

Original Article

The Perceptions of International Students on Intercultural Communication in English Language Classrooms at Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Received: 23 November 2025

Revised: 29 December 2025

Accepted: 15 January 2026

Published: 07 February 2026

Abstract - In the context of increasing internationalization in higher education, intercultural communication has become a crucial factor influencing international students' learning experiences, particularly in English language classrooms. This mixed-methods study investigates international students' perceptions of intercultural communication and examines how intercultural communication experiences affect their engagement in English language classrooms at Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Ho Chi Minh City. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 64 international students, while qualitative insights were obtained from semi-structured interviews with six purposefully selected participants. The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the instrument demonstrated high internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.914). Interview data were analyzed thematically to complement and deepen the quantitative findings. Guided by Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) framework, the results indicate that international students generally hold positive perceptions of intercultural communication and recognize its value in enhancing cultural understanding, learning motivation, and English language development. Intercultural communication experiences were found to positively influence students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, particularly by increasing motivation, improving listening and speaking skills, and preparing students for future academic and professional contexts. However, moderate challenges related to communication anxiety, cultural differences, and limited naturalness in English use were also identified. The study highlights the importance of supportive pedagogical practices, culturally responsive teaching, and institutional support in fostering effective intercultural communication. The findings contribute empirical evidence to intercultural communication research in the Vietnamese higher education context and offer practical implications for English language teaching in multicultural classrooms.

Keywords - Perceptions, International students, Intercultural communication, English language classroom.

1. Introduction

In the context of increasing globalization, higher education is witnessing a dramatic change in the size and characteristics of the international student community. Knight (2004) argues that the internationalization of higher education is not only related to the movement of students across borders but also reflected in the cultural diversity in the classroom, requiring the educational environment to adapt to these differences. According to a report by UNESCO (2022), more than six million students are studying outside their home countries, marking a significant increase in the trend of global academic mobility. This has turned the classroom into a dynamic intercultural space, where communication is not only limited to language but also to the exchange of values,

identities, and worldviews. In particular, in the context of English becoming a global language, the English classroom has become a central space for cross-cultural interaction and mutual influence.

Intercultural communication is understood as the process of interaction between individuals from different cultures, each of whom brings their own set of values, beliefs, and ways of expression (Chen & Starosta, 2005). For international students, the ability to participate effectively in English classes depends not only on language proficiency but also on the ability to adapt in a multicultural communication environment (Byram, 1997).



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In Vietnam, the number of international students studying at universities has been rising in recent years, reflecting ongoing efforts to integrate and improve the quality of higher education. Initiatives like the ASEAN University Network and international accreditation programs have helped bring Vietnamese educational institutions closer to global standards. Nguyen Tat Thanh University (NTTU) is one of the training institutions that welcomes many international students from different cultures. However, in reality, there is still a significant gap in understanding and supporting international students in the learning process, particularly in English classes where interaction and mutual understanding play a crucial role in knowledge acquisition. In addition, although educational institutions in general and NTTU in particular actively promote internationalization, both local teachers and students are often unprepared to deal with cultural differences in teaching and learning. Classroom activities, assessment methods, or expectations of learning participation are still mainly based on local cultural norms, unintentionally creating barriers for international students who come from different academic traditions (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005).

Therefore, it is necessary and urgent to study the role of intercultural communication in the perception and participation of international students in English classes. This study, entitled "*The Perceptions of International Students on Intercultural Communication in English Language Classrooms at Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Ho Chi Minh City*," not only contributes to filling the theoretical gap in the Vietnamese context but also brings practical value in building a more comprehensive, equitable, and effective learning environment for students from different cultural backgrounds.

Although intercultural communication is considered an important factor in the foreign language learning process, especially for international students, in-depth studies on how this factor affects their perceptions and learning engagement in Vietnam remain limited. Most of the research on intercultural communication in higher education originates from Western contexts, often focusing on students studying abroad or analyzing at the macro-policy level (Knight, 2004; Deardorff, 2006). In contrast, empirical research related to classrooms in Vietnam, especially in English courses with the participation of international students, is quite sparse.

International students attending classes in a new country often face many difficulties in adapting to the learning environment due to differences in language, communication styles, and cultural norms (Chen & Starosta, 2005). These barriers not only affect learning effectiveness but also impact their psychology, confidence, and level of engagement in the classroom (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). For example, familiar learning behaviors such as asking questions, participating in group discussions, or expressing personal opinions may be encouraged in some cultures but considered inappropriate or

disrespectful in others. In Vietnamese classrooms, international students sometimes face implicit expectations that force them to adapt completely to local norms, while the school or lecturer has not made corresponding adjustments. This imbalance can easily lead to communication gaps and reduced motivation to participate in learning. Moreover, international students' silence or indirect communication can be misunderstood by lecturers as indifference, thereby exacerbating the gap between teachers and students. As a result, the classroom, which is supposed to be a central space for students to integrate both academically and socially, sometimes becomes a source of stress rather than a place to foster integration. This not only reduces learning outcomes but also has long-term consequences, such as feelings of isolation and reduced attachment to the learning environment, and can even lead to students dropping out (Marginson, 2014).

Despite the growing recognition of intercultural communication as a crucial dimension of foreign language education, empirical evidence explaining how intercultural communication shapes international students' perceptions and classroom engagement in Vietnam remains scarce. Existing studies have largely been conducted in Western higher education contexts or have approached internationalization from policy-oriented or institutional perspectives, leaving classroom-level experiences, particularly within English language courses, underexplored. Moreover, little attention has been paid to international students' own voices regarding how cultural differences influence their interaction, participation, and sense of belonging in Vietnamese universities. This lack of context-specific, learner-centered research creates a significant gap in understanding the pedagogical realities of increasingly multicultural English classrooms in Vietnam. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates international students' perceptions of intercultural communication in English language classrooms at Nguyen Tat Thanh University, thereby contributing practical insights that can inform culturally responsive teaching practices, curriculum design, and teacher preparation in the Vietnamese higher education context.

1.1. Research Objectives

- To investigate the perceptions of international students on the role of intercultural communication in English language classrooms at NTTU.
- To analyze the impact of intercultural communication experiences on students' level of engagement in English language classrooms

1.2. Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of international students about the role of intercultural communication in English language classrooms at NTTU?
2. In what ways do intercultural communication experiences affect international students' engagement in English language classrooms at NTTU?

2. Literature Review

2.1. International Students

International students are understood as those who study at an educational institution in a country other than their own (UNESCO, 2022). This group of students often participates in full-time or academic exchange programs that use a language of instruction other than their native language. In educational research and applied linguistics, international students are considered a unique group of learners because they must adapt to a new academic environment, a new language of instruction, and different socio-cultural situations (Marginson, 2014). Differences in cultural backgrounds, learning styles, communication norms, and academic expectations can significantly impact the learning experience, class participation, and communication effectiveness of international students (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005).

In this study, international students are understood to be students from Laos and Cambodia who are studying English courses at NTTU. These students use English as a second language and participate in learning in a multicultural classroom environment. Besides language challenges, international students face psychological pressures related to differences in teaching methods, assessment formats, and classroom interaction. Their unfamiliarity with a proactive academic environment that requires discussion and the presentation of personal opinions in English can affect their confidence and ability to participate in learning. Therefore, studying the characteristics, needs, and learning experiences of international students is essential to proposing appropriate teaching methods that contribute to improving their learning effectiveness and adaptability within a multicultural university education.

2.2. English Language Classroom

An English Language Classroom is understood as a teaching and learning environment where English is used as the primary language for teaching, learning, and interaction between teachers and students. According to Harmer (2007), an English classroom is not only a space for transmitting language knowledge, but also a social communication environment where learners practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills through interaction and collaboration. For English classes with many students from many different countries, the English classroom is regarded as a space for intercultural communication. In this environment, learners use English to learn the language, exchange views, share cultural values, and build academic and social relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997).

The English language classroom in this study is understood as the English classes at NTTU. International students in this study primarily interact in English during activities such as teaching, group discussions, presentations,

and academic work. This study is conducted to analyze how intercultural communication takes place and how these experiences influence the perceptions and learning engagement levels of international students.

Beyond its function of teaching the language, English classes play a crucial role in developing intercultural communication skills. Through interactive activities such as group discussions, pair work, and class presentations, students have the opportunity to be exposed to diverse perspectives, communication styles, and cultural values. However, differences in language proficiency, learning habits, and communication norms can also create barriers to interaction. Therefore, studying the English classroom environment is essential to understand how classes are organized and the factors influencing international students' participation in a multicultural situation.

2.3. Intercultural Communication

2.3.1. Explanation of Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is a concept that has been approached by many scholars from different perspectives, but all emphasize the process of exchanging meaning between individuals from different cultures. Gudykunst and Kim (2003) define intercultural communication as the process of transmitting and receiving information between people from different cultural backgrounds, in which factors such as language, social context, and cultural values play a decisive role in the effectiveness of interaction. Meanwhile, Chen and Starosta (2005) expand this concept, emphasizing that intercultural communication is not limited to language differences but also includes the belief systems, values, behaviors, and worldviews that each individual brings to the communication process. In this way, intercultural communication is considered a combination of linguistic competence and cultural competence, requiring participants to both understand and adapt to the diversity of communication contexts. On closer examination, the above definitions have important similarities and differences. What is common is that both Gudykunst and Kim (2003) and Chen and Starosta (2005) emphasize the decisive role of culture and social context in shaping and regulating the communication process. However, Gudykunst and Kim focus more on the information transmission aspect, considering effective information exchange as the main goal, while Chen and Starosta focus on the value and belief aspect, considering communication as a complex interactive process where each individual both learns and adjusts his or her behavior based on his or her cultural background.

In the field of language teaching, Byram (1997) offers an important complementary perspective that learning a language cannot be separated from learning culture, because language is always linked to the value system and communication norms of the community that uses it. According to Byram, to

communicate effectively in a multicultural context, learners need to develop intercultural communication competence, including an open attitude, knowledge of cultural differences, and adaptive skills in diverse communication situations. Compared with the definition of Chen and Starosta, Byram not only emphasizes cognitive and attitudinal factors, but also puts forward requirements for application skills in real-life situations, so his theory provides more practical guidance.

Thus, it can be seen that intercultural communication is not simply a matter of language exchange, but a complex interaction process between cognition, attitude, skills, and cultural context. In international educational environments, especially in multicultural English classrooms, understanding these definitions helps instructors design appropriate learning activities while helping international students develop effective communication skills, overcome cultural barriers, and enhance their social and academic integration.

Understanding the nature and components of intercultural communication is not only a theoretical issue but also has direct implications for the context of multicultural English classrooms at NTTU. When international students participate in learning, the ability to exchange meanings effectively depends not only on language proficiency but also on the ability to recognize values, cultural norms, and adaptive skills in different communication situations. Thus, this study, based on the definition and analysis of intercultural communication, will help clarify international students' perceptions of the role of intercultural communication, thereby explaining how these experiences affect the learning engagement level in English classrooms. This connection provides a solid basis for data analysis while providing practical guidance for designing teaching activities and policies to support international students in multicultural learning environments.

2.3.2. The role of intercultural communication in second language learning

In the process of learning a second language, intercultural communication plays a central role, because language proficiency is not limited to the ability to use grammatical structures and vocabulary, but also includes the ability to understand and apply the language in the cultural context in which it is used. Byram (1997) asserts that language learning is closely linked to culture learning; to use language appropriately in cross-cultural communication situations, learners need to develop intercultural communication competence, which includes an open attitude, knowledge of cultural differences, skills in explaining and comparing cultural phenomena, as well as the ability to apply knowledge in practice. Fantini (2000) adds that intercultural communication helps learners to increase cultural sensitivity, thereby improving their ability to interact effectively with native speakers and individuals from other cultures. This is especially important in international educational

environments, where students not only learn languages but also face communication situations that are diverse in cultural styles and values. Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes the role of social and interactional factors in promoting language-learning motivation; when students are given opportunities to exchange and collaborate in multicultural environments, they often become more proactive, more confident, and more willing to participate in learning activities, thereby enhancing learning engagement.

However, when analyzing the above studies, some limitations can be seen. Byram (1997) and Fantini (2000) mainly focused on the development of learners' personal competence, with little emphasis on the role of the classroom environment and support policies from lecturers or schools. In contrast, some previous studies show that intercultural communication is not only an individual competence but is also strongly influenced by social interaction and classroom structure, emphasizing the role of teachers in facilitating and guiding intercultural communication experiences. The combination of individual competence and the learning environment suggests that, for intercultural communication to be truly effective in language learning, there needs to be a balance between developing individual skills and fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages intercultural interaction.

In relation to the research context at NTTU, intercultural communication ability becomes a key factor in helping international students not only improve their English skills but also increase their participation and integration in the classroom. Students with good intercultural communication skills can actively participate in discussions, share opinions, coordinate in groups, and adapt to different teaching styles, while minimizing stress and feelings of isolation. On the contrary, a lack of experience and support in intercultural communication can lead to reduced learning motivation, limited interaction, and negatively affect learning outcomes. Therefore, research on international students' perceptions of intercultural communication and its impact on learning engagement is particularly necessary, contributing to explaining the current situation of multicultural English classrooms in Vietnam, and providing a practical basis for improving teaching methods and student support policies.

2.4. Learning Engagement

2.4.1. Explanation of Learning Engagement

The concept of learning engagement is defined by many scholars as a multidimensional construct, reflecting the level of effort, attention, and commitment of learners in the learning process. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) divided learning engagement into three main aspects. First, behavioral engagement is expressed through active participation in learning activities, such as doing assignments, participating in group discussions, collaborating on projects, and complying

with learning requirements. Second, emotional engagement, expressed through positive feelings towards learning, interest in lesson content, and friendly relationships with teachers and friends. Third, cognitive engagement, expressed in the level of intellectual investment, perseverance in learning, and the ability to apply learning strategies and critical thinking to achieve learning goals.

Meanwhile, Kuh (2009) expanded the definition, emphasizing that learning engagement is not only related to the individual efforts of students but also depends on the extent to which the educational environment creates meaningful learning opportunities. This perspective suggests that learning engagement is the result of the interaction between the active efforts of learners and the supportive academic environment, including the quality of teaching, classroom structure, assessment methods, and opportunities for collaboration. Thus, learning engagement is not only an individual effort but is also influenced by the surrounding environmental, social, and cultural conditions.

However, when analyzing the above studies, some limitations can be seen. Fredricks et al. (2004), although providing a detailed three-dimensional framework, did not clearly mention the role of cultural context and multicultural learning environment, an important factor for international students. In contrast, Kuh (2009) emphasized the role of the learning environment, but did not analyze in depth the effects of intercultural interactions on students' motivation and engagement behaviors. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of learning engagement needs to incorporate both individual aspects (e.g., effort, attitude, and learning strategies) and environmental aspects (e.g., social interactions, classroom structure, and lecturer support), while also considering the impact of culture and diversity of international students.

Concerning the research context at NTTU, international students' learning engagement in English classes is not only determined by their individual language ability and learning attitudes, but is also strongly influenced by their intercultural communication experiences. Students who feel respected and understood, and who have opportunities to engage in interactions in a culturally open environment, often demonstrate higher levels of engagement, behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively. On the contrary, if the classroom environment lacks support for intercultural communication or has cultural barriers, students are likely to fall into a state of passivity, anxiety, and reduced motivation to learn, leading to poor learning outcomes. Therefore, research on learning engagement in multicultural contexts, combined with students' perceptions and experiences of intercultural communication, is an important factor in understanding and improving the learning effectiveness of international students in Vietnam, while providing a practical basis for designing appropriate teaching activities and support policies.

2.4.2. The Relationship between Intercultural Interaction and Classroom Engagement

In multicultural classroom environments, intercultural interaction is considered an important factor in promoting students' learning engagement. Many international studies have shown that the level of student engagement, especially international students, is directly influenced by the quality of social and academic interactions they experience in the classroom (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). When students feel respected, understood, and have the opportunity to participate in a culturally open environment, they tend to participate more actively, both behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively. This means that students not only fully participate in learning activities but also show interest, motivation, and creativity in learning.

Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes the role of social factors in the learning environment, especially the interaction between learners and the classroom context, in shaping foreign language learning motivation. When students have the opportunity to interact, collaborate, and communicate with their peers from different cultures, they not only improve their language skills but also increase their confidence and willingness to participate in learning activities. From the perspective of Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), learning engagement is the result of a combination of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive factors, in which intercultural interaction acts as a catalyst, stimulating all three aspects.

Nevertheless, if analyzed critically, it can be seen that most international studies mainly focus on Western contexts or university environments with a high proportion of international students, with few studies specifically on English classes in developing countries such as Vietnam. Therefore, although the above results show that intercultural interaction has a positive impact on learning engagement, direct application to the Vietnamese context requires caution, as international students in Vietnam often face language barriers, communication styles, and cultural norms that are different from those in the West. If the classroom environment is not properly adjusted, these interactions may be limited, even leading to feelings of isolation, reduced motivation, and reduced engagement.

In connection with the research title at NTTU, the relationship between intercultural interaction and learning engagement becomes particularly important. International students in English classes not only learn the language but also experience cross-cultural communication situations. When lecturers actively facilitate students to share their views, collaborate on group projects, and openly discuss cultural issues, students will demonstrate higher levels of engagement, including active participation in lessons, maintaining positive learning attitudes, and proactively applying learning

strategies. Conversely, the lack of support for intercultural communication or potential cultural barriers can reduce self-confidence, create distance between students and lecturers, and thereby reduce learning effectiveness. Therefore, studying this relationship not only helps explain international students' learning behaviors and attitudes but also provides a theoretical and practical basis for lecturers and educational administrators to design appropriate support activities, methods, and policies to build a multicultural, comprehensive, and effective learning environment.

2.4.3. The Role of the Instructor in Promoting Intercultural Communication in the Language Classroom

In multicultural classrooms, teachers play a central role in creating a learning environment that promotes intercultural communication, not only imparting linguistic knowledge but also supporting students in developing communication skills and adapting to different cultural contexts. Byram (1997) emphasized that teachers are not only transmitters of linguistic knowledge but also facilitators, guiding students in developing intercultural communication skills, including attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness. Meanwhile, Lázár's (2003) research focused on integrating cultural elements into the curriculum, showing that using multicultural materials, organizing open discussions, and encouraging students to share personal experiences can enhance cultural awareness and communication skills, while improving students' confidence and interest in learning. Other studies have also highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity and lecturers' attitudes towards international students. Chen and Starosta (2005) found that lecturers who demonstrate openness, respect, and fairness in their assessments help students feel safe, thereby increasing their ability to actively participate in learning activities. Conversely, if lecturers lack cultural sensitivity or do not have specific support strategies, students may feel isolated or under-appreciated, leading to reduced motivation and engagement.

Comparing studies, it can be seen that the role of lecturers is understood at different levels. Some studies focus on the integration of culture into teaching content (Lázár, 2003; Allo, 2018), while others emphasize the interaction and social relationship between lecturers and students as a determinant of engagement and learning effectiveness (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). When synthesizing these perspectives, it can be seen that effective lecturers in promoting intercultural communication need to combine both factors: the quality of multicultural teaching content and an open, culturally sensitive communication attitude.

The role of lecturers becomes even more important in supporting international students in English classes at NTTU. Lecturers not only provide language instruction but also create opportunities for students to share cultural perspectives,

collaborate on group projects, and participate in open discussions. These activities not only enhance intercultural communication skills but also directly impact students' level of engagement in learning, including their behavior, emotions, and cognition. If teachers lack cultural sensitivity or do not adjust their teaching methods appropriately, international students may have difficulty engaging, leading to reduced learning effectiveness and a sense of belonging in the classroom. Therefore, research on the role of teachers in promoting intercultural communication is not only of theoretical significance but also provides an important practical basis for designing training programs, teaching activities, and policies to support multicultural students.

2.5. Perceptions

2.5.1. Explanation of Perceptions

In the educational context, perception is understood as the process by which individuals receive, organize, and interpret information based on their experiences, beliefs, values, and social context, thereby forming assessments, attitudes, and behavioral tendencies toward a specific educational phenomenon (Schunk, 2013). Perception is not static data, but a dynamic process, continuously adjusted by new experiences and feedback from the learning environment (Bandura, 1986). In this view, students' perceptions reflect not only their understanding of learning content, but also their feelings about the learning environment, their relationships with instructors and peers, and their ability to adapt to learning demands.

Different scholars have approaches that emphasize different aspects of perception. For example, Bandura (1986) focuses on the social-cognitive aspect, arguing that perceptions are formed through the process of observation, experience, and comparison with social norms. In contrast, Schunk (2013) emphasizes the individual and contextual factors, whereby perceptions are formed through the interaction between personal experiences, beliefs, values, and information received from the environment. Comparing these two perspectives, it can be seen that perceptions are influenced by both internal factors of the learner and external factors, especially in a multicultural classroom environment where cultural factors and interaction styles play an important role.

In the scope of this research, international students' perceptions may include views, feelings, and evaluations about the role, effectiveness, and challenges of intercultural communication in the classroom. Students' perceptions of the importance of intercultural communication will directly influence their motivation, attitudes, and learning behaviors, ranging from actively exchanging ideas and participating in group discussions to applying appropriate learning strategies in a multicultural environment. Conversely, negative perceptions or feelings of isolation can lead to reduced learning engagement, lack of confidence, and limited ability to interact in the classroom.

Thus, studying perceptions not only helps clarify how international students understand and evaluate intercultural communication in the classroom but also provides a basis for designing teaching strategies, support policies, and learning activities to enhance learning engagement and educational effectiveness in a multicultural environment. Perceptions, therefore, become an important bridge between learning experiences, intercultural interactions, and actual learning outcomes.

2.5.2. Factors Affecting Perceptions

International students' perceptions in the English classroom are not formed in a vacuum but are influenced by a complex set of interacting factors, including personal experiences, language proficiency, interactions with teachers and peers, and teaching structures and methods (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). Analyzing these factors helps to clarify how students form their evaluations of intercultural communication and their level of learning engagement. First, personal experiences and cultural backgrounds play a decisive role in shaping perceptions. Byram (1997) points out that students' previous learning habits, educational values, and communication styles influence how they interpret their learning behaviors and expectations in a new environment. Students from educational backgrounds that encourage speaking up, group discussion, and autonomous learning tend to be more active in participating in multicultural activities, while students from educational backgrounds that favor passive listening, note-taking, or individual learning may feel awkward and less confident.

Second, language proficiency is a factor that directly affects perceptions of classroom participation. Students with high English proficiency tend to understand lecture content easily, participate in discussions, and feel confident in intercultural communication, thereby forming positive perceptions of the classroom environment. In contrast, students with language difficulties may feel restricted, anxious, or shy about participating, leading to negative perceptions and reduced learning engagement (Peng, 2012).

Third, interactions with instructors and classmates are also important factors. According to Chen and Starosta (2005), feedback from instructors, instructor attitudes, opportunities for discussion, and experiences of success or difficulty in intercultural communication all shape perceptions of the level of safety, respect, and effectiveness in the classroom. Zhang and Hu's (2025) study also highlighted that students who feel connected and supported in a multicultural classroom develop positive perceptions, thereby engaging more actively in learning activities.

Fourth, teaching structure and methods, including factors such as assessment methods, participation requirements, and the extent to which cultural content is integrated into lessons,

also influence students' perceptions. Vaccarino (2009) pointed out that if the classroom applies purely culturally normative teaching methods, without adjustments for international students, their perceptions of fairness, appropriateness, and participation will be limited, thereby negatively affecting learning engagement.

Comparing the above factors, it can be seen that international students' perceptions result from the interaction between personal factors, such as experience and language proficiency, and environmental factors, such as social interaction and teaching methods. International and Vietnamese studies have emphasized that a lack of support or cultural sensitivity from lecturers and learning environments can reduce students' motivation, positive emotions, and engagement levels (Zhao et al., 2005).

In this study, understanding the factors that influence international students' perceptions of intercultural communication will help lecturers and educational administrators design appropriate activities, teaching methods, and support policies to enhance learning engagement, foster positive learning experiences, and build a comprehensive and effective multicultural classroom environment.

2.5.3. The Impact of Perceptions on Attitudes, Motivation, and Learning Behavior

Perceptions are not only the process of receiving and interpreting information, but also play a fundamental role in shaping important psychological variables in learning, such as attitudes, motivation, and behavior (Schunk, 2013). Studies on language learning show that positive perceptions of the learning environment and intercultural communication experiences have a direct impact on students' active participation, persistence in learning, and maintaining positive attitudes toward the subject (Dörnyei, 2001; Peng, 2012). Specifically, students who have positive perceptions of the role of intercultural communication (for example, feeling that cross-cultural exchanges help them improve their language skills, understand other cultural values, and create opportunities for social integration) tend to be more open, confident, and proactive in the classroom. They are willing to ask questions, participate in group discussions, share their opinions, and apply effective learning strategies. In contrast, students with negative perceptions, such as fear of cultural mistakes, feeling isolated, or lacking support from instructors and classmates, tend to withdraw, participate less, and have reduced motivation to learn, leading to poor learning outcomes (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Anyichie & Butler, 2023). Previous studies have shown that perceptions influence all three aspects of learning engagement. The first is behavioral engagement, meaning that students actively participate in learning activities, group discussions, assignments, and projects, reflecting their level of

commitment to learning. The second is emotional engagement, meaning that positive perceptions create a sense of attachment, satisfaction, and interest in the subject, while reducing anxiety and stress when having to communicate in a multicultural environment. The third is cognitive engagement, meaning that students invest intellectually, apply learning strategies, think critically, and adapt to different communication situations (Dörnyei, 2001; Peng, 2012).

In comparison, it can be seen that perception acts as a bridge between learning experiences and learning outcomes; it not only guides attitudes and behaviors in the classroom but also influences the level of confidence, initiative, and long-term commitment of international students. Students who clearly perceive the benefits of intercultural communication are more active in seeking information, exchanging with lecturers and friends, thereby improving learning effectiveness and cultural integration experiences (Marginson, 2014).

Relating to this study, understanding the impact of perceptions on international students' attitudes, motivations,

and learning behaviors is the basis for lecturers to design multicultural teaching strategies, create a supportive learning environment, and encourage intercultural communication. This not only enhances learning engagement but also contributes to building an inclusive, equitable, and effective classroom environment, suitable for the context of internationalization of education in Vietnam.

In the framework of this study, the ICC model provides a foundation for analyzing international students' perceptions and experiences in the English language classroom at NTTU. Specifically, the components of the model will be used to explain how international students perceive the role of intercultural communication in the classroom and analyze the impact of intercultural communication on learning engagement, through changes in students' attitudes, motivations, and behaviors. Thus, applying the ICC model not only helps the analytical framework of this study have a solid theoretical basis but also contributes to clarifying the connection between global theories of intercultural competence and international students' learning practices in the Vietnamese educational context.

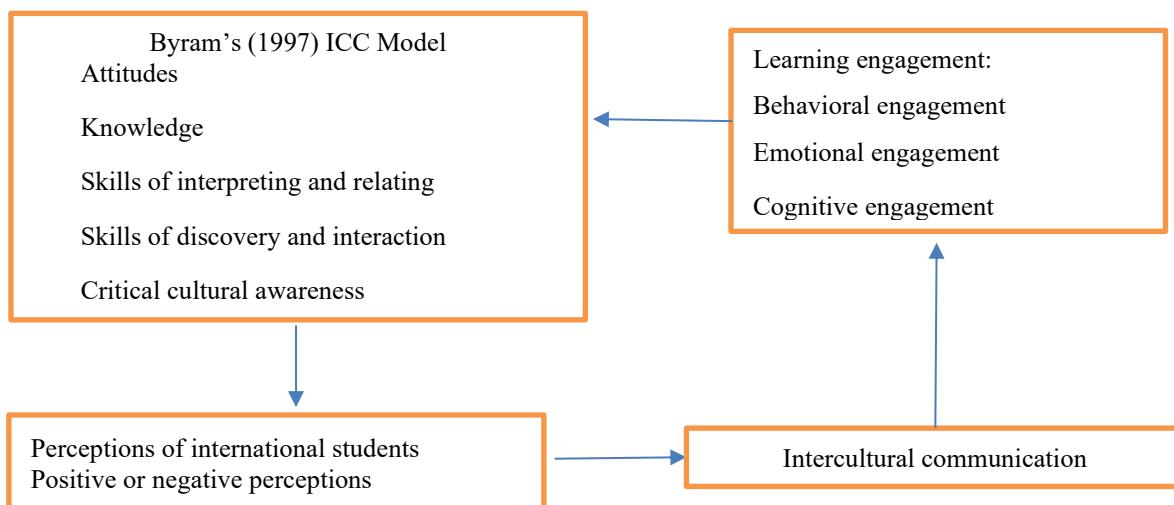


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework

3. Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively examine the perceptions of international students on intercultural communication in English language classrooms at NTTU, HCMC. Particularly, a quantitative method was deployed to investigate the perceptions of international students on the role of intercultural communication in English language classrooms through a questionnaire survey.

In parallel, a qualitative, phenomenological approach was applied to analyze the impact of intercultural communication experiences on students' level of engagement in English language classrooms. At the time of the study, NTTU had a

total of 203 international students enrolled across various faculties, who were from Laos and Cambodia. During their studies in Vietnam, these students primarily used Vietnamese as the main language of instruction and daily communication; therefore, English courses at NTTU were classified as non-compulsory and non-credit-bearing in order to reduce academic pressure associated with foreign language learning. At the time of data collection, approximately 120 international students were attending English language classes at the university. From this population, 64 international students voluntarily participated in the questionnaire survey in the quantitative phase, representing 53.3% of the total number of international students enrolled in English classes. According to Hair et al. (2010), sample adequacy in social science

research is determined not by response rate alone but by absolute sample size and the ratio of observations to measured variables; accordingly, smaller samples may be considered acceptable when the target population is limited and difficult to access. Given that international students at NTTU constitute a relatively small and specific population, the sample size was necessarily constrained; nevertheless, the participation of 64 students is considered appropriate for descriptive and exploratory analyses.

Furthermore, the questionnaire demonstrated strong internal consistency, as indicated by a high Cronbach's alpha coefficient = 0.914, thereby supporting the adequacy of the sample size for addressing the research objectives. Additionally, 6 international students were purposively selected in the qualitative phase to ensure cultural diversity and to obtain deeper information about intercultural communication experiences. The selection criteria required that participants had been studying at NTTU for at least two years and possessed at least an intermediate level of English proficiency. To enhance the diversity of the research sample, at least one participant was selected from among Cambodian students. The remaining interview participants were Lao students, as the majority of questionnaire respondents were from Laos.

3.1. Participants

The participants included 64 international students studying at NTTU in HCMC. There was a relatively equal distribution of gender among participants, with 46.9% female and 53.1% male. Students from Laos accounted for 85.9% of the sample, while Cambodian students represented 14.1%. Regarding academic majors: 17.3% of participants studied Business Administration, 42.1% Information Technology, 21.9% Medicine, 15.7% Pharmacy, and 3.1% Nursing. In terms of academic year, 35.5% were first-year students, 38.7% were second-year students, 8.1% were third-year students, 12.9% were fourth-year students, and 4.8% were classified as others. The majority of students (81.2%) had studied English in their home countries, whereas 18.8% had never studied the language before. The current level of English proficiency among international students was as follows: 62.5% at the Starter level, 35.9% at the Intermediate level, and 1.6% at the Advanced level.

After completing the questionnaire, 6 international students were purposefully selected for the interview phase to further examine the impact of intercultural communication experiences on their level of engagement in English language classrooms at NTTU. Purposeful sampling was employed to ensure that participants represented diverse cultural backgrounds and varying levels of classroom engagement, as indicated by their questionnaire responses. The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their personal experiences, perceptions, and feelings related to

intercultural communication in English learning contexts. This qualitative phase complemented the quantitative findings by providing in-depth insights into how intercultural interactions influence students' participation, motivation, and confidence in classroom activities. Through triangulation of questionnaire and interview data, the study aimed to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of international students' engagement in English language classrooms.

3.2. Data Collection Instrument

The tool of the research is known as the instrument that the researcher uses for collecting the necessary data for the study. In this research, a structured questionnaire is used to collect information from the sample of students. The questionnaire contains items that reflect the perceptions of international students on intercultural communications in English language classrooms at NTTU.

Participants were asked to express their level of agreement with various statements using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". In addition, the researcher also focuses on the interview to collect data from 6 selected international students. The combination of questionnaire and interview is likely to highlight valid and reliable findings.

3.2.1. Questionnaire

In this study, a questionnaire was designed with 25 items given to 64 international students at NTTU. It is formulated to collect the data that supports the research and to confirm findings from the preceding tools used in collecting the data. With the questionnaire, the researcher can collect a large amount of information from students in a short period of time and in a relatively effective way.

To obtain reliable data and minimize potential misunderstandings regarding international students' responses, all questions were presented in Vietnamese to ensure that respondents could comprehend them thoroughly and clearly.

The questionnaire consists of 2 parts:

Part A relates to the participants' personal information, such as gender, nationality, major of study, year of study, etc.

Part B focused on (i) perceptions and experiences of learning English among international students; (ii) intercultural communication practices in English classes; (iii) the students' perceptions of intercultural communication; (iv) challenges in a multicultural learning environment; and (v) the impact of intercultural communication on English language learning. The questionnaire comprised 25 items with 5 main categories. The following table will describe how the items are categorized.

Table 1. Items categorized in the questionnaire

Categories	Items
The perceptions and experiences of international students in learning English	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Intercultural communication in English language classrooms	6, 7, 8, 9, 10
The perceptions of international students on intercultural communication	11, 12, 13, 14, 15
Challenges in learning English in an intercultural environment	16, 17, 18, 19, 20
The impact of intercultural communication on English learning	21, 22, 23, 24, 25

3.2.2. Interview

An interview is considered to be one of the most effective tools to collect data for the study because it brings more insights into the research findings and explores the ways intercultural communication experiences affect international students' engagement in English language classrooms at NTTU. Furthermore, the interview provides more detailed

information as well as the attitudes of participants. The interviews were conducted by 6 selected international students. These participants were chosen to participate in semi-structured interviews based on an initial review of their questionnaire responses, through which these students demonstrated a clear interest in the research topic and showed enthusiasm by responding to the survey.

4. Findings

4.1. Findings from the Questionnaire

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the 5 questionnaire factors' mean scores

Descriptive Statistics					
Factors	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
PER1	64	2	5	3.41	0.660
CRO	64	1	5	3.38	0.670
PER2	64	2	5	3.62	0.545
CHA	64	2	5	3.33	0.720
IMP	64	2	5	3.56	0.658
Valid N (listwise)	64				

The mean scores (M) for all five factors are the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale, indicating generally positive perceptions of English learning and intercultural communication among the participants. The highest mean is observed for PER2 (M = 3.62), followed by IMP (M = 3.56), suggesting that students particularly value intercultural communication and perceive it as beneficial for their English learning. PER1 (M = 3.41) and CRO (M = 3.38) reflect

moderately positive evaluations of students' learning experiences and classroom-based intercultural communication practices. CHA (M = 3.33) has the lowest mean and the largest standard deviation, indicating that challenges in learning English in an intercultural environment are recognised but experienced with greater variability across students.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of international students' perceptions and experiences in learning English

Statements	Mean	SD
1. I do not encounter any difficulties in studying the English subject.	3.31	0.889
2. I am interested in participating in English lessons.	3.98	0.701
3. I can easily comprehend the content of English lectures delivered by the teacher.	3.23	1.050
4. I rarely make grammatical and vocabulary mistakes in English assignments.	3.11	0.893
5. I am encouraged to use English both inside and outside the classroom.	3.41	0.849

As seen in Table 3, mean scores ranged from M=3.11 to M=3.98, which meant that the participants showed both their agreement and neutral ideas on the statements. Specifically, the majority of students felt enthusiastic about participating in learning activities. Statement number two displayed that the participants were interested in participating in English lessons, with M=3.98 and SD=0.701. Their interest in learning English was an important factor in boosting motivation and participation in the classroom. Moreover, a large number of

the participants said that they were encouraged to use English both inside and outside the classroom (item 5: with M=3.41 and SD=0.849). This result reflected a relatively supportive learning environment.

On the other hand, the students had a neutral idea on the statement that they did not encounter any difficulties in studying the English subject (Item 1: with M=3.31 and SD=0.889). This meant that the participants generally did not

encounter too many difficulties in learning English, but the average agreement level indicated that a segment of the students still faced certain obstacles. Besides, the participants showed their average agreement level on their ability to understand English lectures delivered by English teachers (item 3: with $M=3.23$ and $SD=1.050$). In addition, the

participants stated that they rarely made grammatical and vocabulary mistakes (item 4). This statement had the lowest average score, with $M = 3.11$; $SD = 0.893$. This result meant that grammatical and vocabulary errors remained relatively common.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of intercultural communication in English language classes

Statements	Mean	SD
6. I frequently engage with lecturers during English classes.	3.11	0.928
7. I feel comfortable communicating in English with classmates from diverse cultural backgrounds.	3.28	0.881
8. I have learned new cultural knowledge through communication activities in English classes.	3.50	0.836
9. I am encouraged by English lecturers to share my personal opinions, even though my cultural background differs from that of most of my classmates.	3.50	0.797
10. I have the opportunity to work in groups with international peers in English classes.	3.53	0.854

As shown in Table 4, the lowest mean value was $M = 3.11$, and the highest one was $M = 3.53$, which indicated that participants expressed both agreement and neutral opinions regarding statements related to their perceptions of intercultural communication in English classes. In detail, most of the participants had the opportunity to work in groups with international friends in English classes (item 10: with $M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.854$). They frequently participated in group work with peers from various countries. Similarly, the participants also agreed that they learned new cultural knowledge through communication activities in English classes (item 8: with $M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.836$); and they were encouraged by English lecturers to share personal opinions despite cultural differences (item 9: with $M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.797$). These results

revealed a relatively open and supportive classroom environment for cultural diversity. Conversely, the participants' comfort level when communicating with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds was only average (item 7: with $M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.881$). This indicated that while many students felt quite comfortable, a portion still experienced difficulties due to cultural differences and language limitations. Furthermore, the participants had the lowest average score on the statement that they frequently engaged with their lecturers during English classes (item 6: with $M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.928$). This indicated a low level of interaction between students and instructors, possibly stemming from shyness or language.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of international students' perceptions of intercultural communication

Statements	Mean	SD
11. I believe that understanding my classmates' cultures helps me learn English more effectively.	3.50	0.797
12. I have the opportunity to improve my communication skills with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds in English classes.	3.53	0.796
13. I and my international classmates and I receive enthusiastic support from the instructor in English classes.	3.69	0.889
14. I make an effort to understand cultural differences in order to better comprehend English lessons.	3.66	0.623
15. I acknowledge that different cultures have distinct communication styles and behavioral norms in academic environments.	3.70	0.659

It was impressive that the mean scores of the participants' perceptions on intercultural communication were high, from $M=3.50$ to $M=3.70$. This meant that a majority of the participants agreed with the statements regarding perceptions of intercultural communication in the English language classroom. This result reflected that the students valued the importance of cultural understanding and intercultural interaction in the English language learning process. Specifically, the majority of the students had a clear

understanding of cultural diversity and how these differences affected communication in the classroom. They acknowledged that different cultures had distinct communication styles and behavioral norms in academic environments (item 15: with $M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.659$). Furthermore, the participants also agreed that they received enthusiastic support from instructors in English classes (item 13: with $M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.889$). This support contributed to creating a learning environment that encouraged cultural exchange and helped students become

more confident in communication. In addition, a majority of students indicated that they made an effort to understand cultural differences in order to better comprehend English lessons (item 14: with $M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.623$). This showed that the students actively participated in building intercultural understanding as part of their learning strategy. They also agreed that English classes provided opportunities to improve communication skills with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds in English classes (item 12: with $M = 3.53$, SD

$= 0.796$), reflecting the relatively frequent intercultural interaction. Finally, the participants believed that understanding their classmates' cultures helped them learn English more effectively (item 11: with $M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.797$). In conclusion, the results showed that international students had a positive perception of intercultural communication and appreciated the benefits that cultural understanding brought to English learning and classroom interaction.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of challenges in learning English in an intercultural environment

Statements	Mean	SD
16. I find it difficult to express myself clearly in English when talking with classmates from different cultural backgrounds.	3.38	0.807
17. I am afraid of making cultural mistakes when communicating in English.	3.31	0.852
18. I feel anxious or hesitant to participate in class discussions in English due to cultural differences.	3.36	0.932
19. I face challenges in establishing relationships with instructors or classmates from different cultural backgrounds due to language barriers	3.25	1.069
20. I find it difficult to adapt to different communication styles in English classes.	3.38	0.951

As shown in Table 6, the mean values ranged from $M = 3.25$ to $M = 3.38$, indicating that participants expressed a neutral level of agreement with statements about difficulties encountered in an intercultural English learning environment. This reflected that international students were aware of certain challenges, although these difficulties were not considered severe. Concretely, the participants neutrally said that they found it difficult to express their selves clearly in English when speaking with classmates from different cultures (item 16: with $M = 3.38$ and $SD = 0.807$); they also neutrally agreed that they had difficulty adapting to different communication styles in English classes (item 20: with $M = 3.38$; $SD = 0.951$). These results showed that expressing oneself and adapting to diverse communication styles are relatively common challenges for international students. Furthermore, participants moderately agreed with the statement that they felt anxious or hesitant to participate in class discussions due to cultural differences (item 18: $M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.932$). This result meant that cultural differences could affect students' confidence when participating in English-language exchange

activities. At a lower level, participants indicated that they feared making cultural mistakes when communicating in English (item 17, $M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.852$). Although the average score was not very high, this still showed that concerns about unintentionally violating cultural norms could hinder natural communication. Finally, the participants had the lowest average score on challenges in establishing relationships with instructors or classmates from different cultural backgrounds due to language barriers (item 19: $M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.069$). Although this was the lowest average, the high standard deviation suggests that the level of difficulty experienced was uneven among students; some students faced significant challenges, while others did not consider it a significant problem. In conclusion, the results indicated that international students experienced difficulties with expression, communication anxiety, and adapting to multicultural communication styles. However, the level of difficulty was moderate, suggesting they were still relatively well-equipped to cope in a multicultural learning environment.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the impact of intercultural communication on English learning

Statements	Mean	SD
21. I have chances to gain a deeper understanding of different cultures through learning English with peers from different countries.	3.59	0.886
22. I feel more motivated to learn English when communicating with international classmates in English classes.	3.64	0.897
23. I use English more naturally when communicating with peers from different cultural backgrounds.	3.30	0.849
24. I am able to hear a variety of English accents from peers in my English class.	3.47	0.816
25. I believe that the ability to communicate with classmates from different cultural backgrounds will be beneficial for both my academic studies and future career.	3.81	0.794

As shown in Table 7, the mean values ranged from $M = 3.30$ to $M = 3.81$, indicating that participants generally agreed with the statements regarding the impact of intercultural communication experiences on English language learning. This meant that intercultural communication played a positive role in promoting the level of engagement, motivation, and skill development of international students. Specifically, most participants believed that the ability to communicate with classmates from different backgrounds was beneficial for both their academic studies and future careers (item 25: $M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.794$).

This result showed that students highly valued the long-term value of intercultural communication competence, not only in the academic context but also in their future career orientation. Furthermore, participants reported feeling more motivated when communicating with international peers in English classes (item 22: $M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.897$). The result proved that intercultural interaction contributed to a more engaging learning environment, stimulating participation in classroom activities.

Additionally, opportunities for a deeper understanding of other cultures were also positively rated (item 21: with $M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.886$), indicating that cultural factors play a crucial supporting role in language learning. The participants also agreed that they heard a variety of English accents from international classmates (item 24: with $M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.816$).

Exposure to diverse pronunciations helped the students expand their ability to recognize sounds and adapt to English in real situations.

On the other hand, participants had a neutral view that they used English more naturally when communicating with peers from different cultural backgrounds (item 23: $M=3.30$; $SD=0.849$). While the average score remains in the slightly consensual range, this result suggests that not all students felt comfortable or natural communicating with international classmates, possibly due to language barriers or cultural differences.

In conclusion, the findings indicated that intercultural communication experiences had a positive impact on international students' engagement in English classes, particularly in increasing motivation, broadening cultural understanding, improving listening and speaking skills, and developing valuable skills for future studies and careers.

4.2. Findings from the Interview

To gain a deeper understanding of how intercultural communication experiences influenced international students' engagement in English language classes, interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The interview results supplemented and clarified the trends identified in the questionnaire, while also providing direct evidence from the learners themselves. The results were shown in themes as follows:

Table 8. Themes from student responses

Themes	Responses
Intercultural communication broadens understanding and increases motivation for learning.	S1, S4, S6
Intercultural communication experiences helped improve the naturalness and effectiveness of English communication.	S1, S2, S5
Cultural differences affect confidence and participation in classroom activities.	S1, S2, S6
Intercultural communication helped develop listening and speaking skills and adaptability to different English accents.	S4
Intercultural communication benefited academic and professional futures	S1, S2
Suggestions for improving the learning environment to enhance international student engagement	S1, S3

Theme 1: Intercultural communication broadens understanding and increases motivation for learning

The interview findings indicated that intercultural communication played a crucial role in expanding understanding and enhancing motivation for learning English among international students. This aligned with the quantitative results, where students showed a high level of agreement regarding learning about cultures through interaction ($M = 3.59$) and increased motivation when communicating with international peers ($M = 3.64$). Many

students emphasized that exposure to their classmates' cultures provided them with richer learning experiences:

“...When I talk to my friends about their cultures, engaging with them helps me understand these cultures in specific contexts that I might not encounter in a general learning program. From this, I can learn more vocabulary, phrasing, and how they express their cultural backgrounds through English, which enriches my experience not only in terms of language learning but also cultural learning.”

(Student 1)

This sharing demonstrated that cultural knowledge helped them naturally acquire new vocabulary and expressions.

Similarly, another student said:

“...When we understand our friends' culture, we tend to be ask more not just personal questions, but the whole history of that Country came from, how their economics work, or even the different of each family spend their whole life and that's increasing the ability for us to study language faster...”.

(Student 4)

These findings demonstrated that intercultural understanding fosters curiosity and expands language skills across various fields. Other students confirmed this positive impact. (S6) described, “*...It makes me understand English better and learn new cultural vocabulary that I didn't know before. It also encourages me to speak more confidently because we can share our experiences with each other...*”

(Student 6)

These speeches showed that intercultural communication not only helped students understand the material better but also fostered motivation, confidence, and enthusiasm; these are key factors driving engagement in English classes.

Theme 2: Intercultural communication experiences help improve the naturalness and effectiveness of English communication

The findings from interviews showed that students rated their natural English usage when communicating with classmates from different cultures as average ($M = 3.30$). This result meant that not all students felt completely comfortable in intercultural communication situations. However, interview data showed that many students made significant progress thanks to these interactions.

“...I started having daily conversations with my Vietnamese friends. These conversations are not about heavy or academic topics; instead, they are very casual discussions about everyday things like what to eat, where to go, or what we like. All of this has greatly contributed to my ability to think and use English naturally...”

(Student 1)

This result indicated that regular practice in a multicultural environment helped them develop more natural communication skills.

Similarly, the other student stated, “*I've worked in teams with people from many different countries. Communicating in English has helped me improve my listening skills and become more confident.*”

(Student 2)

This highlights the clear benefit of communication for listening and speaking skills. However, this experience was not uniform among the students.

One student candidly shared, “*I haven't experienced such a thing before.*”

(Student 5)

Which meant that some students still lacked opportunities for cross-cultural interaction. This explained why the average score on the questionnaire wasn't high, and also reflected that students' exposure to a cross-cultural environment depended on their individual level of participation and interaction opportunities.

Theme 3: Cultural differences affect confidence and participation in classroom activities

Findings from the questionnaire show that the level of naturalness and comfort in communicating in a multicultural environment remains at an average level, especially in item 23 ($M = 3.30$).

This is clearly reflected in the interview data. Many students stated that cultural differences made them feel anxious and lacking confidence when participating in classroom activities.

One of the students admitted, “*...I used to feel anxious about participating or speaking up, as I was afraid that my way of expressing might not fit and would cause misunderstanding...”*

(Student 1)

This indicates hesitation in speaking in front of classmates from different cultures. Another student stated, “*...If we don't communicate clearly or understand each other well, the group work may not progress smoothly...”* which reflected difficulties in cross-cultural group collaboration.

(Student 6)

Other student also affirmed, “Cultural differences affect how students participate in groups and their confidence in speaking.”

(Student 2)

These findings helped explain why international students' confidence and classroom engagement were only average in the quantitative results.

Theme 4: Intercultural communication helped develop listening and speaking skills and adaptability to different English accents

The findings from the questionnaire showed that students agreed they frequently heard many different English accents in class ($M = 3.47$). Interview analysis clarified this, particularly through the sharing of one student, who had interacted with students from many countries at exchange activities, “*I met a lot of students from all over the world, including China, Russia, the Philippines, and Thailand. They were amazing and very good at English, which challenged me to learn English in different accents and tones.*”

(Student 4)

This experience showed that exposure to diverse English accents not only helped learners broaden their language knowledge but also developed their listening and adaptability in communication. This was an important benefit, as familiarizing students with different English accents helps them become more confident when communicating in an international environment, while strengthening their listening and speaking skills in multicultural situations.

Theme 5: Intercultural communication benefited academic and professional futures

The findings from the questionnaire revealed that intercultural communication skills were crucial for their academic and professional futures. Interview data strongly reinforced this finding. As shared by one student:

“*...This intercultural exchange gives me deeper insights into culture, not only my own but also others', which allows me to use these valuable experiences in an international working environment.*”

(Student 1)

From the same perspective, one student stated:

“*These skills will definitely benefit me in the future - whether in the workplace, studying abroad, or traveling to different countries. I believe that I will use these communication skills later on, and they will be essential for my personal and professional development.*”

(Student 6)

These statements showed that students not only recognized the immediate benefits in the classroom but also appreciated the long-term value of intercultural communication skills. This reflected students' increasing preparation for a globalized context where cross-cultural communication competence was essential.

Theme 6: Suggestions for improving the learning environment to enhance international student engagement

Interview findings showed that students desired a more supportive learning environment to enhance their confidence

and engagement. One notable suggestion came from one student:

“*I hope there will be more group activities where we have the chance to use English to communicate on a smaller scale and connect with my peers, instead of using English only in front of the whole class. This would help us practice English while gradually building our confidence in communication.*”

(Student 1)

Another student also expressed a similar view, emphasizing the benefits of small groups:

“*Working in small groups allows international students to feel more comfortable and increase their willingness to communicate, as they have greater opportunities to practice English without the pressure of speaking in front of the entire class. This learning environment helps enhance students' confidence and engage them better.*”

(Student 3)

These suggestions indicated that students needed a safer and more friendly space to practice English without feeling pressured in a large class. Designing small group activities, increasing multicultural interaction, and creating a more supportive environment could help reduce cultural barriers, promote integration, and improve international student engagement in English classes.

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. The perceptions of international students on the role of intercultural communication in English language classrooms at NTTU

The findings from the questionnaire show that international students at NTTU have a positive perception of the role of intercultural communication in English classes. High average scores on statements related to understanding classmates' cultures, differences in academic communication styles, and support from instructors present students' awareness of the importance of cultural factors in foreign language learning.

This finding is consistent with Byram's (1997) view that language learning is inseparable from cultural learning, especially in multicultural educational environments. These findings align with Dörnyei's (2005) L2 motivational self-system, which argues that learners' self-beliefs, aspirations, and global identities significantly influence their engagement and persistence in language learning. Similarly, Ryan and Mercer (2010) emphasize that positive attitudes toward English often emerge from exposure to multicultural peer interaction and global communication needs, reinforcing the idea that the students' perceptions are grounded in real-world relevance rather than abstract classroom beliefs.

These findings are also consistent with previous studies such as Baker (2015) and Deardorff (2006), which emphasize that intercultural communication helps learners move from language use to a process of negotiating meaning, which is influenced by cultural identity and social context. The students' acknowledgment of the existence of different academic communication norms shows that they are progressively developing intercultural communication skills, including open-mindedness and critical thinking; these are two important components in Byram's (1997) ICC model. Byram's (1997) ICC model emphasizes that language learners should be exposed to authentic cultural interaction in order to develop critical cultural awareness and social empathy. Moreover, Deardorff (2006) argues that intercultural learning environments gradually cultivate respect, curiosity, and openness, key attributes reflected in the students' responses. Although the mean scores indicate agreement rather than strong agreement, they demonstrate that intercultural communication is recognized as an integral component of the English classroom experience and not merely an add-on to linguistic instruction.

The results from interviews further reinforced these findings. The students shared that learning and interacting with peers from different cultures broadened their perspectives and helped them better understand how to use English in diverse communication situations. This demonstrates that positive perceptions exist not only at a conceptual level but are also formed from practical learning experiences in the classroom. Thus, it can be affirmed that international students' perceptions of intercultural communication are consistent between quantitative and qualitative data; this clearly proves the role of cultural factors in the English language learning process. This aligns with Baker's (2015) argument that intercultural communication transforms language learning from a purely linguistic process into a negotiation of meaning shaped by cultural identities. Similarly, Kim's (2001) intercultural adaptation theory suggests that direct engagement with cultural diversity strengthens learners' adaptability, resilience, and identity negotiation. The high level of agreement in this table implies that students view intercultural communication as beneficial not only linguistically but also socially and psychologically, as it prepares them for real-world, global communication scenarios.

Such findings reflect Jackson's (2019) claim that intercultural classrooms can generate "productive discomfort," where cultural misunderstandings occur but eventually lead to deeper learning. Likewise, Nguyen (2022) notes that Southeast Asian multilingual learners often struggle with accent variation and cultural pragmatics, especially when exposed to English as a lingua franca rather than a single standardized form. Students' acknowledgment of these barriers highlights the need for more explicit scaffolding, culturally-responsive teaching approaches, and supportive

learning environments that normalize mistakes and gradual adaptation.

4.3.2. The impact of intercultural communication experiences on students' level of engagement in English language classrooms at NTTU

The findings show that intercultural communication significantly influences the learning engagement of international students, including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects. The results from the questionnaire indicate that students appreciate the positive impact of intercultural communication on learning motivation, confidence in using English, and the ability to develop listening and speaking skills in the classroom.

This finding is consistent with the model of Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), in which learning engagement is considered a multidimensional construct strongly influenced by the learning environment and social interactions. These findings reinforce the argument that intercultural learning environments foster adaptive linguistic competence and sociopragmatic awareness, essential for successful communication in global contexts (Byram, 1997). Students also reported that interacting with peers from different cultural backgrounds increased their intrinsic motivation and curiosity toward language learning, supporting Ryan and Deci's (2020) Self-Determination Theory, which states that diverse environments can enhance autonomy, relatedness, and competence- three core psychological drivers of active learning engagement.

The students tend to participate more actively in group discussions, collaborative work, and opinion exchange when the classroom facilitates intercultural communication. This is consistent with the research of Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005), which suggests that the quality of academic and social interaction is a determining factor in student engagement, especially among international students.

Interview results show that many students feel more comfortable, less anxious, and have a greater sense of belonging when they are respected and encouraged to share their personal cultural perspectives. This contributes to creating a psychologically safe learning environment to promote learning engagement.

Intercultural communication helps students develop critical thinking, adapt to different communication styles, and apply appropriate learning strategies in multicultural situations. These findings are consistent with Dörnyei's (2001) view, which emphasizes that motivation and engagement in foreign language learning are strongly influenced by social and interactive factors. Thus, intercultural communication not only supports language learning but also acts as a catalyst to promote the holistic learning engagement of international students.

4.3.3. Correlation between Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

A significant contribution of this study is the clarification of the strong correlation between the findings obtained from quantitative and qualitative methods. Findings from the questionnaire provided an overview of the cognitive trends and learning engagement levels of international students in English classes. Based on these results, a semi-structured interview was implemented to further explore students' personal experiences to better explain the findings obtained from the questionnaire.

The findings from the interviews complement and reinforce the findings from the questionnaire. Students' shared experiences of increased confidence, motivation, and class participation are shown through the high average scores in the groups of factors related to the impact of intercultural communication in the questionnaire. This demonstrates that the research process was conducted logically, from identifying agreement levels using quantitative methods to clarifying the causes of those agreement levels through qualitative methods.

The convergence between the quantitative and qualitative data enhanced the reliability and explanatory value of the study. At the same time, it confirms the suitability of the mixed research design in studying intercultural communication and learning participation. Thus, the study not only provides empirical evidence for existing theories but also contributes to enriching the understanding of the learning experiences of international students within university education in Vietnam.

5. Conclusion

The study “*The Perceptions of International Students on Intercultural Communication in English Language Classrooms at Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Ho Chi Minh City*” was conducted to explore how international students perceive, experience, and are impacted by intercultural communication during their English language learning. Based on data combining questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the study provides a comprehensive view of the role of intercultural communication in the engagement and learning effectiveness of international students.

Regarding the first research question, the findings show that international students have a positive perception of the

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role of intercultural communication. The majority of students appreciate the opportunity to interact with classmates from different cultures. They believe that this helps them broaden their cultural understanding, improve their English skills in communication situations, and develop confidence in the classroom. These findings suggest that intercultural communication is viewed by students as an essential component of English language classes.

However, alongside these positive perceptions, the findings point out some challenges related to international students' perceptions of the role of intercultural communication in English language classrooms at NTTU. Some students struggle to adapt to the diversity of academic communication styles, pronunciation differences, and culturally specific language usage. Furthermore, psychological barriers such as anxiety about communication, fear of making mistakes, and misunderstanding the intentions of classmates also affect the learning experience of international students. These challenges demonstrate that a positive perception does not necessarily mean students easily adapt to an interdisciplinary classroom environment.

For the second research question, the findings show that intercultural communication has a positive impact on the English language learning process and learning engagement of international students. Students agreed that interacting with multicultural classmates increased their motivation to learn, led to more active participation in discussions, and improved their language skills, particularly speaking and listening skills. This shows that intercultural communication acts as a driver of learning engagement and supports the development of students' communication skills within an English-language classroom setting.

However, the study presents some limitations in the impact of intercultural communication on students' learning. Some students believe that differences in English proficiency and cultural backgrounds can lead to misunderstandings in communication, reducing the effectiveness of group activities. Additionally, the lack of supportive and clear pedagogical strategies from instructors may prevent students from fully exploiting the benefits of an intercultural learning environment. These limitations suggest the need for appropriate pedagogical measures to minimize challenges and maximize the positive impact of intercultural communication on English language learning.

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