Article

An Empirical Study on Intercultural Contact and Intercultural Communication Competence of Chinese International Students in the UK: A Case Study of Lancaster University

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between intercultural contact (IC) and intercultural communication competence (ICC) among Chinese international students at Lancaster University, UK. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes the frequency and nature of IC and self-assessed ICC levels. Findings reveal a predominance of indirect IC, such as media consumption and cultural events, over direct interactions with native English speakers. Self-assessment of ICC indicates strong attitudes towards cultural diversity but identifies areas for improvement in domestic cultural knowledge and cognitive skills. Statistical analysis demonstrates a significant positive correlation between IC and ICC, with direct IC positively impacting communication skills and indirect IC contributing to cultural knowledge and positive attitudes. These findings emphasize the importance of both direct and indirect IC in developing ICC. Educational institutions should focus on facilitating diverse IC opportunities to enhance students' language proficiency, cultural adaptation, and overall well-being.

Keywords: Intercultural contact (IC), intercultural communication competence (ICC), Chinese international students, acculturation

INTRODUCTION

The processes of economic globalization and the internationalization of higher education have precipitated a significant shift in the educational landscape, with China emerging as a predominant source of international students. English-speaking countries, particularly the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, are the preferred destinations for these students. In the academic year 2022--2023, Chinese international students represented the largest cohort of international students in the UK, totaling 154,260 individuals, a number that has been consistently rising over the past five years, including the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2024). Figure 1 illustrates the steady growth of Chinese student enrollments in the UK from 2018 academic year to 2023.
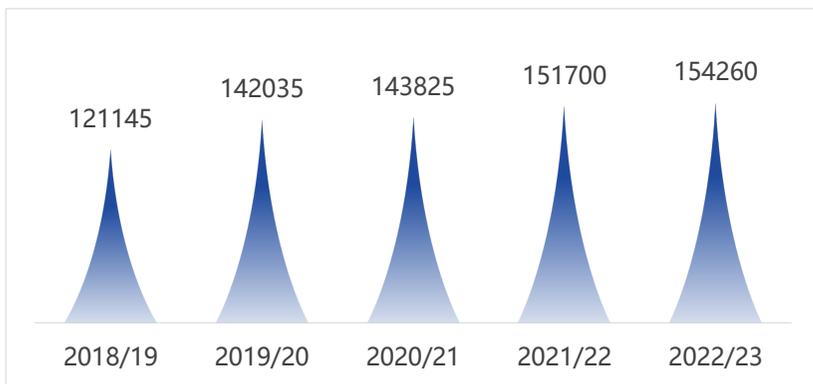

Figure 1: Chinese Student Enrollments in the UK for Academic Year 2018-2023

The burgeoning presence of Chinese students in UK higher education institutions presents a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges. While the opportunity to study abroad offers exposure to a rich tapestry of cultures and diverse academic experiences, Chinese students frequently encounter unique difficulties in adapting to the British educational system and cultural norms. These challenges include language barriers, which are critical for academic success and social integration, as many students struggle with effective communication, comprehension of lectures, and participation in class discussions. Cultural differences in teaching styles, learning expectations, and social norms can lead to misunderstandings and adaptation challenges. Additionally, Chinese students may experience social isolation due to these barriers, which hinders the formation of friendships and social networks with local peers, and can contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Yin et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of addressing mental health among Chinese international students (CIS), noting their growing population and increasing depressive symptoms. They advocate for integrating cultural

psychology in mental health interventions, focusing on acculturation, linguistic barriers, and social support. Practitioners should recognize cultural factors in depression, anxiety, or academic stress among CIS and incorporate psychoeducation in academic counseling.

Astley (2024) conducted an analysis of the cross-cultural challenges faced by Asian international students in the United Kingdom. The study underscored variations in educational methodologies, linguistic obstacles, and socio-cultural adjustments. Consequently, Astley (2024) proposed several strategies, including cultural awareness training for institutional staff, enhanced student orientation programs, and the implementation of buddy systems, to foster cross-cultural competence and facilitate the academic and social integration of Asian international students.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) plays a pivotal role in addressing these challenges and is essential for the academic and social success of Chinese students in the UK. ICC facilitates effective communication with professors and peers, enhancing students' understanding of course content, participation in discussions, and the clear expression of their ideas. It also aids in adapting to the UK educational system by understanding cultural differences in teaching and learning styles. Socially, ICC promotes integration by enhancing interactions and enabling students to build friendships and connections across diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby reducing isolation and fostering a sense of belonging. Furthermore, the development of ICC can bolster students' confidence and self-esteem, leading to improved mental well-being and resilience, while strong social connections and support networks can mitigate the challenges of studying abroad and reduce the risk of mental health issues.

Despite the recognized importance of ICC for the academic and social integration of Chinese international students, there is a notable research gap concerning the intercultural contact (IC) and ICC of this population. This study endeavors to address this oversight by examining the current situation of IC and ICC among Chinese students in the UK, with the aim of providing insights that can inform educational institutions and policymakers in creating a more supportive and inclusive environment. By understanding and addressing the specific challenges faced by Chinese students, the UK higher education sector can better facilitate their academic success, social integration, and overall well-being, enabling them to thrive in their educational and personal endeavors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks

Kormos and Csizér's Intercultural Contact Theory (2007) provides a foundational understanding of how individuals engage with diverse cultures through direct and indirect contact. Direct contact, involving face-to-face interactions, is crucial for language proficiency and communication skills. Indirect contact, such as media consumption, also plays a significant role in cultural engagement. This theory is

particularly relevant for this study, as it provides a lens through which to examine the intercultural experiences of Chinese students in the UK.

Byram's Intercultural Communication Competence Model (ICCM) (1997) is a comprehensive framework that includes knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness as components of ICC. This model is instrumental in assessing the competencies of Chinese students in the UK by examining their cultural knowledge, attitudes, communication skills, and awareness of cultural perspectives. It helps to identify the multifaceted nature of ICC and its development through intercultural contact.

John W. Berry's Acculturation Theory (2017) is essential for understanding individual adaptation strategies in response to intercultural interactions. Berry's theory posits four acculturation strategies—integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization—and their impact on psychological adaptation and health outcomes. This theory is particularly useful for understanding the adaptation processes of Chinese students in the UK and the potential outcomes of their intercultural experiences.

Existing Research on IC and ICC

Wu, Fan, and Peng (2013) explored the dimensions and evaluation scales of intercultural competence (ICC) among Chinese college students, aiming to enhance teaching and learning in intercultural settings. Their study developed a framework for assessing ICC. Meanwhile, Zhong, Bai, and Fan (2013) conducted a pilot study on a self-report scale for assessing ICC among Chinese college students, providing insights into students' self-perceptions of their skills.

Previous research in English-speaking countries has consistently linked greater intercultural contact with higher levels of ICC. Chinese students engaging in diverse intercultural interactions demonstrate improved communication skills and a deeper understanding of both their own and the host culture. However, these studies often focus on direct contact and may overlook the role of indirect contact.

Peng and Wu (2016) analyzed the intercultural contact pathways of Chinese college students, revealing how they develop ICC through various contact channels. In 2017, they further examined the impact of China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' on the development of ICC among college students, emphasizing the importance of fostering ICC among young people in the globalized world(Peng & Wu,2017).In a follow-up survey in 2018, Peng and Wu(2018) investigated the intercultural contact experiences of Chinese college students, aiming to understand their perceptions of cross-cultural interactions and the challenges they face in adapting to new cultural environments. The findings highlighted the need for more opportunities for students to engage in intercultural exchange programs and activities.

Chinese-based research has highlighted the importance of language proficiency and cultural knowledge in facilitating effective communication among Chinese students studying abroad. However, these studies often rely on self-reported measures and may lack robust statistical analysis, limiting their generalizability. Overall, these studies contribute to the understanding of ICC

development among young people in the context of globalization and international cooperation.

Gaps in Previous Studies

Recent scholarship has increasingly investigated the influence of intercultural contact on the development of ICC. For example, Zhang's (2020) study promotes the cultivation of students' intercultural competence through the use of authentic video materials in language education. Similarly, Liu and Chen's (2021) research highlights the critical role of direct contact in enhancing the intercultural communication competence of Chinese international students. Their findings reinforce the notion that direct interaction is instrumental in promoting adaptability and effective communication within foreign cultural contexts. This study is particularly valuable for its contribution to a validated framework for assessing cross-cultural adaptation, which has implications for educational strategies and aids in the integration of Chinese students into international settings.

Nadeem and Zabrodskaja's (2023) paper introduces the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC), which is tailored for international students. This model delineates key intercultural stages: Intercultural Effectiveness (ICE), Intercultural Competence (ICC), Intercultural Adjustment (ICA), and Intercultural Adaptation (ICN). Results from a survey of 171 international students in Shanghai validate the sequential progression through these stages, indicating a transition from effectiveness to normalization. The significance of this study lies in its culture-general approach and its recommendations for the development of intercultural skills in educational policies and practices.

A notable oversight in the existing literature is the predominant focus on direct intercultural contact. While the importance of direct contact is well recognized, the role of indirect contact, such as media exposure and participation in cultural events, in fostering ICC has not received sufficient attention. This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the combined effects of both direct and indirect intercultural contact on the ICC of Chinese students studying in the UK.

Furthermore, the majority of research to date has been conducted within Chinese contexts, which may not fully reflect the experiences of Chinese students in the UK. This study aims to provide a more nuanced perspective on the intercultural experiences of this specific demographic, thereby enriching our understanding of ICC development in diverse educational settings.

Significance of the Study

This study fills a crucial gap in the literature by examining the relationship between intercultural contact and ICC among Chinese international students in the UK. By addressing the limitations of previous studies and employing a rigorous research methodology, this study not only contributes to theoretical understanding but also offers practical implications for policymakers and educators. Enhancing the cross-cultural adaptability and communication skills of

international students is vital for their educational experiences and integration into UK society.

METHOD

The methodology of this study combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A questionnaire based on the Self-assessment Scale of Intercultural Contact (SSIC) and the Self-assessment Scale of Intercultural Communication Competence (SSICC) was administered to a sample of 57 Chinese students studying in the UK. This quantitative data provided insights into the frequency and channels of intercultural contact, as well as the self-assessment of intercultural communication competence among the participants. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of ten students to gain deeper insights into their individual experiences and perspectives on intercultural contact and communication.

Due to space limitations, this paper focuses on the analysis and presentation of quantitative data fromthe questionnaire. The qualitative analysis results from the semi-structured interviews will be explored in depth in a separate article.

Research Questions and Objectives

This study aims to investigate the current situation of intercultural contact and intercultural communication competence among Chinese students in the UK. The primary research question focuses on understanding the relationship between intercultural contact and intercultural communication competence, as well as its implications for language learning and cultural adaptation.

The objective of this study is to provide insights for developing strategies to enhance the intercultural communication competence of Chinese students in the UK by exploring the aforementioned relationship.

Questionnaire Design
The questionnaire was structured into three sections: demographic information, the Self-assessment Scale of Intercultural Contact (SSIC), and the Self-assessment Scale of Intercultural Communication Competence (SSICC).

Demographic Information
This initial section collected basic demographic data from the participants.

Self-assessment Scale of Intercultural Contact (SSIC)
The SSIC utilized a five-point Likert scale for participants to self-assess their intercultural contact frequency. Derived from Kormos & Csizér's (2007) and Peng's (2016) IC scales, the SSIC consists of two dimensions: direct contact (12 items) and indirect contact (10 items), each representing a specific channel. The reliability and validity of the SSIC were assessed using SPSS 24.0, yielding Cronbach's Alpha (.831) and KMO (.893) values, indicating high internal consistency and suitability for analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1: Reliability and Validity of SSIC

Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	.831
Validity	KMO	.893

Self-assessment Scale of Intercultural Communication Competence (SSICC)

The SSICC was adapted from a questionnaire developed by Wu, Fan, and Peng (2013), which aligns with Byram's (1997) ICC model. The SSICC encompasses six dimensions: domestic cultural knowledge (3 items), foreign cultural knowledge (7 items), attitudes (3 items), intercultural communication skills (9 items), intercultural cognitive skills (3 items), and awareness (3 items). Participants scored themselves on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "0" to "5". The Chinese version of the questionnaire was used to enhance clarity and efficiency. The SSICC demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = .88) and validity (KMO = .92), confirming the suitability of the items for the study (see Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability and Validity of SSICC

Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	.88
Validity	KMO	.92

The questionnaire, grounded in Kormos and Csizér's IC theory and Byram's ICC model, consists of the SSIC and SSICC scales. The SSIC assesses the frequency and channels of intercultural contact through 22 items, while the SSICC evaluates cultural knowledge, attitudes, communication skills, cognitive skills, and awareness across 28 items.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed online to Chinese international students at Lancaster University in the UK, resulting in 57 valid responses. Semistructured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of ten students to gain deeper insights.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS 24.0, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and tests for reliability and validity.

Sample Size

The sample size of 57 Chinese students at Lancaster University in the UK was selected based on previous research in the field and practical considerations. However,it is acknowledged that the sample size may be limited in terms of generalizability. To mitigate this limitation, future research could consider expanding the sample size or conducting the study in different educational institutions.

Potential Biases in Self-reported Data

It is acknowledged that self-reported data may be subject to biases, such as social desirability bias or recall bias. To address this, the semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to triangulate the data and gain deeper insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives. Additionally, future research could consider triangulating data through additional methods, such as interviews with university staff or host-country peers.

Analysis Connecting Findings to Research Questions

The analysis of the questionnaire data aimed to connect the findings clearly to the research questions. Specifically, the study aimed to explore how different types of intercultural contact influence various dimensions of intercultural communication competence. The results of the analysis provided insights into the current situation of intercultural contact and intercultural communication competence among Chinese students in the UK, and the relationship between these variables.

Future Steps

Future research could consider expanding the sample size and triangulating data through additional methods to enhance the generalizability and robustness of the findings. Additionally, longitudinal research could be conducted to track the development of intercultural communication competence among Chinese students in the UK over time.

RESULTS

Demographic Information

The survey collected demographic data from 57 participants, including gender, age, current academic year, department, and duration of stay at Lancaster University in the UK. This information is not only crucial for understanding the background of the respondents and identifying any potential correlations with their intercultural experiences but has significant implications for educational policy and international student support programs.The demographic information gathered from the survey participants in the study at Lancaster University is as follows.

Gender Distribution

Females made up the majority of respondents, with 42 participants representing 73.68% of the total.Males accounted for 15 participants, which is 26.32% of the sample.There were no participants who identified as 'other' in terms of gender. The predominance of female participants (73.68%) suggests that support programs should be sensitive to the specific needs and challenges that female international students may face, such as safety concerns, networking opportunities, and career development.

Age Group

The age group under 18 had only 1 participant, constituting 1.75% of the respondents. The majority of participants, 42 individuals, fell within the 18-25 age bracket, making up 73.68% of the sample.The 26-30 age group had 2 participants, which is 3.51% . Participants aged 31-40 numbered 9, representing 15.79%. The 41-50 age group included 3 participants, or 5.26% of the sample. No participants were in the 51-60 age group or above 60 years of age. The majority of participants being in the 18-25 age bracket (73.68%) indicates that the university should tailor support services to the needs of young adults, including stress management, peer support networks, and career guidance.

Academic Stage

There were no participants in the Foundation Year. Undergraduate Year 1 (UG Year 1) had 2 participants, which is 3.51%. Seven participants were Undergraduate Year 2 (UG Year 2), which is 12.28%. Eight participants were in their final undergraduate year (UG3), representing 14.04%. The Postgraduate (PG) level had the highest percentage of participants, with 28 individuals, or 49.12%. Eight participants, making up 14.04%, were PhD students. Seven participants were categorized under 'Other', which is 12.28%. The high number of postgraduate students (49.12%) and PhD candidates (14.04%) underscores the need for specialized support in research skills, academic writing, and career planning for advanced degree holders.

Field of Study

The majority, 31 participants or 54.39%, belonged to the Arts & Social Sciences. There was 1 participant from Health & Medicine, representing 1.75%. The Management School had 20 participants, which is 35.09%.The Science & Technology field had 5 participants, or 8.77%.The large representation from Arts & Social Sciences (54.39%) and Management (35.09%) suggests that interdisciplinary programs and workshops could be beneficial, fostering cross-departmental collaboration and diverse skill sets.

Duration of Stay in the UK

The most common duration of stay was 0-1 year, with 27 participants (47.37%). An equal number of participants, 27, had been in the UK for 1-3 years, also representing 47.37% . Two participants, which is 3.51%, had stayed in the UK for 3-5 years.There was One participant who had been in the UK for more than 5 years, constituting 1.75% of all participants. The short duration of stay (mostly 0-3 years) indicates that immediate and ongoing cultural orientation and integration programs are essential for new international students.

Intercultural Contact (IC)

The survey measured intercultural contact through two main categories: direct and indirect. Direct intercultural contact had an average score of 2.66, indicating relatively limited face-to-face interactions with native English speakers. In contrast, indirect intercultural contact scored an average of 3.69, suggesting that students were more exposed to British culture through media and other indirect means (see Table 3).

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Intercultural Contact

Intercultural contact	M	SD
Direct intercultural contact	2.66	1.12
Indirect intercultural contact	3.69	1.24

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Direct Intercultural Contact Analysis

The direct contact analysis revealed that the highest average score was for understanding British culture through tourism (4.36), followed by participating in festival celebrations (3.61). These scores indicate that leisure and event-based activities are more common avenues for direct cultural engagement. Conversely, lower scores were observed for internships/part-time jobs (1.93) and volunteer activities (2.16), implying fewer opportunities for practical, culturally immersive experiences.The higher scores for tourism and festival celebrations suggest that cultural events can be leveraged as platforms for intercultural learning. Educational policy should encourage participation in such events and integrate them into the curriculum to enhance direct IC experiences (see Table 4).

Indirect Intercultural Contact Analysis

The indirect contact analysis revealed that the most frequent indirect interactions occurred through watching English movies/TV programs (4.00) and listening to English songs/radios (3.66). These findings suggest that media consumption is a significant way for students to access and learn about the host culture. Lower scores for communicating with native English speakers via social

media (3.39) might indicate hesitancy or lack of opportunity to engage in direct online conversations.The significant engagement with English media highlights the potential for using popular culture as a tool for language acquisition and cultural understanding. Support programs could include media clubs or workshops that analyze cultural nuances in media content (see Table 5).

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

The self-assessment of intercultural communication competence revealed an overall average score of 3.85, with the attitude dimension scoring the highest (4.30), followed by intercultural communication skills (3.92). The lower scores in intercultural cognitive skills (3.68) and domestic cultural knowledge (3.61) suggest areas for improvement and highlight the importance of self-awareness and cultural knowledge in enhancing ICC (see Table 6).

Domestic Cultural Knowledge

This dimension focuses on the Chinese students' understanding and awareness of their own cultural heritage and values. It encompasses their comprehension of traditional customs, social norms, historical events, and other cultural aspects unique to China. The importance of domestic cultural knowledge lies in its ability to shape one's identity and cultural perspective, which is crucial in cross-cultural interactions. A strong foundation in domestic cultural knowledge allows students to confidently represent their culture and avoid misunderstandings in intercultural settings.The average score of 3.61 indicates a moderate understanding of one's own culture, which is essential for effective cross-cultural interactions.The moderate score in domestic cultural knowledge (3.61) suggests that international students may benefit from programs that encourage them to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds, which can enhance their intercultural interactions (see Table 7).

English Cultural Knowledge

This aspect pertains to the students' knowledge and comprehension of British culture, including its history, traditions, social norms, and values. Understanding English cultural knowledge is essential for Chinese students in the UK, as it enables them to adapt to the local environment, avoid cultural conflicts, and establish meaningful relationships with native speakers. A good grasp of English cultural knowledge also enhances their ability to participate effectively in cross-cultural communication and collaborations. The average score of 3.1 indicates a challenge in adapting to the new cultural environment and a potential barrier to effective cross-cultural interactions.The lower score in English cultural knowledge (3.1) indicates a need for more comprehensive cultural orientation programs that provide in-depth insights into British culture, history, and social norms (see Table 8).

Attitude

Attitude encapsulates the students' readiness to embrace, respect, and engage with cultural diversity. An affirmative stance towards intercultural communication is pivotal for fostering harmonious interactions. Chinese students in the UK are expected to exhibit an eagerness to understand, acclimate to, and value the cultural nuances they encounter, which is key to building rapport with their British counterparts and the wider community. Conversely, a dismissive or closed attitude can precipitate misinterpretations, disputes, and social alienation, thereby impeding the efficacy of their intercultural exchanges.

The participants' highest average score in this domain, 4.30, signifies a strong inclination towards cultural pluralism and a proactive approach to engaging with it (see Table 9). This positive disposition suggests that support programs should not only acknowledge but also actively cultivate this cultural openness. By doing so, educational institutions can create and sustain an inclusive campus atmosphere that celebrates diversity and encourages mutual understanding and respect among all students.

Intercultural Communication Skills

This dimension focuses on the practical competencies essential for effective intercultural interaction. It includes linguistic proficiency, active listening, non-verbal communication cues, and the ability to navigate and resolve intercultural conflicts. For Chinese students in the UK, the development of these skills is critical for facilitating clear and respectful dialogue with peers and local residents. Among these, language proficiency stands out as a key enabler of precise and coherent self-expression.

The average score of 3.92 for this dimension indicates that students have a solid baseline in intercultural communication abilities (see Table 10). However, the score also suggests that there are areas where students could further refine their skills to enhance their effectiveness in cross-cultural exchanges. To address these needs, educational institutions might consider bolstering language support services and organizing specialized communication workshops. These initiatives could focus on refining linguistic fluency, improving comprehension in diverse accents and dialects, and developing advanced strategies for conflict resolution and non-verbal communication in a multicultural context.

Intercultural Cognitive Skills

Intercultural cognitive skills are vital for the nuanced analysis, interpretation, and assessment of cultural variations. These skills encompass critical thinking, problem-solving, and the adaptability required to navigate new cultural landscapes. For Chinese students in the UK, honing these abilities is essential for a profound understanding and appreciation of the subtleties involved in intercultural exchanges. Students should be adept at recognizing cultural nuances,

deciphering their significance, and modifying their behaviors to facilitate successful intercultural interactions.

The average score of 3.68 for this dimension indicates that there may be a need for students to enhance their proficiency in analyzing and comprehending the implications of cultural differences on communication (see Table 11). The somewhat lower score in intercultural cognitive skills suggests a potential area for improvement in the students' capacity for critical analysis of cultural variances. To address this, educational policymakers should consider integrating courses or dedicated modules that specifically target the development of these cognitive skills. These educational components could focus on enhancing students' ability to engage in critical thinking, solve intercultural dilemmas, and adapt their strategies for effective communication in diverse cultural settings.

Intercultural Awareness

Intercultural awareness refers to the students' recognition and sensitivity towards the nuances of cultural issues and disparities. It encompasses being conscious of one's own cultural predispositions, stereotypes, and preconceptions, as well as being attentive to the consequences of one's actions on others. This awareness is fundamental in intercultural interactions, as it aids students in preventing conflicts and misunderstandings. By recognizing and respecting cultural differences, students can modify their behaviors and communication approaches to foster constructive relationships with individuals from various cultural backgrounds.

The average score of 3.89 for this dimension indicates a strong level of consciousness regarding cultural diversity and a dedication to fostering understanding and cohesion among cultures (see Table 12). However, while the score reflects a positive level of awareness, there is still potential for growth. Support programs could be further enhanced by offering targeted training on enhancing cultural sensitivity and actively challenging and overcoming stereotypes. This would ensure that students are not only aware of cultural differences but are also equipped with the tools to engage in inclusive and respectful intercultural exchanges.

FINDINGS

The questionnaire findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the intercultural contact (IC) and intercultural communication competence (ICC) among Chinese students in the UK. The analysis reveals a prevalence of indirect IC, with an average score of 3.69, compared to direct face-to-face interactions with native English speakers, whose score is lower at 2.66. Notably, tourism (4.36), festival celebrations (3.61), and media consumption, including movies (4.00), songs (3.66), and websites (3.64), are the primary means of indirect cultural engagement. In contrast, direct forms of interaction, such as internships (1.93) and volunteer work (2.16), are less commonly engaged in.

With respect to ICC, the average self-assessment score is 3.85, indicating strong attitudes towards cultural diversity (4.30) and a lower score in domestic cultural knowledge (3.61). These results imply that while Chinese students in the UK generally exhibit positive attitudes towards cultural diversity, there is a need for enhanced knowledge of the domestic culture and cognitive skills.

In summary, the data indicate a predominance of indirect cultural contact and a relative deficiency in direct interaction, highlighting the need for improvement in domestic cultural knowledge and cognitive skills within the ICC framework.

Relationship between IC and ICC

The data analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between IC and ICC, suggesting that increased levels of intercultural engagement are associated with greater proficiency in intercultural communication. Direct IC, characterized by regular in-person interactions, is strongly associated with the communication skills dimension of ICC, providing practical opportunities for students to hone their communicative abilities. Indirect IC, including exposure to the host culture through media and travel, is more closely related to the acquisition of cultural knowledge and the cultivation of positive attitudes towards cultural diversity. Active engagement with the host culture, even indirectly, is correlated with higher self-reported levels of ICC.

Thus, both direct and indirect IC play unique but complementary roles in shaping students' ICC. The positive correlation between IC and ICC underscores the contribution of intercultural contact to the enhancement of intercultural communication competence.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings suggest that higher levels of IC, particularly indirect contact, are instrumental in developing ICC. Consequently, educational institutions should prioritize the creation of opportunities for direct interaction to augment communication skills, while also promoting indirect contact to foster cultural knowledge and positive attitudes. This dual approach is likely to result in improved language proficiency, cultural adaptation, and a more enriching educational experience for Chinese students in the UK.

In conclusion, the findings underscore the importance of providing a spectrum of opportunities for both direct and indirect cultural engagement to enhance the ICC of Chinese students. Educational policies and practices should be aligned to facilitate these interactions, thereby promoting a more inclusive and globally oriented academic environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This investigation concludes that intercultural contact is a critical determinant in the development of intercultural communication competence (ICC) for Chinese international students in the UK. Direct interaction facilitates the honing of

communication skills, while indirect exposure contributes to the enrichment of cultural knowledge and the fostering of positive attitudes. Despite the study's limitations, including a small sample size, potential self-assessment bias, cross-sectional design, and cultural context specificity, the findings offer valuable insights for educational practices.

The study's conclusions emphasizes the pivotal role of intercultural contact in enhancing the intercultural communication competence of Chinese international students in the UK. To operationalize this insight and provide tangible recommendations, this section expands upon the conclusion by embedding them within the framework of cultural adaptation theory. Acculturation theory posits that successful cross-cultural transitions hinge on individuals' ability to navigate and integrate into a new cultural milieu, emphasizing both practical skills and psychological adjustment.

Based on this theoretical groundwork, the following concrete suggestions are proposed for educational institutions aiming to foster intercultural contact among Chinese international students.

Implementation of Language Exchange Programs: Establish structured language exchange programs that pair Chinese international students with native British students. These programs should not only focus on linguistic proficiency but also incorporate cultural dialogues and shared experiences, thereby promoting both direct communication practice and deeper cultural understanding. Regular check-ins and feedback sessions can assess progress and address any cultural misunderstandings promptly.

Cultural Integration Activities: Organize a series of culturally immersive activities such as traditional festivals celebrations, cultural workshops (e.g., cooking classes, art making), and history tours. These activities serve as vehicles for indirect contact, allowing students to observe, learn, and appreciate British culture from a first-hand perspective. Encouraging active participation and leadership roles within these events can further bolster cultural sensitivity and empathy.

Intercultural Mentorship Schemes: Initiate mentorship programs pairing experienced international students or local ambassadors with newer arrivals. Mentors can provide guidance on navigating academic and social systems, offer emotional support during the adaptation phase, and facilitate introductions to broader social networks. This peer-to-peer support fosters a sense of belonging and reduces cultural isolation, indirectly enhancing communication competence.

Cultural Adaptation Workshops and Seminars: Develop workshops and seminars that explicitly address the challenges of cultural adaptation. Topics might include cross-cultural communication strategies, understanding and managing cultural differences, and stress management techniques. Incorporating guest speakers from diverse backgrounds can enrich discussions with real-life experiences and practical advice.

Supportive Housing Arrangements: Consider implementing housing initiatives that promote cultural mixing, such as international student houses or roommate pairings that intentionally blend nationalities. Such arrangements facilitate spontaneous intercultural interactions in daily life, fostering a more

natural and sustained process of cultural adaptation and communication skill development.

Feedback and Reflection Platforms: Establish platforms for continuous feedback and reflection, enabling students to share their experiences, challenges, and successes in cross-cultural interactions. Online forums, journaling activities, or group discussions can serve as safe spaces for honest dialogue and self-assessment, leading to more self-aware and adaptable communication strategies.

By embedding these recommendations within a cultural adaptation framework, educational institutions can create a holistic and supportive environment that not only encourages but also effectively facilitates intercultural contact, ultimately enhancing the intercultural communication competence of Chinese international students in the UK.

SUMMARY

This study offers empirical insights into the relationship between intercultural contact and the development of communication competence among Chinese international students in the UK. It underscores the pivotal role of increased intercultural engagement in fostering adaptability and effective communication skills. The research findings serve as a blueprint for developing targeted language and cultural adaptation programs, equipping international students with the tools necessary for successful integration into the host culture.

The study's outcomes prompt educational institutions and policymakers to prioritize the enhancement of intercultural communication competence as a key component of international student support and education. The recommendations derived from this research advocate for a multifaceted approach to promoting intercultural learning, including structured language exchange programs, cultural integration activities, mentorship schemes, and reflective practice platforms.

For future inquiries, the study suggests broadening the investigation to include a larger and more diverse sample of international students. Additionally, the use of varied assessment methods is recommended to capture the dynamic nature of intercultural competence development. Comparative analyses across different cultural settings would further enrich our understanding of the universal and context-specific factors influencing the intercultural communication competence of international students.

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APPENDIX

Table 4: Direct Intercultural Contact

Items	M	SD
1. Have a knowledge of English culture through curriculum/ textbooks in school	3.14	1.13
2. Have a knowledge of English culture through teachers in school	3.27	1.13
3. Have a knowledge of English culture through schoolmates	3.30	1.13
4.Have a knowledge of English culture through school activities	2.50	1.34
5.Have a knowledge of English culture through internships/ part-time jobs	1.93	1.23
6.Have a knowledge of English culture through tourism	4.36	0.94
7.Have a knowledge of English culture through club	1.95	0.94
8.Have a knowledge of English culture through host family members	1.30	0.95
9.Have a knowledge of English culture by participating in festival celebrations	3.61	1.04
10.Have a knowledge of English culture by participating in academic conferences/lectures and forums	2.80	1.23
11.Have a knowledge of English culture by participating in summer/winter camps	1.59	1.09
12.Have a knowledge of English culture by participating in volunteer activities	2.16	1.27

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 5: Indirect Intercultural Contact

Items	M	SD
13.Communicate in English with native English speakers via social media	3.39	1.40
14.Have a knowledge of English culture by reading paper/electronic English books/newspapers and magazines	3.52	1.02
15.Have a knowledge of English culture by browsing English websites	3.64	1.35
16.Have a knowledge of English culture by watching English movies/ TV programs	4.00	1.31
17.Have a knowledge of English culture by listening to English songs/ radios	3.66	1.31
18.Have a knowledge of English culture by watching cultural performances and exhibitions	3.91	1.07

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 6: Mean and Standard Deviation of Self-assessment of Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural Communication Competence	M	SD
Domestic cultural knowledge	3.61	1.02
English cultural knowledge	3.1	1.01
Attitude	4.30	0.83
Intercultural communication skills	3.92	0.95
Intercultural cognitive skills	3.68	1.02
Intercultural Awareness	3.89	0.95

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 7: Domestic Cultural Knowledge

Items	M	SD
1. Have a knowledge of history, geography, society and politics of your own country	3.59	1.00
2.Have a knowledge of lifestyle and values of your own country	3.80	0.95
3.Have a knowledge of social etiquette and religious culture of your own country	3.43	1.11

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 8: English Cultural Knowledge

Items	M	SD
4.Have a knowledge of English history, geography, society and politics	3.02	1.00
5.Have a knowledge of English lifestyle and values	3.36	0.84

6.Have a knowledge of English social etiquette and religious culture	2.91	0.96
7.Have a knowledge of English cultural taboos	2.75	1.04
8.Learn and compare the basic norms and behavioral knowledge of different cultures	3.25	1.06
9.Have a knowledge of the basic knowledge of intercultural communication and communication concepts	3.25	1.04

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 9: Attitude

Items	*M*	*SD*
11.Willing to communicate and learn from people from different cultures	4.14	1.00
12.Willing to tolerate different values, eating habits, taboos.	4.32	0.80
13.Willing to learn foreign languages and cultures well	4.45	0.70

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 10: Intercultural Communication Skills

Items	*M*	*SD*
14.The ability to negotiate with the other party when there is a misunderstanding in intercultural communication	3.61	0.97
15.The ability to use body language or other non-verbal means of communication when speech is impaired	3.73	1.04
16.The ability to communicate successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds and fields in a foreign language	3.82	0.90
17.The ability to be polite to people from different cultures when communicating with them	4.25	0.84
18.The ability to communicate with people from different cultures without offending them with inappropriate language or behavior	4.11	0.92
19.The ability to communicate with people from different cultures without prejudicing them as much as possible	4.16	0.89
20.The ability to avoid mentioning private topics when communicating with people from different cultures	4.07	0.97
21.The ability to be sensitive to cross-cultural differences	3.70	1.05
22.The ability to see things from different cultures and perspectives when looking at events in other countries, such as politics, economy and religion, etc.	3.82	1.02

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 11: Intercultural Cognitive Skills

Items	M	SD
23.The ability to directly acquire knowledge related to intercultural communication through contact with people from different cultures	3.66	1.03
24.The ability to use various methods, techniques and strategies to assist in learning foreign languages and cultures	3.61	1.06
25.The ability to reflect and learn from cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstandings and to find appropriate solutions	3.77	0.96

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 12: Intercultural Awareness

Items	M	SD
26.Be aware of cultural similarities and differences when communicating with people from different cultures	4.00	0.89
27.Be aware of the difference in cultural identity when communicating with people from different cultures	3.91	0.94
28.Be aware of differences in cultural styles and language use and how they affect social and work situations	3.75	1.01

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation.