

Title: Co-creating a Global Campus: Assessing the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Peer Support Roles of Local Taiwanese Students in Central Taiwan Universities

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Abstract

Research Overview

This qualitative study investigates how local Taiwanese university students in Central Taiwan contribute to intercultural integration through peer support, social presence, and intercultural communicative competence. Guided by Byram's (1997) ICC framework, the study analyzes interview data from five Taiwanese university students and highlights their roles in fostering communication, belonging, and intercultural engagement on campuses in Taiwan.

Purpose of Study

The increasing internationalization of Taiwanese higher education has created more opportunities for intercultural interaction between local and international students. Existing research has examined intercultural competence development and adaptation experiences among international students, while fewer studies have explored the contributions of local Taiwanese university students within intercultural integration processes. This study examines how local Taiwanese university students function as active agents in supporting intercultural communication and peer integration at universities in Central Taiwan. The study is grounded in Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence framework, particularly *savoir être* and *savoir comprendre*, which emphasize openness, empathy, interpretation, and intercultural mediation.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design following Creswell's qualitative inquiry approach, emphasizing participants' lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Taiwanese university students at universities in Central Taiwan who regularly interacted with international students. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on intercultural contact experiences. The interview questions explored intercultural attitudes, communication challenges, peer support practices, and perceptions of cultural interaction. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns connected to Byram's (1997) ICC dimensions, particularly *savoir être* and *savoir comprendre*. Coding focused on intercultural openness, mediation practices, language negotiation, social presence, and intercultural development.

Results and Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the participants play active roles in intercultural integration through intercultural attitudes, peer mediation, and social presence, reflecting key dimensions of Byram's (1997) ICC framework. The findings also support studies emphasizing that intercultural competence develops through sustained interaction within educational environments.

The first theme, intercultural attitudes (*savoir être*), revealed openness, curiosity, and willingness to engage with cultural diversity despite feelings of uncertainty. Participant 1 described meeting international students as "very fresh" and wanting to "exchange cultural experiences." Participant 2 stated that communicating with international students was "pretty easy" because of multicultural exposure. These responses reflect openness and readiness to interact across cultures, aligning with Byram's (1997) concept of intercultural attitudes. The findings also support Chow's (2022) discussion that Taiwanese university students develop intercultural understanding through interaction and exposure to perspectives. However, two participants also experienced hesitation during intercultural encounters. Participant 3 explained feeling "shy or hesitant with European and African students" because of concerns about communication misunderstandings, while Participant 4 admitted feeling "a little weird and shy" because of prior exposure to international students. These findings are consistent with Yang et al. (2025), who argued that intercultural experience may create uncertainty during intercultural interaction.

The second theme, intercultural mediation and peer support (*savoir comprendre*), highlighted how local Taiwanese university students interpreted cultural differences and supported international students in navigating life. Participants assisted with transportation, healthcare, classroom guidance, and language difficulties. Participant 2 shared, “sometimes when they are sick, I take them to the hospital,” while Participant 3 described helping a Vietnamese student complete legal procedure because “she had a language barrier.” Participant 5 also supported international students by helping them improve Chinese listening and reading skills for their A2 certification. Participants additionally demonstrated communication strategies. Participant 3 used body language and direct demonstration to overcome misunderstandings, while Participant 5 simplified vocabulary to support students with limited Mandarin or English proficiency. These findings support Feng et al. (2025), who emphasized that intercultural communicative competence involves flexible communication strategies and empathy rather than linguistic perfection alone. Similarly, Lu, Wang Guénier, and Hird (2024) argued that intercultural competence develops through interpersonal contact and interaction.

The third theme, social presence and intercultural belonging, illustrated how Taiwanese university students created supportive environments that helped international students feel welcomed. Participant 2 described herself as “a friendly friend” who helped international students “feel more comfortable here.” Participant 4 shared Taiwanese snacks with international students to help them “feel more at home,” while Participant 5 organized intercultural exchange activities involving Taiwanese tea culture and New Year traditions. These interactions demonstrate that intercultural integration extends beyond language support into relational engagement and emotional connection. The findings support Zabrodska and Wang’s (2025) argument that intercultural communication among international students is shaped by relational interaction, emotional support, and inclusive communication environments. Overall, the study suggests that Taiwanese university students are important co-creators of intercultural learning spaces within university internationalization processes.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence, Peer Support, Taiwanese University Students, Internationalization