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Research Article

Intercultural Teaching Competency of Foreign Language Teachers at a Private University in Guangxi, China: A Needs Assessment Perspective on Structural Characteristics

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the discrepancy between foreign language teachers' current and desired levels of intercultural teaching competency (ITC), as well as to identify the structural relationships among its dimensions from a needs assessment perspective. Adopting a quantitative research design, data were collected from 138 foreign language teachers at a private university in Guangxi, China, of whom 136 valid responses were included. A structured questionnaire was used to measure both the perceived current and desired levels of ITC. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, the Modified Priority Needs Index (PNI Modified), and Pearson correlation analysis. The result of the study found that: 1) Teachers' overall ITC was at a medium level (M=3.34, S.D.=0.49), with both current and desired gaps across dimensions being high level. The largest gap was observed in intercultural teaching reflection (ITR) (PNI Modified=0.467). 2) Significant positive correlations were found among all five dimensions of ITC. In particular, intercultural teaching reflection (ITR) demonstrated strong associations with intercultural teaching knowledge (ITK) (r = .810) and intercultural teaching practice (ITP) (r = .802), suggesting a central and integrative role of reflective competence within the overall structure. 3) Based on gap prioritization and structural relationship analysis, the study constructs a "Progressive Cyclical Integration Model of ITC", emphasizing the dynamic and cyclical interactions among Intercultural Teaching Beliefs (ITB), Intercultural Teaching Knowledge (ITK), Intercultural Teaching Design (ITD), Intercultural Teaching Practice (ITP), and Intercultural Teaching Reflection (ITR), with ITR playing a central integrative role.

Keywords: Intercultural Teaching Competency, Needs Assessment, Private University, Foreign Language Teachers, Intercultural Teaching Reflective

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Introduction

Against the backdrop of deepening globalization and multicultural interactions, intercultural education has emerged as a critical issue in international foreign language education reform. UNESCO's

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Guidelines for Intercultural Education emphasize the pivotal role of language education in fostering intercultural understanding and dialogue (UNESCO, 2006). The U.S. National Standards for Foreign Language Learning for the 21st Century introduced the "5C" framework, integrating the cultural dimension into the core objectives of foreign language education (ACTFL, 1996). The Council of Europe further underscores the integration of intercultural awareness and multilingual competence in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, highlighting the cultivation of learners' ability to communicate and interact effectively in diverse societies (Council of Europe, 2001). Overall, international foreign language education philosophy has shifted from a singular focus on language skills toward a developmental orientation that equally values language proficiency and intercultural competence.

In China, the cultivation of intercultural competence has also been elevated to a key component of the national education strategy. *The National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline (2010–2020*) explicitly sets the goal of cultivating talent with an international perspective and global competitiveness, highlighting the strategic importance of intercultural competence. Subsequently, *The Teaching Syllabus for English Majors* in Higher Education Institutions (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2000) incorporated intercultural communication skills into teaching principles for the first time. *The National Standards for Undergraduate Foreign Language Education in Higher Education* Institutions (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018) further designated intercultural competency as one of the core competencies for foreign language majors. This shift indicates that China's foreign language education has progressively transitioned from a knowledge-based approach to a competency-based and comprehensive literacy orientation, with intercultural teaching competency emerging as a vital dimension of teacher professional development.

However, compared to the abundant research on learners' intercultural communication competence, systematic exploration of teachers' intercultural teaching competency remains insufficient (Zheng, 2019; Zheng & Gao, 2019). Although the Council of Europe has advocated that teachers should assume responsibility for cultivating intercultural communication competence (Council of Europe, 2001), and the role of foreign language teachers has shifted from "language knowledge transmitters" to "facilitators of intercultural competence," this conceptual shift has not necessarily translated into practical capabilities. Research indicates that most teachers lack systematic training in intercultural or inclusive education, and continue to face challenges in adaptation and transformation at the practical level. Consequently, a structural gap may exist between policy advocacy and teachers' actual competencies, necessitating empirical validation.

Furthermore, existing empirical research has predominantly focused on assessing the "current levels" of teacher competencies, with limited systematic analysis of the gap between "current levels" and "desired levels" based on needs assessment theory. However, needs assessment theory posits that competency gaps serve as a crucial basis for defining professional development priorities and optimizing resource allocation (Aekwut et al., 2025). Within the field of intercultural teaching competency (ITC), research, quantitative studies grounded in this theoretical framework remain relatively scarce, particularly lacking in-depth examinations of specific institutional and regional contexts.

In this regard, Guangxi provides a meaningful and contextually significant setting for investigation. As a border region in southern China and a key hub in China–ASEAN cooperation, Guangxi is characterized

by ethnic diversity and increasing intercultural exchanges (Li, H. et al., 2021). Foreign language education in this region plays a crucial role in supporting regional communication and international collaboration. At the same time, private universities in Guangxi often face constraints in terms of educational resources, access to professional training, and international exposure compared to more developed regions. These contextual factors may influence the development of teachers' ITC, thereby highlighting the need for context-specific empirical research.

Therefore, this study systematically investigates the structure and development pathways of ITC among foreign language teachers at a private foreign language university in Guangxi, China, from a needs assessment perspective.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the discrepancy between teachers' current and desired levels of intercultural teaching competency;

2. To identify the structural relationships among the dimensions of intercultural teaching competency;

3. To construct a Progressive Cyclical Integration Model of intercultural teaching competency based on the gap analysis and structural relationship findings.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design. Based on a literature review, a questionnaire survey was developed to collect data on the current levels and desired levels of ITC among foreign language teachers at private universities in Guangxi Province, China.

1. Participants and Sampling

The study selected foreign language teachers from a private foreign language university in Guangxi as participants, totaling 138 teachers covering disciplines such as English, Thai, Spanish, and Vietnamese. A census survey method was adopted, distributing questionnaires to all faculty members, with 138 completed questionnaires ultimately collected. After screening, 136 valid questionnaires were retained, representing a 98.6% response rate. The final valid sample size met statistical requirements.

2. Data Collection Instruments

This study draws upon the "Self-Assessment Scale for University English Teachers' Intercultural Teaching Competency". Based on definitions, concepts, and descriptions of ITC from literature, the questionnaire is divided into five dimensions: intercultural teaching beliefs (ITB), intercultural teaching knowledge (ITK), intercultural teaching design (ITD), intercultural teaching practice (ITP), and intercultural teaching reflection (ITR). Each dimension comprises five items, totaling 25 items. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

3. Procedure and Ethics

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Payap University, Thailand. The survey questionnaires were distributed online via the Wenjuanxing survey platform and shared through QQ and WeChat. Prior to participation, all participants were informed of the research objectives, data confidentiality principles, and anonymity, and their informed consent was obtained.

4.Data Analysis

After data collection, SPSS 27.0 software was used to analyze the data, completing the following steps:

First, descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the current and desired levels of teachers' ITC, calculating the mean and standard deviation for all research variables. The interpretation of mean scores followed the equal interval method, in which the five-point Likert scale was divided into five levels with an interval width of 0.80 (1.00–1.80 = very low, 1.81–2.60 = low, 2.61–3.40 = moderate, 3.41–4.20 = high, and 4.21–5.00 = very high). This approach is widely adopted in social science research (Boone & Boone, 2012).

Second, inferential statistical analysis was employed to examine the gap between teachers' self-reported “current levels” and “desired levels”, using a paired samples t-test to determine whether a significant difference existed between the two. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationships among the five dimensions of ITC

The Modified Priority Needs Index (PNI Modified) was calculated using the mean scores of the desired and current levels to determine the priority ranking of needs across each dimension. The index was computed using the formula PNI Modified = (D– C)/ C, where D represents the mean score of the desired level and C represents the mean score of the current level.

5.Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire items were evaluated by three experts in the fields of intercultural education and foreign language teaching. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was employed to assess the consistency between each item and the research objectives. Each expert rated the items using a three-point scale (+1 = clearly congruent, 0 = uncertain, −1 = not congruent). The IOC values for all items ranged from 0.67 to 1.00, indicating acceptable content validity. Items with IOC values below 0.50 were revised or removed prior to data collection.

Subsequently, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine the construct validity of the scale. The KMO measure was 0.927, and Bartlett's sphericity test was highly significant (χ^2=2389.143, df=300, p<0.001), indicating the data were suitable for factor analysis. The analysis yielded five common factors explaining 69.214% of the total variance. All items scored above 0.5 on their respective factors, confirming good construct validity.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's α coefficients. The overall Cronbach's Alpha for the 25 items was 0.955, with sub-dimension Alphas ranging from 0.805 to 0.893. All values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating high reliability.

The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the theoretical lineage of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which provides the foundational basis for understanding intercultural teaching competency (ITC) in foreign language education. Drawing on the ICC framework proposed by Michael Byram (1997, 2009), intercultural competence is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. This five-dimensional model offers a systematic structure for integrating cultural elements into language education and serves as a theoretical cornerstone for the structured development of teachers' intercultural competencies.

In addition, the framework incorporates the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence developed by Darla Deardorff (2006). This model emphasizes a developmental, process-oriented structure in which attitudes, knowledge, and skills interact dynamically to produce internal outcomes (e.g., adaptability, flexibility, empathy, and cultural self-awareness) and external outcomes (i.e., effective and appropriate communication in intercultural contexts). The model highlights the progressive, inside-out nature of intercultural competence, where internal dispositions are transformed into observable intercultural performance through reflective practice and real-world interaction.

Building upon these theoretical foundations, ITC extends beyond general intercultural competence by emphasizing teachers' pedagogical capacity to transform cultural knowledge and awareness into instructional objectives, classroom practices, and reflective improvement. As noted by Karen Sercu (2005), ITC involves not only intercultural knowledge and attitudes but also the ability to design culturally responsive teaching activities and facilitate meaningful intercultural classroom interaction.

Furthermore, this study is informed by Needs Assessment theory (Altschuld & Kumar, 2010), which provides an evaluative framework for identifying discrepancies between current conditions and desired outcomes. From this perspective, needs are defined as the gaps between "what is" (current level) and "what should be" (desired level). This theoretical lens justifies the examination of foreign language teachers' intercultural teaching competency by comparing their perceived current and desired levels, thereby enabling the identification and prioritization of developmental needs.

Accordingly, this study conceptualizes ITC as a multidimensional and integrative construct consisting of five interrelated dimensions: Intercultural Teaching Beliefs (ITB), Intercultural Teaching Knowledge (ITK), Intercultural Teaching Design (ITD), Intercultural Teaching Practice (ITP), and Intercultural Teaching Reflection (ITR). These dimensions function as a dynamic and mutually reinforcing system. ITB provide the value orientation for intercultural instruction; ITK offers the cognitive foundation; ITD translates intercultural objectives into pedagogical planning; ITP operationalizes intercultural elements through classroom interaction; and ITR promotes continuous professional growth and adaptive improvement.

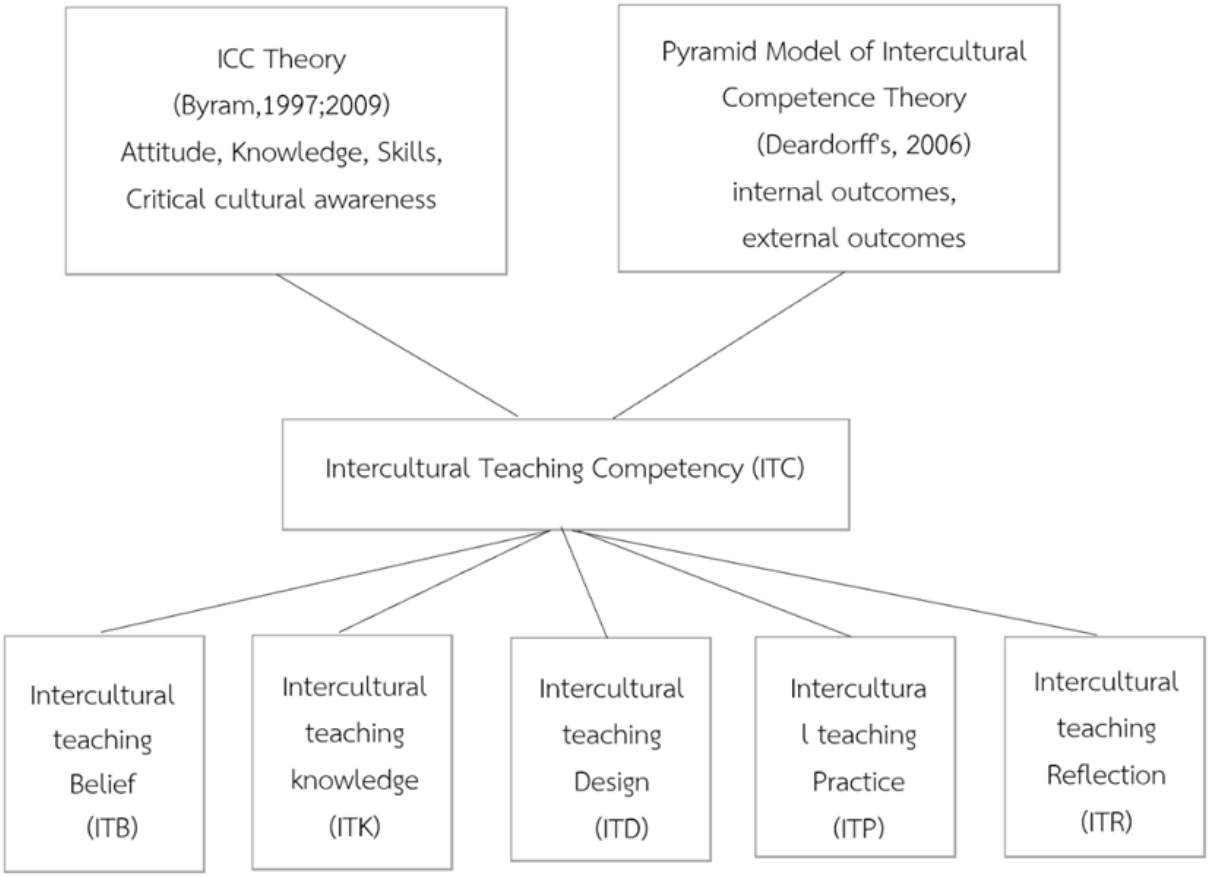


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Research Results

1. Discrepancies Between Current and Desired Levels of ITC Among Foreign Language Teachers

Through gap analysis, the study aimed to identify deficiencies in ITC. Based on collected data, discrepancies between current and desired levels were identified and prioritized.

Table 1 Comparison of Foreign Language Teachers' Current and Desired Levels of ITC (n=136)

Dimension	Current		Desirable		t-value	P-value (two-tailed)	PNI Modified	Priority rank
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.				
ITB	3.44	0.52	4.84	0.27	-31.61	0.001**	0.41	3
ITK	3.31	0.54	4.74	0.36	-29.50	0.001**	0.43	2
ITD	3.46	0.54	4.80	0.32	-28.18	0.001**	0.39	5
ITP	3.35	0.61	4.69	0.40	-24.72	0.001**	0.40	4
ITR	3.15	0.60	4.62	0.43	-27.22	0.001**	0.47	1
Total	**3.34**	**0.49**	**4.74**	**0.30**	**-30.98**	**0.001****	**0.42**	

Note: ITB = Intercultural Teaching Beliefs
ITK = Intercultural Teaching Knowledge
ITD = Intercultural Teaching Design
ITP = Intercultural Teaching Practice
ITR = Intercultural Teaching Reflection

As shown in Table 1, The current level of foreign language teachers' ITC is a medium level (M=3.34, S.D.=0.49). Among these dimensions, ITD (M=3.46) and ITB (M=3.44) scored relatively high, followed by ITP (M=3.35) and ITK (M=3.31), while ITR scored the lowest (M=3.15). In addition, the standard deviations for ITP (SD = 0.61) and ITR (SD = 0.60) were comparatively larger than those of the other dimensions, indicating greater variability and more pronounced individual differences in teachers' development across these competencies.

Foreign language teachers' ITC was rated at a very high level (M = 4.74, S.D.=0.30). Among the five dimensions, ITB (M = 4.84) and ITD (M = 4.80) received the highest mean scores, followed by ITK (M = 4.74) and ITP (M = 4.69), whereas ITR obtained the lowest mean score (M = 4.62).

A paired-sample t test was conducted to compare the current and desired levels of foreign language teachers' ITC. The results showed significant differences across all five dimensions ($p < .001$), with current levels significantly lower than the desired levels. The mean scores for current levels fall within the medium level (3.15–3.46), while desired levels mean scores exceed 4.62 across all dimensions.

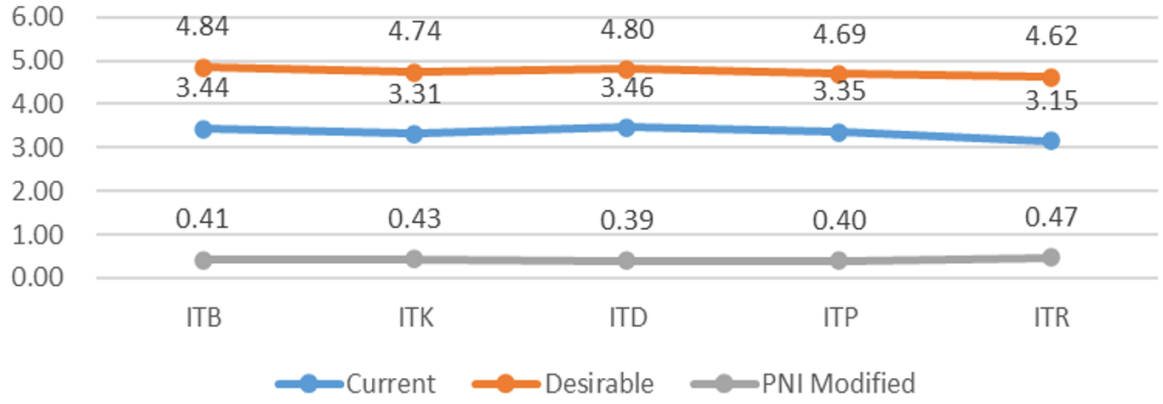


Figure 2 Needs Assessment of ITC

The modified Priority Needs Index (PNI Modified) of the five dimensions of ITC ranged from 0.39 to 0.47. The priorities of needs were ranked in descending order as follows: 1) ITR (C = 3.15, D = 4.62; PNI Modified = 0.47), 2) ITK (C = 3.31,D = 4.74; PNI Modified = 0.43), 3) ITB (C = 3.44,D = 4.84; PNI Modified = 0.41), 4) ITP (C = 3.35, D= 4.69; PNI Modified = 0.40), and 5) ITD (C = 3.46, D = 4.80; PNI Modified = 0.39).

2. Correlation Analysis of ITC Dimensions Among Foreign Language Teachers

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the variables. The results are reported using correlation coefficients (r) and corresponding p-values. Correlations were considered statistically significant when $p < .05$. Positive r values indicate positive associations, whereas negative r values indicate negative associations.

The results of the normality test for the data show that the skewness of the current levels mean for the five dimensions ranges from -1.775 to -0.802, and the kurtosis ranges from 1.019 to 4.575. These values fall within acceptable thresholds ($|Sk| < 2$; $|Ku| < 7$), indicating no severe deviation from normal distribution. Therefore, parametric tests can be employed for analysis (George & Mallery, 2010).

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of ITC Dimensions (n = 136)

Variables	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurt	ITB	ITK	ITD	ITP	ITR
ITB	3.44	0.52	-1.562	4.182	1				
ITK	3.31	0.54	-0.945	1.533	.603**	1			
ITD	3.46	0.54	-1.775	4.575	.692**	.753**	1		
ITP	3.35	0.61	-0.991	1.262	.556**	.745**	.761**	1	
ITR	3.15	0.60	-0.802	1.019	.594**	.810**	.745**	.802**	1

Note: ** p < .01 (two-tailed)

To examine the structural relationships among the five dimensions of ITC, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was employed to test the five dimensions: ITB, ITK, ITD, ITP, and ITR. Results revealed significant positive correlations among all dimensions ($p < .001$), with correlation coefficients ranging from .556 to .810. Although some coefficients were relatively high, none exceeded the multicollinearity threshold of 0.90. Thus, the dimensions maintain strong interrelationships while retaining relatively independent conceptual content.

The findings indicate that the dimensions of ITC are not mutually independent but exhibit strong structural integration. First, the ITR showed the highest correlations with other dimensions, particularly demonstrating extremely strong correlations with ITK ($r = .810$) and ITP ($r = .802$). This suggests that teachers' ITR plays an integrative role within the ITC framework, serving as a crucial link between cognitive understanding and classroom practice.

Second, the correlation coefficient between ITD and ITP was .761, while that between ITK and ITD was .753, indicating that ITD plays a crucial mediating role in the transformation of ITK into classroom implementation.

Additionally, the relatively low correlation coefficient between ITB and ITP ($r = .556$) suggests that teachers' endorsement of intercultural teaching concepts has not yet been fully and effectively translated into classroom behavior, revealing a certain degree of disconnect between theory and practice.

Overall, the five dimensions form a progressive developmental structure comprising ITB, ITK, ITD, ITP, and ITR, with the ITR mechanism enabling the cyclical renewal of ITC.

Discussions

This study conducted a survey on the ITC of 136 foreign language teachers at private university in Guangxi, focusing on the gap between current and desired levels. It analyzed the relationships among the five dimensions of ITC, and based on the survey findings, constructed the Progressive Cyclical Integration Model of ITC.

1. Structural Characteristics of ITC

The findings reveal that foreign language teachers' overall ITC is at a medium level, which is consistent with the survey results by Jiang, et al. (2021). In terms of dimensional distribution, ITB scored relatively high, while ITP and ITR scored relatively low. This finding aligns with the findings of previous research (Wanner, 2021), which also highlighted varying levels of competency across different dimensions of intercultural teaching.

These discrepancies reveal a tension between teachers' cognitive and practical: while most teachers strongly endorse the importance of intercultural teaching and express willingness to integrate it into classrooms, they encounter practical challenges during implementation, such as complex situational demands, limited teaching resources, and insufficient strategic experience, leading to a disconnect between theory and practice.

Furthermore, while teachers have developed a high degree of intercultural educational identity at the conceptual level, their competency development has yet to achieve the transformative leap from “cognitive identification” to “reflective integration.” In other words, while teachers possess positive attitudes and value positions, they have yet to establish stable reflective mechanisms and critical cultural analysis capabilities in practice. This finding corroborates Sercu's (2005) observation that foreign language teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward intercultural teaching, yet remain deficient in deep cultural inquiry and critical reflection at the classroom level.

2. Gap Analysis and Development Priorities

The gap analysis of foreign language teachers' ITC reveals significant discrepancies between “current levels” and “desired levels” across all five dimensions, with the most pronounced gap observed in the ITR. This finding indicates that teachers not only possess a relatively clear understanding of their current levels, but also demonstrate a more urgent developmental demand for enhancing their ITR. From a needs assessment theory perspective, the structural pattern of moderate current levels combined with higher developmental expectations reflects teachers’ strong motivation for professional development. However, at the practical level, the lack of systematic support pathways and institutional safeguards hinders the effective conversion of development intentions into capability enhancement. Deardorff's (2006) process model of intercultural competence further explains this phenomenon: the development of intercultural competence relies on the cyclical integration of attitudes, knowledge, and skills in practice, coupled with continuous reflection. Without institutionalized reflection mechanisms, the competence structure struggles to achieve dynamic optimization and vertical deepening.

Meanwhile, ITR ranked first in the gap analysis, which is consistent with previous research emphasizing the centrality of reflective practice in intercultural teaching. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that cultural teaching should be grounded in “reflective practice” as its core approach. This view is further supported by recent empirical studies. For instance, Tajeddin et al. (2024) demonstrate that collaborative reflection significantly enhances teachers’ intercultural instructional practices by enabling them to notice cultural dimensions and reconstruct their teaching strategies. Similarly, Tolosa et al. (2018) highlight that teacher reflection and inquiry cycles serve as critical mechanisms for aligning theoretical understanding with classroom practice, thereby promoting the development of intercultural teaching competence. In the context of teacher education, Lallana and Salamanca (2020) also emphasize that effective training programmes should incorporate structured self-reflection to facilitate the internalization of intercultural knowledge and skills.

Taken together, these findings suggest that cultural teaching is not merely the transmission of cultural knowledge, but a process of meaning negotiation and value construction mediated through reflection. Without sustained and systematic reflective practice, intercultural teaching risks remaining confined to superficial introductions and comparisons of cultural phenomena, failing to guide learners

toward critical understanding and the development of multiple perspectives. Therefore, strengthening ITR is not only a crucial measure to address teachers' practical developmental needs, but also an essential pathway to promote the coordination and deepening of ITC.

3. Structural Integration and Development Pathway Model

Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among all five dimensions, with the strongest correlations observed between ITR and ITK (r = .810) and between ITR and ITP (r = .802). These findings are consistent with Schön's (1992) theory of reflective practice, which conceptualizes reflection not as a peripheral post-instructional activity but as a central mechanism linking knowledge construction with pedagogical action. Through the iterative processes of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, teachers continuously reinterpret their professional experiences, thereby fostering cognitive refinement and the optimization of instructional practice.

Moreover, reflective practice has been shown to be positively associated with teacher self-efficacy, as deep and critical reflection enhances professional judgment and strengthens confidence in instructional decision-making (Faez et al., 2025). Taken together, the strong associations among ITR, ITK, and ITP observed in this study further substantiate the integrative and regulatory function of reflection within the structural configuration of ITC.

Although this study explored the structural characteristics and developmental pathways of ITC from a needs assessment perspective, several limitations remain. First, the sample was drawn from a single private university in Guangxi, which may limit the representativeness of the findings. Accordingly, the generalizability of the results to broader institutional or regional contexts warrants further investigation. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be subject to social desirability bias and perceptual distortion. The absence of triangulated data sources, such as classroom observations or semi-structured interviews, restricts the depth and validity of the empirical evidence. Third, the cross-sectional design captures teachers' competencies at a single point in time and does not allow for examination of developmental trajectories or causal relationships. Longitudinal or mixed-method designs would therefore be necessary to further substantiate the proposed progressive cyclical integration model.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

Drawing upon the findings of priority gap analysis and structural relationship analysis, this study develops the Progressive Cyclical Integration Model of ITC. The proposed model conceptualizes competence development as a dynamic and systematically integrated process comprising five interrelated stages: ITB as the cognitive and value-oriented foundation, ITK as conceptual resources, ITD as a transformative intermediary, ITP as behavioral implementation, and ITR as an integrative and regulatory mechanism. This staged configuration provides a process-oriented explanation of how internal dispositions are translated into pedagogical actions and subsequently refined through reflective mediation.

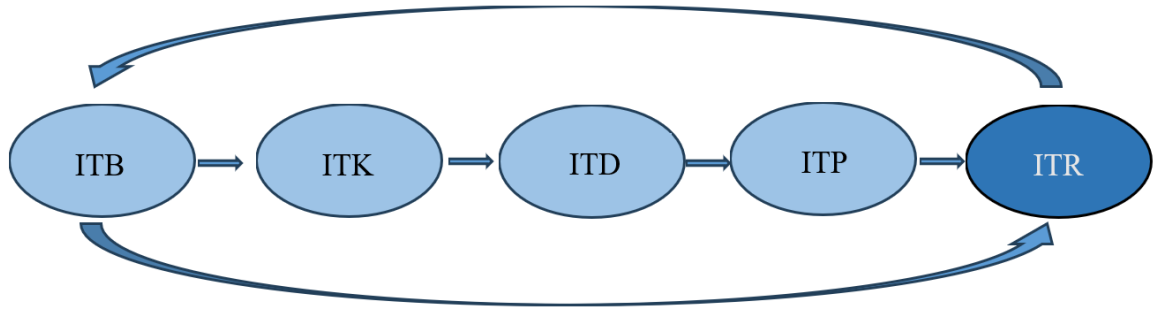


Figure 3 Progressive Cyclical Integration Model of ITC

In terms of originality, this study advances existing research by moving beyond static, multidimensional, and parallel conceptualizations of intercultural competence and instead proposing a recursive feedback loop mechanism embedded within the ITC structure. Specifically, the model highlights the central role of ITR in reconstructing ITB and deepening ITK, thereby facilitating continuous system updating and sustained professional development. Such a cyclical and progressive perspective offers a more dynamic interpretation of competence development compared to linear or fragmented models commonly adopted in prior studies.

Regarding the contribution to the body of knowledge, this research enriches the theoretical framework of ITC in three key ways. First, it extends the application of ITC theory to the domain of teacher competence by systematically integrating intercultural theory with pedagogical dimensions. Second, it introduces a needs assessment perspective to ITC research by simultaneously examining current and desired levels and identifying priority developmental gaps through the Modified Priority Needs Index (PNI Modified). Third, it provides an empirically grounded structural explanation of the developmental pathway of ITC, demonstrating a progressive integration from ITB to ITK, ITD, ITP, and ITR, contributes a dynamic, process-oriented framework to the broader body of knowledge on teacher professional competence and intercultural pedagogy.

Conclusions

From a needs assessment perspective, this study systematically examined the structural characteristics and competency gaps of intercultural teaching competency among foreign language teachers. The findings indicate that teachers' overall intercultural teaching competency is at a moderate level; however, significant discrepancies exist between the “current levels” and “desired levels” across all dimensions, particularly in intercultural teaching reflection, which showed the highest priority need. The central role of intercultural teaching reflection was further validated, particularly in its significant correlations with intercultural teaching knowledge and intercultural teaching practice, highlighting its integrative and regulatory role within the intercultural teaching competency system.

The study reveals that foreign language teachers' intercultural teaching competency is not a set of parallel dimensions but follows a progressively integrated developmental pathway characterized by “intercultural teaching belief–intercultural teaching knowledge–intercultural teaching design–intercultural

teaching practice–intercultural teaching reflection." Specifically, intercultural teaching belief provides value orientation for competency development, intercultural teaching knowledge forms the cognitive foundation, intercultural teaching design serves as the bridging mechanism in transforming knowledge into classroom practice, and intercultural teaching reflection functions as a regulatory component, facilitating cyclical integration and dynamic optimization across dimensions.

Based on these findings, this study proposes the Progressive Cyclical Integration Model of Intercultural Teaching Competency, emphasizing the intercultural teaching reflection driven development process, and underscores the importance of institutional support and professional development mechanisms for continuous competency improvement. This model provides a new structural explanation for the development of intercultural teaching competency, clarifying the dynamic process through which internal cognition is transformed into observable pedagogical behaviors.

In conclusion, by combining structural gap analysis with pathway exploration, this study extends the scope of intercultural teaching competency research and provides systematic pedagogical implications for the professional development of foreign language teachers. The findings emphasize the importance of strengthening intercultural teaching reflection, promoting the effective transformation of intercultural teaching knowledge into intercultural teaching design and intercultural teaching practice, and establishing supportive mechanisms, offering empirical evidence and theoretical references for optimizing teacher training systems in private universities.

Recommendations

1. Policymaking Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned research findings (the largest gap in ITR coupled with the strongest structural integration), enhancing ITC should not rely on fragmented, single-dimensional approaches. Instead, a synergistic development mechanism centered on reflection-driven growth, design-based transformation, and systemic institutional support should be established.

1.1 The foreign language departments in universities should establish intercultural reflection journals as the core breakthrough point for ITR, promoting action research cycles, and refining peer feedback mechanisms. These measures can transform individual reflection into institutionalized and collaborative professional development practices.

1.2 Universities should conduct ITD training as a key conversion hub, using case studies, task-driven workshops, and scenario simulations, such training strengthens the contextualized translation of ITK into ITP and enhances the structural coherence between theory, knowledge, and classroom application.

1.3 National-level educational management departments should provide policy support and resource allocation as the institutional foundation for ITC development. Constructing ITC resource platforms and professional learning communities facilitates experience sharing and sustained innovation. Within this integrated framework, ITR serves as the driving force, ITD promotes practical transformation, and institutional structures provide long-term support. Together, these elements propel ITC toward dynamic, cyclical advancement and systemic optimization.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

2.1 Future studies should expand the sample scope by conducting cross-regional or cross-institutional comparative research to strengthen the external validity of the findings.

2.2 Adopting mixed-methods approaches is also recommended. Combining questionnaire surveys with classroom observations, interviews, and instructional text analysis would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the generative mechanisms underlying ITC development.

2.3 Additionally, longitudinal tracking studies should be undertaken to examine teachers' competency development trajectories during training programs, action research engagement, or participation in professional learning communities. The progressive cyclical integration model proposed in this study can be further validated through advanced statistical techniques, such as structural equation modeling, to enhance its explanatory power and empirical robustness.

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