*Original Paper*

# A Simple but Unaware Matter: Cultivating Intercultural Communication Awareness through a Non-Formal Education of Office Personnel in Bangkok

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*Abstract*

*This study, focusing on cultivating intercultural communication awareness through a non-formal education of office personnel in Bangkok, aims to highlight the prominent influence of an Intercultural Communication (IC) training program in promoting business workers to have some extent of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) applied at their workplace. The concurrent mixed-method study comprised three approaches employed for collecting data. Two sets of self-reflection questions before and after the training program and the semi-structured interview were the main research instruments to assess the participants' intercultural communication competence after the six-hour training. The data analysis and interpretation stage entailed transforming quantitative data into qualitative themes or codes, then relating them to quantitative outcomes for interpretation and integration. The findings suggested that the business workers had a low to moderate intercultural communication competence with particular areas to be developed prior to the training program. Nevertheless, the results drawn from the study concluded that the participants gained IC awareness from the six-hour training in a relatively high manner. The outcomes of this study could be used as a guideline for educational institutions to prepare graduates with intercultural communication competence ready for the labor market, along with human resource departments and corporations to equip their employees with IC assets by designing or offering training programs to enhance productivity at the workplace.*

*Keywords*

*intercultural communication, intercultural communication competence, intercultural communication at workplace, intercultural communication training*

## 1. Introduction

Ineffective communication outcomes could be caused by various variables (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Ting-Toomey, 2009), resulting in misunderstanding or even conflicts in every unit of society: family, workplace, local and global communities. As a result, factors that promote effective intercultural communication should be investigated, particularly among members of a specific group who regularly spend time together at a particular place, like the office workers. However, intercultural communication was deemed relatively new in Thailand as compared to other disciplines of study, as evidenced by the availability of limited research in this area. Furthermore, few studies examined employees quantitatively and qualitatively, especially in increasing intercultural dialogue among office workers. As a result, this study titled "A simple but unaware matter: cultivating intercultural communication awareness through a non-formal education of office personnel in Bangkok," has filled a gap by investigating approaches to boost the intercultural competency of office workers through non-formal education.

This study aimed to determine whether the six-hour intercultural communication training could ignite or create intercultural communication awareness among office workers in Bangkok. All corporations require effective teamwork to run their businesses. However, creating practical employee cooperation is sometimes regarded as a significant challenge. Each staff member comes from a different cultural background and has diverse perspectives and worldviews. As a result, to produce a corporative performance in the workplace, the organization must devise strategies to consolidate all diversity among its employees.

An ideological desire in a business operation is to work effectively and efficiently among the staff members. Hence, the researcher was interested in investigating whether office workers' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) played a vital role in promoting effectiveness in business operations. The mixed-method approach was employed to explore the two IC aspects of the study. First and foremost, the chosen strategy discovered the participants' intercultural communication competence. Secondly, the training outcomes determined the participants' awareness of the IC. There were two research questions set to seek answers to this study. First, what were office workers' intercultural communication competence levels before attending the ICC training program? Lastly, to what extent did office workers obtain IC awareness after the training? The findings of this study could be beneficial as a guideline in developing training programs or courses to raise IC awareness among employees in organizations. In addition to the abovementioned point, this study could be an essential springboard for future research in ICC cultivation in a Thai business context.

## 2. Literature Review

"Intercultural competence" has remained undefined for more than five decades. Several researchers, however, have offered justifications, including allusions to global, international, and multicultural competence (Fantini, 2005, 2009, 2012). Nevertheless, one definition by Byram (2008) is comprehensible and relevant to this study. He argues that intercultural competence is the capacity to engage with people of a cultural group and identity to which we do not belong, understand them, and act together. Byram (2008) proposes that "it is not a matter of changing identity, but instead of crossing group boundaries to see other culture from within, and to see our own culture from the other perspective."

In reality, even though no one can possess all of the components or qualities of intercultural communication competence, everyone should own them to some extent. This is because "full" intercultural competence is impossible to obtain (Barrett et al., 2013). However, numerous intercultural competence models are available today to assist in measuring ICC. As a result, the six models -Intercultural Maturity Model (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005); Intercultural Sensitivity Model (Bennett, 1993); Intercultural Competence Model (Byram, 1997); Intercultural Components Model (Barrett et al., 2013); the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters Model (Council of Europe, 2009) and Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006) were chosen because they are relevant to this study and were carefully examined to determine the most suitable one. After thoroughly reviewing, the Intercultural Components Model by Barrett, Byram, Lazar, Mompoint-Gaillard, and Philippou (2013) is the most suited model for providing an appropriate framework for the study. However, when determining this appropriate operationalized intercultural communication competence model to be the guideline of this research, the fact that the model comes from the perspective of Western researchers is taken into account. Adjustments were made as required and relevant to the situations to ensure that the model is suitable for a Thai context study.

Attitudes, knowledge and understanding, skills, and actions are the intercultural communication traits based on Barrett and his colleagues' framework (2013) assessed in this study. Values such as cultural variety and pluralism of viewpoints and practices were among the examined attitudes. Understanding all cultural entities' internal diversity and heterogeneity was essential to knowledge and understanding. Using a multi-perspectivity approach was one of the skills required. This occurs when a person is encouraged to consider other people's perspectives. As a result, a person's skills in comprehending, showing empathy, and adapting to new cultures were investigated, along with their cognitive capacity. Finally, the domain of the action was assessed to explore a person's capacity to seek out opportunities to interact and communicate with others of diverse cultural orientations appropriately, effectively, and courteously.

Concerning intercultural communication assessment, several models from various scholars were explored. They included Barrett's Intercultural Competence Assessment Model (2013), Byram's Intercultural Competence Assessment Model (1997), the Assessment of Intercultural Competence

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(Fantini, 2006), and the Intercultural Competence Assessment Model (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 1999). Following extensive consideration, Byram's Intercultural Competence Assessment Model was most suitable for assessing the intercultural communication competence of the office workers in Bangkok. Before commencing the inquiry, clear objectives for each competence were also conducted.

## 3. Methods

This study sought to establish explanations concerning the intercultural communication competence the office workers were equipped. It utilized quantitative, complemented by qualitative methods, to collect and analyze data. The applied approaches included the pre and post-training self-assessment questionnaires and semi-structured interviews—this range of methods allowed for data gained from different perspectives. First, participants completed the quantitative-based questionnaires before participating in the training. In addition, the qualitative approach of informal semi-structured interviews after the training session was employed to gain additional supporting data from the participants. The demographical context for this study was 120 office workers from business corporates in Bangkok (N=120) who took the 6-hours-IC awareness training program organized by a human resource company in Bangkok.

*3.1 Research instruments*

There were three research instruments employed in this study. Firstly, a set of ICC self-assessment questionnaires designed by Inkaew (2016) was adopted to investigate the intercultural communication competence of the participants. The ICC self-assessment questionnaires were constructed based on the four intercultural competence domains, namely attitudes, knowledge and understanding, skills, and actions, framed by Barrett et al. (2013). All the survey questions were written in Thai so the participants could comprehend them without language barriers.

The ICC self-assessment questionnaires have a total of 20 questions. First, the participants were asked to rate their intercultural communication competence using the Intercultural Components Model developed by Barrett et al. (2013) as the study's framework. The set of questionnaires comprises five domains - attitudes (5 items), knowledge and understanding (5 items), skills (5 items), and actions (5 items). Participants rated their performance on a 5-point Likert scale. Each item is scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree," 2 indicating "disagree," 3 indicating "agree," 4 indicating "strongly agree" and 0 indicating "not sure." Secondly, there was another set of quantitative self-reflection items for participants to rate after completing the training program. The second set of questionnaires features six parts. First, the participants were asked to assess their ICC before joining the training program. Next, the respondents rated the course's benefits, the instructor's or trainer's performance, course's contents, and training strategies. Fifth, the attendees were invited to evaluate their own intercultural communication competence after the training. Finally, they were asked to assess the overall picture of the training program, reflecting their satisfaction with their IC awareness improvement. In assessing self-perceptions, the participants performed their self-assessment on a 1-10-point Likert-type scale, with 1 being the least and 10 being the highest degree of satisfaction.

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Finally, the semi-structured interview was conducted to investigate participants' opinions on their IC training experience and their IC awareness gained from the training. These two approaches were used to triangulate the respondents' pre-training assessment results.

*3.2 Intercultural Communication Awareness Training Outline*

The researcher prepared the training features emphasizing critical learning points based on several scholars' recommendations to ensure that participants were well-equipped with IC awareness following the training (e.g., Barrett et al., 2013; Byram, 2011, 2020; Deardorff & Berardo, 2012). The six-hour training session was divided into IC concept familiarization and discussion, workshops, and case studies analysis. The program began with an open inquiry as to why communication is ineffective before proceeding to the notion of intercultural communication in the morning session of the first three hours. The attendees were then introduced to several perspectives on intercultural communication competence. After that, the first workshop was conducted to review and deepen the attendees' comprehension of the coached issues. The afternoon program started with perspectives on cultural complexity and communication, supplemented by the second workshop, ensuring that all attendees were aware of cultural complexity. The training session concluded with discussing intercultural dynamics in business organizations, followed by the final workshop. Additionally, participants worked on several case studies involving potential intercultural communication issues at work and addressed them using perspectives they had learned throughout the training session.

*3.3 Data Analysis and Validation Procedures*

The data analysis strategies for this study included first assessing the quantitative data, as the concurrent mixed-methods model is the approach. The participants were then given a quantitative self-assessment. In the meantime, the respondents were subjected to qualitative informal semi-structured interviews. This is the method suggested by Creswell (2009) for obtaining reliable quantitative findings, and it entails completing all essential data transformations, including qualitatively establishing codes and themes.

The data acquired from the structured questionnaires of self-assessment questions were stored in the SPSS software program. This tool aided in the use of statistical data for the analysis of each question item's "Frequency," "Mean," and "Standard Deviation." In addition, a set of procedures was followed to ensure that data derived from both quantitative and qualitative findings were valid. According to Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), validity is related to research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings. They claim that the validity of mixed methods research is primarily linked to the design and interpretation stages of the study. Therefore, while addressing mixed-methods validity, the emphasis is on the methodologies utilized in all three phases of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative strategies used in the study (Creswell & Clark, 2011). As a result, the validity and reliability of data results for both approaches were rigorously examined throughout each working approach.

To ensure the validity of the quantitative findings, triangulation data sources, peer-reviewing, and

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extensive description methodologies were employed. During the data analysis procedures, possible threats to internal validity were recognized and controlled. Finally, the interpretation processes were used to interpret the quantitative findings gathered from the office workers in the final step of integration and interpretation. The results of semi-structured interviews were combined and evaluated for a comprehensive view of the findings.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section reports the following findings:

1. Levels of intercultural communication competence of office workers prior to attending the IC awareness training program

2. The extent of IC awareness office workers gained after completing the training program

## 1. Levels of intercultural communication competence of office workers prior to attending the IC awareness training program

The 20 self-assessment questions adopted from Inkaew (2016) were distributed to all participants to analyze the extent of intercultural communication competence of the 120 officers before engaging in the ICC training program. The first five questions probe the participants' attitudes toward diversity, while the following five examine the respondents' cultural knowledge and understanding. Question items 11-15 explore the participants' ICC in terms of abilities to decenter themselves from their own perspectives, empathy and adjusting to other cultures, and the last five questions investigate the attendees' behaviors in seeking out opportunities to engage and communicate with people of various cultural orientations (Barrett et al., 2013; Byram, 1997; Council of Europe, 2009).

The results drawn from the questionnaires are illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1. Participants' Levels of ICC through Self-Assessment Prior to Attending the Training Program**

| Question items/ No. of respondents = 120 | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Domain 1: Attitudes** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| 1. I feel embarrassed when I see people from other cultures performing a greeting kiss and goodbye kiss. | 18 | 46 | 43 | 11 | 2 | 2.56 | 0.91 |
| 2. I feel frustrated and question the situation when I see an old foreigner living in Thailand carrying things without any help from their accompanied children. | 11 | 29 | 50 | 27 | 3 | 2.15 | 0.96 |
| 3. I am curious and want to know the cultural background of my new colleague, who is from a foreign country, so I look for information in order that I know how to treat my new colleague properly. | 22 | 59 | 27 | 7 | 5 | 2.72 | 0.95 |

| | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. When I travel to a country that doesn't have a queue or lineup system for services, I feel disappointed to see such a disorganized practice. | 9 | 11 | 41 | 57 | 2 | 1.73 | 0.93 |
| 5. I enjoy talking or working with foreign colleagues from different cultures, while my friends always avoid working and/or talking with them. | 16 | 43 | 45 | 2 | 14 | 2.38 | 1.12 |
| **Domain 2: Knowledge and Understanding** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| 6. I know that people from Europe are white (Caucasian) and very punctual. | 2 | 14 | 61 | 29 | 14 | 1.64 | 0.84 |
| 7. I know that most Thai people like spicy food and eat street food. However, when I take my new foreign colleagues out for dinner, I always bring them to a nice, clean restaurant and order food with a mild taste for everyone, including myself. | 32 | 61 | 16 | 7 | 4 | 2.92 | 0.97 |
| 8. I don't like to listen to non-native English accents because I think they are difficult to understand for Thai people like me. | 34 | 55 | 16 | 2 | 13 | 2.78 | 1.22 |
| 9. I know that when some foreigners raise their eyebrows or remain silent, it means they are frustrated or unhappy. | 6 | 23 | 48 | 11 | 32 | 1.77 | 1.45 |
| 10. I will not be surprised if there is a group of Muslim workers in the company and the company allocates or sets up a 'praying zone' for them. | 43 | 52 | 14 | 2 | 9 | 2.98 | 1.11 |
| **Domain 3: Skills** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| 11. I will not show my Thai 'Wai' when greeting new foreign colleagues because this might make them feel awkward in responding to my greeting. | 45 | 59 | 3 | 11 | 2 | 3.12 | 0.95 |
| 12. Foreigners coming to stay or work in Thailand have to know and be well aware of Thai culture to get along within the local environment without problems. | 39 | 71 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3.2 | 0.73 |
| 13. I can see that some foreigners from a particular part of the world have superstitions/beliefs like some Thai people do, because I sometimes see them wearing or showing respect to an object. | 11 | 71 | 23 | 2 | 13 | 2.54 | 1.06 |
| 14. When meeting people from different cultural backgrounds, I don't whisper to people next to me because other people might think that it is impolite or I am gossiping about them. | 41 | 50 | 21 | 1 | 7 | 2.98 | 1.04 |

| | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15. I like to help my Thai friends when they have difficulties talking with foreign friends. | 23 | 57 | 25 | 3 | 12 | 2.63 | 1.13 |
| **Domain 4: Skills** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| 16. I like to work with friends who are from different countries. I think it is a great way to develop my international social skills. | 38 | 61 | 16 | 0 | 5 | 3.06 | 0.91 |
| 17. When I see a disabled person, I will not actively approach him or her and immediately help him/her as much as possible to make him or her happy. | 43 | 63 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3.12 | 0.96 |
| 18. When I go out to have dinner with my Chinese friend, he/she will use chopsticks when eating, but I am more comfortable using a spoon and fork without needing chopsticks. | 27 | 53 | 29 | 4 | 7 | 2.74 | 1.03 |
| 19. I will treat or offer services to the company's visitors from our Thailand's neighboring countries differently from those from Europe because their requirements are different and guests from nearby countries are easygoing. | 14 | 38 | 47 | 9 | 12 | 2.28 | 1.09 |
| 20. To kill time when engaging in small talk with foreign visitors from the Middle East, I will not raise the issue of the regional conflict for discussion in order to show my empathy. | 38 | 43 | 5 | 23 | 11 | 2.64 | 1.33 |

Under the attitudes domain, participants should reflect on their attitudes when respecting persons with different cultural affiliations in the assigned situational scenarios. This involved evaluating their ability to be open to, curious about, and willing to learn from and about people of various cultural orientations and viewpoints and their willingness to sympathize with persons of various cultural affiliations. They also had to anticipate their willingness to question what they would generally accept as "normal" based on their prior knowledge and experience. This included assessing their propensity to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty and seeking opportunities to engage and collaborate with people with diverse cultural orientations and perspectives.

It was difficult to categorize individuals with low and high ICC in intercultural speakers because the same actions or skills can be considered competent in one period of time and environment but not in another or by people of different cultural affinities (Spitzberg, 2000). Inkaew (2016) agrees that we cannot identify or condemn someone based on their intercultural competence because it depends on some elements and varies depending on context and time. For this study, it was worth noting that the researcher employed ICC values within a specific time window. Therefore, it was operationalized to obtain a clear view of the ICC trend in the data analysis.

As a result, regardless of whether the scenarios were positive or negative, the gap for each ICC degree was determined as 0.75, based on the four-degree levels, with '1' being the lowest number that reflected the degree of ICC performed by the business personnel. The following was the range of ICC degree values: 1-1.75 signifies "very low ICC," >1.75-2.50 suggests "low ICC," >2.50-3.25 shows "moderate ICC," and >3.25-4.0 indicates "high ICC" (Inkaew, 2016).

The findings drawn from questionnaires concerning the first domain of intercultural communication competence – attitudes, completed prior to participating in the IC awareness training indicated that office workers had low to moderate intercultural communication competence, with M=2.56, 2.15, 2.72, 1.73, and 2.38 for questions 1 to 5, respectively. Furthermore, except for question 5, where the answers were not consensus (SD=1.12) which was different from the Standard Deviation Variance (SD), the first four answers responded in the same direction with the value below 1.

When it came to recognizing the cultural variety and behaviors of people from various affiliations, some company workers (33.33 %) could not overcome or tolerate the behavior of others, which was deemed normal in foreign countries but not in Thailand as a host culture. Moreover, regarding respecting people of different cultural orientations, the office workers' perception was that they tended to relate other cultures to their own and became frustrated when they witnessed events such as the elderly not being assisted, particularly those who did not support were considered family members. Therefore, according to respondents, the situational practice was deemed inappropriate or wrongdoing.

Barrett et al. (2013) viewed that the respondents were unwilling to tolerate the unfamiliar practice because they equated the foreign culture they encountered with their own culture without realizing the distinctions. Many activities, including regular life experiences, can help people learn about or improve their attitudes towards different cultures. In another way, they expose themselves to and learn from the outside world (Koester & Lustig, 2015). This phenomenon of relating one's own culture to other affiliations of business employees could be explained by the fundamental principle of ICC concept, which views that people see themselves as the center of the world (Bennett, 1993, 2009), before gradually changing to blend in with the real world after learning and gaining more IC experience. Therefore, it takes time to develop a specific level of ICC, obtained through various sources such as formal and informal education or life experience.

Based on this phenomenon, having a positive attitude domain is essential as it serves as a foundation for developing and exercising other IC features. Furthermore, it is critical for working personnel to learn how to expose themselves to IC circumstances with an open and optimistic attitude equipped by the schooling system (Inkaew, 2016). Being thoroughly and systematically trained to understand the fundamental concept of IC characteristics, which is rarely discovered in informal education or life experience, could form individuals to start having IC awareness since they were young. If one's attitude is open and positive, he or she tends to respect persons with diverse cultural affiliations. Persons are more tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty because they are willing and open to learning and empathizing with people from other cultural orientations (Liu, 2014).

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When investigating the following five questions designed to assess the intercultural communication competence of business personnel in the knowledge and understanding domain, the results revealed that they tended to have inconsistent awareness of other cultural groups' differences in intercultural practices at a deeper level. Three of the five situations (7, 8, and 10) signified that the workers had "moderate" IC competence (value gap >2.50-3.25), while the other two situations were with "low" ICC (value gap >1.75-2.50). In addition to cultural awareness, employees should be conscious of stereotyping for a particular group – that what they see and experience, such as the physical appearance and demeanor of Europeans, could not be applied to all members of that society. The possible explanation for this phenomenon was that office workers may have gained a more stereotyped perspective of individuals from particular locations and from various sources, such as at home from their parents, in their basic educational system, and through life experience, including media. Consequently, by having positive intercultural competence, individuals could prevent stereotyping, acquire a feeling of universalism, and appreciate the diversity in our world (Patel et al., 2011).

Regarding accent variety, the participants' responses were different (SD=1.22); some respondents (74.16 %) could not stand distinct accents from people of different cultural backgrounds because they perceived difficulty picking up. To explain the noteworthy phenomenon revealed in the findings, it could be hypothesized that a person's educational attainment and life experience had no direct impact on IC competence levels. The study indicated that other cultural associations in accents were only vaguely seen and understood. According to the researcher's view, the emerging findings were likely the result of the fact that the concept of World Englishes, in particular, has not been adopted as an approach and recognized by the current educational system in Thailand for its functionality in understanding the various accents within the English language. World Englishes appears to be primarily offered to Thai postgraduates (Inkaew, 2016). The concept of World Englishes should be integrated or included in the English classroom at all levels of education (Inkaew, 2018). This would aid students in preparing for the labor market and managing various interactions in today's globalized environment.

Next, the skills domain of the respondents was investigated through question items 11-15, assessing the intercultural communication competence of business personnel, specifically their abilities in "multiperspective", or the ability to decenter from one's own perspective and consider other people's perspectives in addition to one's own. Besides, their skills in acquiring knowledge about other cultural affiliations and viewpoints and comprehending and relating other cultural practices, beliefs, and values to their own were also investigated. Finally, two additional skills were examined: adapting their behavior to different cultural surroundings and acting as a "mediator" in intercultural dialogues, which included an analysis of their translating, interpreting, and explaining skills.

Concerning the results from the participants under the skills domain, the respondents notably performed moderately in all areas of an ICC value gap of >2.50-3.25. However, this study's results differed from the outcomes conducted by Inkaew (2016) on hotel front desk employees. Under scenario 11, most hotel's front office personnel had "very low ICC" (value gap = 1-1.75), demonstrating a lack

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of competence in decentering oneself from their own culture while interacting with other cultures, according to his research. To explain the emergent results gleaned from the business office workers demonstrating a skills domain to decenter themselves from their own culture while engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds, they may have had experience from their daily lives—exposing themselves to intercultural environments and working places—or previous experiences or formal education, which could explain why they were aware of a so-called international standard code of behavior (Barrett et al., 2013).

The last set of questions, items 16-20, investigated various aspects under the actions domain of the business workers, such as their actions in seeking opportunities to engage with people who had different cultural orientations, interacting and communicating appropriately, effectively, and respectfully with people who had different cultural affiliations from their own, cooperating with individuals who had different cultural orientations on shared activities, challenging attitudes and behaviors of people regardless of their cultural affiliations and their actions when mediating situations of cultural conflict. The findings gained from all respondents under this domain showed their consensus in possessing a moderate ICC level (value gap of >2.50-3.25) in four examined areas, situations 16,17, 18, and 20. However, they tended to possess "low ICC" in the area of actions in challenging attitudes and behaviors (value gap of >1.75-2.5). To illustrate, some respondents, for example, showed their own cultural bias towards visitors from nearby and European countries. Depending on the circumstances, this could cause a visitor from a different cultural affiliation to feel uncomfortable, as everyone is independent and expects to be treated equally.

In other aspects, most business workers could seek opportunities to engage with people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from their own. As a result, most respondents could blend and communicate appropriately, effectively, and courteously with people from other cultural backgrounds. In addition, they could distinguish themselves from their own culture. In other words, they did not presume that if something were acceptable in Thai society, it would or should be acceptable in other cultures. This emerging phenomenon indicated that intercultural competence in the domain of action was adequate. For example, 66.66 % of the respondents indicated they would use a spoon and fork when working with people from other cultural backgrounds because they were familiar with it. However, using chopsticks was suggested by 27.5 % of respondents. They perceived that practice would avoid feeling uneasy for the guest. Byram (2008), on the other hand, argued for this perspective, claiming that even though we should be conscious of the multiplicity of cultures and decenter ourselves from our own, to become multicultural mediators, we do not need to change our identities.

To respond to the first research question concerning office workers' levels of intercultural communication competence before attending the IC awareness training program, the findings suggested that the possession of attitudes domain among the office personnel was only to a certain degree. Regarding attitudes, the respondents demonstrated low to moderate intercultural communication

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competence as some of them could not tolerate some different behaviors of other cultures. For knowledge and understanding, the training attendees tended to have inconsistent awareness of intercultural communication in some areas, such as a lack of understanding of other cultural affiliations that were, on a deeper level, utterly different from their own. In contrast, the findings indicated that most respondents appeared capable of dealing with intercultural interactions in the skills domain. Furthermore, the participants had moderate intercultural communication competence in the domain of the actions. They could employ their behaviors to appropriately and effectively cope with multicultural interactions in the workplace. However, some were discovered to have biases towards persons of various affiliations. Finally, the business workers had moderate intercultural communication competence, with specific areas to improve their awareness. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that various biases and limitations may exist in the findings since each IC domain had additional attributes or traits that should have been thoroughly investigated in this study.

## 5. The Extent of ICC Awareness Office Workers Gained after Completing the Training Program

The researcher employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data on the attendees' ability to obtain intercultural communication awareness from the training session. The researcher first invited all participants to complete self-assessment questionnaires on the degree they gained from the training when the session was completed. The researcher then approached 30 participants randomly for an informal semi-structured interview to gain insightful information to supplement the data gathered from the self-assessment questionnaires. Table 2 shows the participants' perspective data reflecting their training performance.

**Table 2. Self-Assessment Results after 6-Hour-IC Training**

| Points for self-assessment | least most satisfied | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.Knowledge before joining the course** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Total | Mean | SD |
| Your level of intercultural communication awareness before joining the training session | 4 | 6 | 7 | 16 | 23 | 21 | 20 | 14 | 5 | 4 | 120 | 5.66 | 2.08 |
| **2.Assessing course's benefits** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Total | Mean | SD |
| (2.1) Intercultural communication competence and awareness gained after completing the training | | | | | | | 26 | 42 | 34 | 18 | 120 | 8.37 | 0.99 |

session

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Total | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (2.2) Concepts or ideas understanding | | | | | | | 18 | 53 | 34 | 15 | 120 | 8.38 | 0.89 |
| (2.3) Applying what you have learned at work or real-life situation | | | | | | 2 | 18 | 45 | 41 | 14 | 120 | 8.4 | 0.93 |
| (2.4) Benefits gained from provided training materials | | | | | 2 | 5 | 23 | 45 | 32 | 13 | 120 | 8.16 | 1.09 |
| (2.5) Benefits gained from this intercultural communication awareness training | | | | | | | 9 | 38 | 47 | 26 | 120 | 8.75 | 0.88 |

| **3.Assessing course's instructor/trainer** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Total | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (3.1) Creating a learning atmosphere | | | | | | 2 | 13 | 40 | 41 | 24 | 120 | 8.57 | 0.99 |
| (3.2) Adequate examples provided during the course | | | | | 2 | 2 | 11 | 26 | 44 | 35 | 120 | 8.78 | 1.12 |
| (3.3) Training strategies encouraging and promoting your critical thinking | | | | | | 2 | 10 | 22 | 46 | 40 | 120 | 8.93 | 1.05 |
| (3.4) Clear explanations | | | | | | 2 | 9 | 25 | 42 | 42 | 120 | 8.93 | 1.06 |
| (3.5) Answering participants' questions clearly | | | | | | | 14 | 26 | 30 | 50 | 120 | 8.97 | 1.05 |

| **4.Assessing course's content and training strategy** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Total | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (4.1) Appropriate explanations performed during the training | | | | | | 2 | 9 | 36 | 48 | 25 | 120 | 8.71 | 0.94 |
| (4.2) Appropriate examples and case studies provided to promote participants' understanding | | | | | | | 16 | 27 | 53 | 24 | 120 | 8.71 | 0.94 |
| (4.3) Training techniques | | | | | | 2 | 7 | 36 | 46 | 29 | 120 | 8.78 | 0.94 |

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| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Total | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| promoting learning and applying knowledge in real-life situations | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (4.4) Constantly 6-hour training promoting participants' understanding and confidence in applying intercultural communication awareness efficiently at the workplace | | | | | | 7 | 38 | 46 | 23 | 6 | 120 | 7.87 | 0.95 |
| **5.Assessing participants after training session** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Total | Mean | SD |
| (5.1) A better understanding of intercultural communication and becoming more aware of it | | | | | | | 14 | 27 | 36 | 43 | 120 | 8.9 | 1.02 |
| (5.2) Benefits gained from the training | | | | | | | 13 | 21 | 54 | 32 | 120 | 8.88 | 0.93 |
| (5.3) Obtaining broader ideas on intercultural communication and inspiration to apply it at the workplace and real-life situations from taking this training session | | | | | | 2 | 11 | 25 | 48 | 34 | 120 | 8.84 | 1 |
| **6.Assessing overall picture of the course** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Total | Mean | SD |
| Overall satisfaction with the training program | | | | | | | 13 | 28 | 39 | 40 | 120 | 8.89 | 0.99 |

The participants' reflections indicated that their level of intercultural communication was relatively low (M=5.66) prior to the training. However, their responses varied, with a Standard Deviation Variance (SD=2.08). When asked if they felt they benefited from attending the program, the majority claimed they did, with a mean of over 8 out of 10 in all areas under the offered benefits. Similarly, the participants were satisfied with the instructor's performance (M=8. and above), which included creating a friendly learning environment, providing adequate examples and clear explanations,

employing strategies to encourage and promote trainees' critical thinking, and clearly and effectively answering all questions. The majority of participants (M=8.71 and above) were satisfied with the content and training strategies. They remarked that accessing various IC perspectives helped them apply the learned viewpoints at the workplace and in real-life situations. However, several of them perceived that the six-hour training was insufficient to fully and effectively promote competence in intercultural communication awareness in the workplace. Extensive training, therefore, was required.

With regard to the contents of the training, they were divided into several sections – conceptual ideas with related activities and three workshops added. The first part of the warm-up activities was an introduction to foster participants to learn about themselves and others. Each participant began the activity by outlining his or her tasks, responsibilities, or personality to cope with the assigned tasks. The participants were then asked to do the same to other workers from different departments. The objective of this practice was for participants to discover themselves by relating and contrasting their own with others (Byram, 1997). Next, the participants were invited to ask their partner questions, with the following responses: nodding head for 'no' and shaking head to left and right for 'yes.' These two actions are different codes practiced in Thai society when disagreeing and agreeing. This activity was designed to help participants understand that while they may be familiar or comfortable with specific codes or behaviors within their own culture (their organization or even a smaller unit such as the department they worked for), those same codes or behaviors may be interpreted differently in other cultures.

The following section raised a question concerning why there are still ineffective communication issues. Although there are many well-known communication techniques found in many how-to books or on the internet, such as understanding basic communication processes, knowing messages, having appropriate communication channels, interpreting messages, providing feedback, working in a proper environment, eliminating distractions, clear pronunciation, and body language, to name a few, the ineffective communication persists. The proposed activity led the participants to another intercultural communication perspective from the "inside" known as "attitudes" (Barrett et al., 2013). After posting a question regarding why communication is ineffective, the participants were familiarized with offered intercultural communication concept, including introducing the conceptual notion of non-verbal communication.

The provided workshops were another factor that emphasized the participants' awareness of intercultural communication. Some examples of the workshop activities were asking attendees to find and share ideas about possible relationships, differences, and conflicts between selected parties like Thai people vs. Thai people, Thai people vs. Germans, father vs. daughter, teacher vs. students, or supervisor vs. subordinate. The participants were also asked to list possible factors that create ineffective communication, such as differences in spoken language, age, gender, nationality, experience, educational background, and more. All of these points could be considered cultural differences. Finally,

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a question on how they could effectively and appropriately communicate with all differences, which led to more debate on the fundamental ICC notions, was posted to all attendees for further discussion.

In addition, the workshop to build cultural competence with innovative activities models adapted from Berardo and Deardorff (2012) promoted the participants with various perspectives on intercultural communication, such as complexity of culture, stereotyping, and prejudice, to name a few. As a result, the trainees were exposed to various IC learning points. The participants were already familiar with the ICC concept at this point. Additionally, the four selected intercultural communication competence domains from Barrett and his colleagues (2013), comprising attitudes, knowledge and understanding, skills, and actions, were introduced to underline the participants' experience. Finally, the training session ended with intercultural dynamics in business organizations aiming to create awareness of intercultural communication in the global workplace (Varner & Beamer, 2011). Participants had opportunities to deal with various case studies of different contexts alongside possible solutions offered by practical IC guidelines brainstormed by the attendees and the scholars' frameworks to ensure that the participants were adequately equipped with intercultural communication awareness.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted to triangulate the self-assessment survey findings to obtain insightful data. The results are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Semi-Structured Interview Data from 30 Participants**

| Questions | Themes | No. of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| 1. What problems or issues are found when working at your workplace? | Sometimes I feel frustrated from dealing with staff from other departments. | 17 |
| | I don't understand why other people think differently. | 13 |
| | It is difficult to get the job done easily when working with others. | 9 |
| | Sometimes I feel unhappy with supervisors or co-workers of how they behave. | 21 |
| | I Feel frustrated and unhappy when being treated unfairly. | 8 |
| 2. Before joining this training, what do you know about intercultural communication? | I don't know. | 4 |
| | It's a kind of communication. | 6 |
| | Communicate with foreigners. | 8 |
| | Communicate with those who have different cultures. | 10 |
| 3. After training, what or how do you see or feel about intercultural | My perceptions towards other are significantly changed. | 12 |
| | I have never known about this before. | 7 |
| | It is very useful and good to know it. | 23 |

communication?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4. Do you think that intercultural communication is essential, and people should be aware of and why? | Yes, it's very useful when we work with others. | 21 |
| | Yes, it can make people understand one another. | 16 |
| | Yes, it can reduce conflicts among people in the society | 11 |
| | Yes, it helps solve communication problems. | 10 |
| 5. Why is intercultural communication important at your workplace? | I can understand other people that I work with more. | 23 |
| | I can try to understand everyone why he or she does something. | 8 |
| | I can help us work as a team and create more productive work as we understand one another more. | 10 |
| | I can work with less frustration. | 9 |
| 6. Why is intercultural communication important in your daily life? | I can apply it with my family members. | 10 |
| | I can apply it in my daily life to communicate with others effectively. | 12 |
| | It makes me understand other people more. | 18 |
| | It can make me see things differently. | 8 |
| | It can help reduce conflicts in society. | 13 |
| 7. What have you learned the most from this training course? | My perceptions towards other change. | 15 |
| | I understand the situations around me more. | 10 |
| | I have some ideas or concepts to be applied in my daily life at the workplace and at home. | 19 |

The findings gleaned from the participants provided substantial direction to confirm that the attendees who participated in the IC awareness training program significantly increased their intercultural communication competence. Before participating in the training, the participants had limited awareness of ICC. However, the participants perceived their worldviews had changed after the training program. As a result, they viewed IC as applicable when working or interacting with others, helping them understand other people better. To illustrate, people could gain intercultural competence through various sources such as formal and non-formal education or life experiences (Barrett et al., 2013), and it is an ongoing process (Korhonen, 2004).

Furthermore, most participants viewed that comprehending intercultural communication may aid them in resolving problematic communication issues at work and home. In addition, they believed they could understand people's various behaviors at work and collaborate to produce more productive work. Lastly, having intercultural communication competence could enable individuals to communicate appropriately and effectively with others of other affiliations, and it could also be beneficial in the participants' real-life situations.

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To answer the second research question of the extent the office workers possessed intercultural communication competence after completing the training program, the findings from the two employed approaches suggested that the participants gained IC awareness from the six-hour training in a relatively high manner, with a mean score of 8 or higher in all aspects. Some attendees, however, commented that the six-hour course was likely insufficient for them to be well aware of all critical IC perspectives. Nevertheless, most participants emphasized that the IC awareness training program benefited them at work, home, and everyday life.

## 5. Conclusion

Understanding intercultural communication is essential because of today's borderless and globalized world. However, adequate and appropriate communication is not confined to the international environment. Intercultural communication is critical, such as inside a family or company, at a smaller scale. After integrating and interpreting the mixed-method methodology's results acquired from this investigation, several notable aspects arose. Intercultural communication awareness was found to be limited among the business personnel in Bangkok at the time of this study. In addition, the business workers possessed relatively rudimentary to moderate IC competence. According to the findings, office workers with higher IC competence were more likely to function well in the context of communication hurdles and other pressures or conflicts produced by communication among people of diverse cultural affiliations. Although there were some limitations in this research, such as the exclusion of some variables, the study's outcomes could be used as a guideline for educational institutions to prepare graduates with IC competence to meet the labor market requirements, human resource departments, or corporations to equip their employees with intercultural communication traits by designing or offering them training programs to enhance productivity at work and to be applied in their real-life situations.

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