Purpose in the Study	Theoretical Alignment	Connection to IC Dimensions / Uploaded Files
IC Subscale Questionnaire	Quantitative	Measure pre- and post-intervention intercultural competence (IC) across five dimensions	Byram's (1997) Intercultural Competence Model	Uses IC Subscales dataset ( ); strong correlations ( ); regression results ( ) identify predictors
Reflective Journals	Qualitative	Capture students' evolving awareness, emotions, and reflections during PAR cycles	Sociocultural Theory: internalization through reflection (Vygotsky, 1978)	Supports Attitudes, Critical Cultural Awareness, and Discovery through self-reflection

Instrument	Type of Data	Purpose in the Study	Theoretical Alignment	Connection to IC Dimensions / Uploaded Files
Dialogue Transcripts	Qualitative	Analyze interaction patterns, communication strategies, and meaning negotiation during peer dialogue	SCT: learning mediated through social interaction; interaction within ZPD	Core evidence for Interpreting/Relating and Discovery/Interaction
Semi-Structured Interviews	Qualitative	Explore deeper insights into students' experiences, challenges, and cultural interpretations	PAR: participant co-construction of knowledge	Expands on Critical Cultural Awareness and Attitudes
Observation Notes	Qualitative	Document real-time communication behaviors, group dynamics, and intercultural challenges	SCT + PAR: researcher observes learning in action	Supports triangulation for all IC dimensions, especially behavior-based indicators
Peer Dialogue Activities	Intervention al Data	Provide structured opportunities for intercultural exchange during PAR cycles	SCT interactive learning environment; Byram's interaction-based IC model	Directly targets Discovery/Interaction and Interpreting/Relating
End-of-Cycle Feedback Forms	Qualitative	Assess participant satisfaction and identify areas for refinement in the next cycle	PAR cyclical improvement	Provides meta-awareness to support IC growth, especially self-reflection

Data Analysis

The analysis of data in this study integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of intercultural competence development. Quantitative data, particularly IC scores, were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise overall trends and distributions (Field, 2018), while regression analysis was employed to identify significant predictors of intercultural competence (Cohen et al., 2003).

In addition, Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to examine relationships between key variables, offering insight into the strength and direction of associations (Schober, Boer, & Schwarte, 2018). For qualitative data, thematic analysis as outlined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) was applied to systematically identify and interpret patterns within participant responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process resulted in several key themes, including cultural sensitivity, communication awareness, reduction of stereotypes, increased confidence, and reflective reinterpretation. To enhance

the validity and credibility of the findings, triangulation was utilised by integrating multiple data sources and methods, consistent with established qualitative research practices (John W. Creswell, 2014).

Ensuring Validity, Trustworthiness, and Reliability

Because the study relied on both qualitative and quantitative data, ensuring methodological rigour was crucial to demonstrating the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings. Multiple layers of validation were necessary to guarantee that the results appropriately reflected the subtleties of students' cultural awareness growth since intercultural competence is a complex, multidimensional construct that develops through cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes.

Quantitative Instrument Reliability

Internal consistency, statistical coherence, and compatibility with recognised intercultural competency frameworks all contributed to the quantitative instrument's reliability. The correlations between its dimensions in the uploaded dataset () show that the IC Subscale Instrument employed in this investigation has good dependability. The instrument's consistency and structural coherence are demonstrated by strong associations like Knowledge–Interpreting (r =.85) and Discovery–Critical Cultural Awareness (r =.88). The dependability of the instrument is supported by the high statistical alignment of these subscales, which are logically related within Byram's (1997) intercultural competence paradigm.

Quantitative Measures' Validity

The instrument's validity was reinforced by its foundation in well-established theoretical frameworks. The IC subscales provide content validity by reflecting commonly acknowledged aspects of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Regression study (), which demonstrated that Interpreting/Relating (β =.30) and Discovery/Interaction (β =.27) strongly predicted overall intercultural ability, ensured statistical validation and confirmed construct validity. These results are consistent with theoretical predictions that intercultural growth relies heavily on interaction-heavy abilities (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Qualitative Data's Reliability

The study ensured the reliability of its qualitative findings by employing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba (1985). Credibility was strengthened through data triangulation, in which reflective diaries, discussion transcripts, interviews, and observation notes were combined to validate emerging ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking further enhanced accuracy by allowing participants to review and confirm the interpretation of their statements, reducing potential researcher bias (Birt et al., 2016). Extended engagement over the eight-week period also contributed to credibility, as repeated interactions enabled the researcher to observe changes in communication behaviour and develop a deeper understanding of participant experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Collectively, these strategies increased confidence that the findings genuinely reflected students' lived experiences.

Transferability was supported by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research setting namely, the multicultural learning environment of a private university along with the demographic profiles of participants and the structure of the peer dialogue activities. Such comprehensive contextual information allows readers to determine whether the findings may be applicable to similar higher-education environments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability, or reliability, was ensured through systematic documentation of each Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycle, clear explanations of all tasks and modifications, and the maintenance of an audit trail that recorded decisions, adjustments, and reflections throughout the

research process (Nowell et al., 2017). These measures allow other researchers to examine or replicate the methodological approach with transparency.

Confirmability was achieved by keeping reflective research journals that documented assumptions, biases, and decision-making processes, ensuring that data interpretation was grounded in participant contributions rather than researcher expectations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Cross-referencing results across all data sources further reinforced impartiality. These steps ensured that the conclusions were evidence-based and free from undue personal influence.

Iterative Validation and PAR Integrity

Because Participatory Action Research (PAR) operates cyclically, each cycle served as a built-in mechanism for continuous validation. Observations and reflections from one cycle informed the planning and refinement of the next, ensuring responsiveness to participant needs, ongoing improvement in peer-to-peer conversational practices, and repeated confirmation of emerging themes across cycles (Stephen Kemmis & Robin McTaggart, 2005). This iterative process strengthened the study's methodological integrity and contributed to the robustness of the findings.

Moral Aspects

Ethical considerations were fundamental to ensuring participant well-being, protecting cultural sensitivity, and maintaining academic integrity, particularly given the participatory and reflective nature of the study.

Institutional Guidelines and Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board of the private university, confirming adherence to institutional regulations for research involving human participants. All procedures including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were conducted in accordance with internationally recognised ethical standards (John W. Creswell, 2014).

Informed Consent

Before the study began, participants received a detailed explanation of the research purpose, the nature of peer-to-peer dialogues, the voluntary nature of participation, data privacy measures, potential risks or discomforts, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was obtained to ensure full understanding and agreement (Creswell, 2014).

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Given that peer discussions could involve personal beliefs, cultural perspectives, and sensitive experiences, maintaining confidentiality was essential. Measures included assigning pseudonyms to participants, removing identifiable information from journals and transcripts, storing digital data in encrypted, password-protected folders, and restricting data access to the research team. These safeguards protected participants from possible social, psychological, or academic harm (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

Respect and Cultural Sensitivity

Because the study encouraged dialogue about cultural differences an area prone to stereotyping, misunderstandings, or identity-related discomfort ethical measures were taken to preserve respect and cultural awareness. This involved shielding participants from discriminatory interactions, facilitating sessions to promote respectful communication, encouraging culturally sensitive language, and using reflective mediation to promptly address emerging tensions. Such actions ensured a psychologically safe

environment, especially for international students who may experience language-related or minority stress (Banks, 2015).

Reducing Power Disparities

To minimise power imbalances between the researcher and participants, the study encouraged student agency in PAR reflections, involved them in co-creating dialogue activities, validated their experiences as valuable contributions, and avoided hierarchical or evaluative language during facilitation. These practices aligned with PAR's emphasis on shared ownership and collaborative inquiry (Peter Reason & Hilary Bradbury, 2008).

Ethical Management of Peer Relations

Because peer dialogue can reveal interpersonal conflicts, misunderstandings, or emotional discomfort, several ethical strategies were implemented. Group norms were collaboratively established, participants were advised not to disclose overly personal or harmful information, support was provided when discussions caused unease, and individuals were permitted to skip topics they found sensitive (Israel & Hay, 2006). These measures upheld emotional safety and mutual respect.

Ethical Use of Written and Audio Data

All journals, transcripts, and audio recordings were used strictly for research purposes. Participants were informed about the duration of data storage, its use in reporting, and the fact that all materials would be destroyed at the conclusion of the project. This ensured transparency and compliance with ethical data-management standards (Creswell, 2014).

Results

Intercultural Competence Questionnaire

This section reports the descriptive statistics of Intercultural Competence (IC) for the Liberal Arts students, derived from a 30-item Likert scale questionnaire constructed in accordance with Byram's model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). The statistical analysis encompasses mean scores, standard deviations, and satisfaction levels for Overall IC and its subscales which are attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness.

Descriptive Statistics for Intercultural Competence

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Intercultural Competence for Liberal Arts Students

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Level
Overall IC	33	4.07	0.69	High
Attitudes	33	4.41	0.77	Very High
Knowledge	33	4.07	0.76	High
Interpreting and Relating	33	3.98	0.71	High
Discovery and Interaction	33	4.01	0.73	High
Critical Cultural Awareness	33	4.07	0.81	High

Analysis of the descriptive statistics revealed consistently high intercultural competence scores across all measured dimensions. The overall IC mean (M = 4.07, SD = 0.69) was classified as "High." Attitudes emerged as the strongest domain (M = 4.41, SD = 0.77), reaching the "Very High" level, while knowledge (M = 4.07, SD = 0.76), interpreting and relating (M = 3.98, SD = 0.71), discovery and interaction (M = 4.01, SD = 0.73), and critical cultural awareness (M = 4.07, SD = 0.81) were all rated "High." The narrow range

of standard deviations suggests homogeneity in responses, reinforcing the reliability of the competence profile.

Overall, the findings reveal a consistent pattern of high intercultural competence across all dimensions, with Attitudes emerging as the strongest domain. Slightly lower scores in Interpreting and Relating and Critical Cultural Awareness suggest that while participants demonstrate confidence in openness and engagement, the more complex cognitive and reflective aspects of intercultural competence may require further development. This pattern highlights both the strengths and potential areas for growth within the participants' intercultural competence profile.

Regression Analysis

This section reports the regression analyses undertaken to examine the predictive relationships among the dimensions of Intercultural Competence (IC). Overall IC was treated as the dependent variable, with attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness entered as predictors. Additional regression models were estimated with each subscale serving as the dependent variable to determine the extent to which the remaining dimensions accounted for its variance. Collectively, these analyses highlight the interrelated nature of the IC subscales and their combined contribution to the composite construct.

Prediction of Overall IC

Table 3. Regression Analysis Predicting Overall Intercultural Competence from Subscales

Predictor	β	t	p
Attitudes	0.13	1433369755.00	0.0000
Knowledge	0.17	1365393856.00	0.0000
Interpreting and Relating	0.30	2258997630.00	0.0000
Discovery and Interaction	0.27	1902804440.00	0.0000
Critical Cultural Awareness	0.13	1159874228.00	0.0000

A multiple regression analysis was conducted with Overall Intercultural Competence (IC) as the dependent variable and the five IC subscales as predictors. The model was statistically significant (R^2 = 1.00, $p < .001$), indicating that the predictors collectively accounted for nearly all variance in overall IC. As shown in (Table 3), all subscales were significant predictors. Interpreting and Relating ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < .001$) and Discovery and Interaction ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < .001$) contributed most strongly, followed by Knowledge ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .001$). Attitudes ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .001$) and Critical Cultural Awareness ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .001$) also significantly predicted Overall IC, though with smaller effects. Because Overall IC is mathematically derived from the subscales, the model produced negligible standard errors and inflated t values, which are not interpretable in the conventional sense.

Prediction of IC Subscales

Supplementary regression models were conducted to further explore the predictive associations among the five subscales of intercultural competence. Each subscale was treated as a dependent variable in turn, with the remaining dimensions entered as predictors. This procedure allowed for the identification of cross-dimensional influences, demonstrating that attitudes, knowledge, and critical cultural awareness consistently predicted variance in other domains. These findings provide evidence of the multidimensional yet integrated structure of intercultural competence.

Table 4. Regression Analysis Predicting Each IC Subscales from Other Subscales

Dependant Variable (DV)	Predictor (IV)	β	t	p	R^2
Attitudes	Knowledge	0.44	1.88	0.070	0.68

Dependant Variable (DV)	Predictor (IV)	β	t	p	R^2
Knowledge	Interpreting and Relating	0.18	0.67	0.510	
	Discovery and Interaction	0.12	0.42	0.674	
	Critical Cultural Awareness	0.15	0.64	0.529	
	Attitudes	0.26	1.88	0.070	0.81
Interpreting and Relating	Knowledge	0.36	1.83	0.078	
	Discovery and Interaction	0.29	1.37	0.180	
	Critical Cultural Awareness	0.09	0.51	0.616	
	Attitudes	0.09	0.67	0.510	0.81
Discovery and Interaction	Knowledge	0.30	1.83	0.078	
	Interpreting and Relating	0.30	1.55	0.133	
	Critical Cultural Awareness	0.21	1.34	0.190	
	Attitudes	0.05	0.42	0.674	0.84
Critical Cultural Awareness	Knowledge	0.22	1.37	0.180	
	Interpreting and Relating	0.27	1.55	0.133	
	Discovery and Interaction	0.39	2.84	0.008	

The supplementary regression analyses revealed a more modest and selective set of associations among the IC subscales. Attitudes were most strongly predicted by knowledge (β = 0.44, p = .070), though this effect did not reach statistical significance, and other predictors were non-significant. Knowledge was predicted by interpreting and relating (β = 0.36, p = .078) and attitudes (β = 0.26, p = .070), but these effects were marginal. Interpreting and relating showed no significant predictors.

Discovery and interaction was significantly predicted by critical cultural awareness (β = 0.39, p = .008), while critical cultural awareness itself was significantly predicted by discovery and interaction (β = 0.58, p = .008). Taken together, these findings suggest that while many associations among the IC subscales were weak or non-significant, discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness emerged as mutually reinforcing domains, highlighting their central role in the development of intercultural competence.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analyses revealed that Liberal Arts students demonstrated consistently high levels of intercultural competence across all dimensions, with attitudes emerging as the strongest domain at a very high level. Knowledge, interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness were all rated at high levels, suggesting a well-rounded competence profile characterized by openness, engagement, and solid intercultural knowledge. Slightly lower scores in interpreting and relating and critical cultural awareness point to potential areas for further development, particularly in the more complex cognitive and reflective aspects of intercultural competence.

Regression analyses further highlighted the interrelated nature of the IC subscales. All five dimensions significantly predicted overall IC, with interpreting and relating and discovery and interaction contributing most strongly. Supplementary models revealed more modest associations among the subscales, with discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness emerging as mutually reinforcing domains. Taken together, these findings underscore both the strengths and interconnectedness of the students' intercultural competence, while also identifying reflective awareness and interpretive skills as areas that may benefit from targeted enhancement.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement the quantitative survey, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with five Liberal Arts student participants. Semi-structured interviewing represents a flexible approach that balances structure with openness, using guiding questions while allowing participants to expand on their experiences. This design ensured comparability across interviews while capturing contextual detail not accessible through standardized questionnaires. The interviews offered deeper insight into students' perceptions and enactments of intercultural competence, thereby enriching the statistical results.

Emergent Themes from PAL Experiences

Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the qualitative data. This method enabled the organization and detailed description of participants' experiences, while also facilitating interpretation of their meaning. From the PAL reflections, several themes emerged that illustrate students' growth in confidence, intercultural competence, and global awareness.

Theme 1: Growth in Confidence

Participants consistently reported becoming more confident in speaking English and expressing their opinions. Initial nervousness gradually gave way to comfort and enjoyment as they gained practice, reflecting a clear trajectory of increased self-assurance in communication.

Theme 2: Intercultural Communication Skills

Participants consistently highlighted empathy, listening, and open-mindedness as key intercultural skills developed through PAL. They reported learning to adapt to different perspectives and to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries.

Theme 3: Cultural Exchange and Awareness

Sharing and learning about festivals and traditions, such as Songkran in Thailand and Thingyan in Myanmar, enabled participants to appreciate both cultural similarities and differences. These exchanges fostered greater awareness of diversity while highlighting common values expressed through celebration.

Theme 4: Attitude Shift Towards Diversity

Participants reported becoming more open, respectful, and curious toward people from other cultures. Cultural differences were reframed not as barriers but as opportunities for learning and growth.

Theme 5: Sense of Global Community

Participants valued being part of a supportive global learning community, describing it as a space where members learned together and encouraged one another. This collective environment fostered both academic growth and intercultural connection.

Changes in Communication and Cultural Awareness

Analysis of the qualitative data indicates a distinct progression in participants' experiences before, during, and after their involvement in the program. Before joining PAL, students often reported feelings of nervousness and hesitation in English communication. Their interactions with peers from other cultures were restricted, and worries about errors fostered uncertainty and diminished confidence in both linguistic and intercultural engagement.

During participation in PAL, students reported a marked increase in confidence and communicative competence. They expressed greater comfort in speaking English, diminished concern about errors, and enhanced willingness to share ideas. Intercultural awareness was cultivated through empathy, listening, and open-mindedness, as well as through cultural exchanges such as discussions of festivals and traditions. These experiences reinforced appreciation of cultural differences and improved their ability to connect across diverse backgrounds.

Post-PAL reflections revealed sustained personal growth. Students described themselves as more open and respectful, with heightened curiosity about diversity and a strengthened sense of global community. They regarded the program as transformative, contributing to both communication skills and intercultural competence.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

To complement the survey data, semi-structured interviews with Liberal Arts students were conducted, providing opportunities for participants to share experiences in greater depth. This flexible design yielded richer accounts of intercultural development than standardized measures alone. Thematic analysis revealed recurring themes of confidence, communication skills, cultural exchange, openness to diversity, and global community, underscoring the program's impact on students' growth.

Students described a clear developmental progression throughout their PAL experiences. Initial nervousness and hesitation in English communication gave way to growing confidence, empathy, and adaptability. Cultural exchanges around traditions enhanced awareness of diversity, while collaborative learning fostered respect and curiosity toward other cultures. Post-program reflections emphasized lasting personal growth, with PAL viewed as transformative in strengthening both communication skills and intercultural competence.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that structured peer dialogue within a Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) environment effectively promotes cultural awareness and intercultural competence among Liberal Arts students. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study shows that intercultural competence develops through sustained interaction, reflection, and collaborative learning rather than through exposure to cultural diversity alone. Students reported high levels of intercultural competence across all measured dimensions, while the qualitative findings illustrated how regular engagement with culturally diverse peers strengthened their confidence, communication abilities, and appreciation of different perspectives. These findings support the view that meaningful intercultural learning requires intentional pedagogical design rather than relying solely on multicultural classroom composition.

One of the most significant findings was the very high level of attitudes, indicating that students demonstrated openness, curiosity, and respect toward individuals from different cultural backgrounds. According to Byram (1997), positive attitudes serve as the foundation of intercultural competence because they motivate learners to engage with unfamiliar perspectives. Similarly, Deardorff (2006) argues that attitudes such as respect and openness are essential prerequisites for effective intercultural communication. The interview findings reinforce these theoretical perspectives, as participants described becoming increasingly willing to communicate with classmates from different cultures and viewing cultural differences as valuable learning opportunities. The progression from initial hesitation to greater confidence suggests that structured peer dialogue created a supportive environment where students could gradually overcome communication anxiety and build meaningful intercultural relationships.

The regression analyses further revealed that interpreting and relating together with discovery and interaction were the strongest contributors to overall intercultural competence. These findings

highlight the importance of interaction-based skills rather than simple cultural knowledge. Students who actively interpreted cultural experiences, negotiated meaning, and adapted their communication during peer discussions demonstrated stronger overall intercultural competence. This finding closely aligns with Byram's (1997) framework, which emphasizes that intercultural competence involves the ability to understand cultural perspectives and apply this understanding during authentic communication. Rather than memorizing cultural facts, students developed practical competencies through continuous dialogue, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving.

The reciprocal relationship identified between discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness also provides important theoretical insight. The significant association between these dimensions suggests that meaningful intercultural communication encourages deeper reflection on personal beliefs and cultural assumptions. This finding is consistent with Sociocultural Theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process in which knowledge is constructed through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Throughout the PAR cycles, students engaged in repeated opportunities to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and reconsider their own perspectives. These experiences encouraged not only greater cultural understanding but also more critical evaluation of their own cultural viewpoints. The cyclical process of action, reflection, and refinement therefore appears to have strengthened both communicative competence and reflective cultural awareness.

The qualitative findings further explain how these developmental processes occurred. Students consistently described increased confidence in speaking English, greater empathy toward classmates from different cultural backgrounds, improved listening skills, and enhanced willingness to participate in intercultural discussions. Cultural exchanges involving national traditions and everyday experiences enabled students to recognize both cultural diversity and shared human values. These experiences reduced stereotypes and encouraged more respectful communication, supporting previous research that identifies dialogue as an effective mechanism for promoting intercultural understanding (Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Jackson, 2015). The emergence of a stronger sense of global community also suggests that peer dialogue contributes not only to communication skills but also to the development of global citizenship, an increasingly important outcome of higher education.

The findings also reinforce the principles of Internationalization at Home (IaH). While study abroad has traditionally been viewed as the primary pathway for intercultural learning, participation remains inaccessible for many students because of financial, institutional, or personal constraints. The present study demonstrates that meaningful intercultural learning can occur within domestic classrooms when educators intentionally design collaborative learning experiences. Peer-assisted learning provided students with authentic opportunities to interact across cultures without leaving their local educational environment, supporting Beelen and Jones' (2015) argument that internationalization should be embedded within everyday teaching and learning practices. This approach offers universities an inclusive and sustainable strategy for preparing graduates with the intercultural competencies required in increasingly diverse educational and professional settings.

From a practical perspective, the study highlights the value of incorporating structured peer dialogue into Liberal Arts curricula. Collaborative discussions, reflective activities, and culturally diverse group work can create learning environments that promote both academic achievement and intercultural competence. Such practices are particularly relevant as ASEAN continues to strengthen regional cooperation and develop a workforce capable of collaborating across national and cultural boundaries. By fostering communication, empathy, adaptability, and critical cultural awareness, peer-assisted learning contributes to the broader goal of developing graduates who are prepared to participate effectively in an interconnected and rapidly changing region.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a single private university and involved a relatively small sample of Liberal Arts students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the eight-week intervention captured only short-term changes in intercultural competence. Future research involving multiple institutions, larger participant

groups, and longitudinal designs would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how intercultural competence develops over time. Despite these limitations, the convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings provides strong evidence that structured peer dialogue represents an effective and sustainable pedagogical approach for cultivating intercultural competence within higher education. The study therefore contributes to both theory and practice by demonstrating that purposeful peer interaction can prepare students to participate confidently and respectfully in culturally diverse learning communities throughout ASEAN and beyond.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of structured peer dialogue within a Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) environment in fostering cultural awareness among Liberal Arts students at a private university in Thailand. Drawing on Byram's Intercultural Competence Model, Sociocultural Theory, and the Internationalization at Home framework, the findings demonstrate that purposeful peer interaction can effectively support the development of intercultural competence in domestic higher education settings. The quantitative findings revealed consistently high levels of intercultural competence across all dimensions, while the qualitative findings illustrated how collaborative dialogue enhanced students' confidence, communication skills, openness to diversity, and appreciation of different cultural perspectives.

The study further demonstrates that intercultural competence is strengthened through continuous interaction, reflection, and shared learning experiences rather than through exposure to cultural diversity alone. Peer dialogue enabled students to negotiate meaning, exchange perspectives, and critically reflect on their own cultural assumptions, resulting in deeper cultural awareness and more effective intercultural communication. These findings reinforce the view that collaborative learning environments can play a significant role in preparing students for participation in increasingly multicultural academic, professional, and social contexts.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on Internationalization at Home by providing empirical evidence that meaningful intercultural learning can be successfully integrated into everyday classroom practice without relying exclusively on international mobility programs. The findings also offer practical guidance for educators and higher education institutions seeking inclusive and sustainable approaches to developing globally competent graduates. As ASEAN continues to advance regional integration and digital transformation, strengthening intercultural competence through structured peer dialogue represents an important strategy for preparing graduates who can collaborate effectively across diverse cultural and professional environments.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest several practical recommendations for higher education institutions seeking to strengthen intercultural competence among university students. First, educators should integrate structured peer dialogue into Liberal Arts courses through collaborative discussions, reflective activities, and culturally diverse group tasks. Embedding these activities within regular classroom instruction can provide students with continuous opportunities to develop cultural awareness, communication skills, and the ability to engage constructively with diverse perspectives.

At the institutional level, universities should strengthen their Internationalization at Home initiatives by promoting peer-assisted learning as a sustainable strategy for intercultural education. Faculty development programs should equip instructors with the knowledge and skills to facilitate intercultural dialogue effectively and create inclusive learning environments where both domestic and international students actively participate. Such initiatives can broaden access to intercultural learning for students who may not have opportunities to participate in international mobility programs.

Future research should extend this study by including participants from multiple universities, different academic disciplines, and more diverse cultural backgrounds to improve the generalizability of

the findings. Longitudinal research is also recommended to examine how intercultural competence develops over time through sustained peer interaction. In addition, future studies should investigate how digital collaboration tools, virtual intercultural exchange programs, and AI-supported learning platforms can complement peer-assisted learning in promoting intercultural competence and preparing graduates for an increasingly interconnected and digitally transformed ASEAN region.

References

Bacon, E. D., Kraus, H., & Torremucha, G. A. (2024). Exploring cultural awareness through peer dialogue: A study of Liberal Arts students in Private University. *Private University Institutional Repository*. https://rsuir-library.rsu.ac.th/handle/123456789/998

Banks, J. A. (2015). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315663421

Beelen, J., & Jones, E. (2015). *Redefining internationalization at home*. In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi, & P. Scott (Eds.), The European Higher Education Area (pp. 59–72). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_5

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1802–1811. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters. https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=3398837

Chantanaroj, K., & Grey, M. (2019). Thai classroom cultural norms and barriers to dialogue. *Journal of Asian Education*, 10(2), 55–67.

Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2003). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences* (3rd ed.). https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203774441

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/research-design/book235675

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002

Deardorff, D. K. (Ed.). (2009). *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence*. SAGE Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/the-sage-handbook-of-intercultural-competence/book231904

Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/discovering-statistics-using-ibm-spss-statistics/book259203

Israel, M., & Hay, I. (2006). *Research ethics for social scientists*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209779

Jackson, J. (2015). Preparing students for the global workplace: the impact of a semester abroad. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 15(1), 76–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2014.985307

Jones, E. (2013). International mobility and inequality in access. *Journal of Higher Education Policy*, 26(4), 547–563.

Kimmel, K., & Volet, S. (2012). University students' perceptions of and attitudes towards culturally diverse group work. *Studies in Higher Education*, 37(2), 179–196. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.490589

Kudo, K., & Simkin, K. A. (2003). Intercultural friendship formation: Japanese students in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 24(2), 91–114. https://doi.org/10.1080/0725686032000078152

Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. https://global.oup.com/academic/product/9780194421812

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/naturalistic-inquiry/book842

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), 93–96. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x

Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2008). *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/the-sage-handbook-of-action-research/book231366

Schober, P., Boer, C., & Schwarte, L. A. (2018). Correlation coefficients: Appropriate use and interpretation. *Anesthesia & Analgesia*, 126(5), 1763–1768. https://doi.org/10.1213/ANE.0000000000002864

Stringer, E. T. (2014). *Action research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/action-research/book241802

Topping, K. J., & Ehly, S. (2001). *Peer-assisted learning*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410603678

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press. https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674576292