Impact of language programs and cultural immersion on intercultural competence and academic success of Northern Chinese students in Thai Universities

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to investigate the interconnections among language proficiency programs, cultural immersion activities, self-efficacy, intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and academic success among Northern Chinese students attending Thai universities. The primary objective is to elucidate the intricate dynamics that affect the development of ICC and academic achievement within the framework of cross-cultural education. By adopting a holistic perspective, this research seeks to address existing gaps in the literature and provide in-depth insights into the complex interplay of these factors. **Methodology**: Utilising a quantitative methodology, the research distributed 500 questionnaires to Northern Chinese students enrolled in Thai universities, yielding 350 valid responses, with data analysis conducted using SmartPLS software. Additionally, a mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating qualitative insights through interviews to enhance the quantitative findings. This methodological design facilitated a comprehensive exploration of language proficiency, cultural immersion, self-efficacy, ICC, and academic success, offering a multifaceted understanding of the subject matter. **Findings**: The findings reveal significant positive correlations among language proficiency programs, cultural immersion activities, self-efficacy, ICC, and academic success. Specifically, language proficiency programs were found to positively influence both ICC and academic achievement, with self-efficacy serving as a mediating factor in these relationships. Similarly, cultural immersion activities were associated with enhanced ICC and academic success, again mediated by self-efficacy. These results highlight the interconnectedness of these variables and underscore the necessity for a holistic approach in cross-cultural education. **Contribution**: This research contributes original insights by concurrently examining language proficiency, cultural immersion, self-efficacy, ICC, and academic success within a unified framework, and its significance lies in the practical implications for educators, institutions, policymakers, and international students, advocating for an integrated approach to cross-cultural education that recognises the mediating role of self-efficacy and promotes the development of culturally competent global citizens.

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Introduction

Cross-cultural competence is essential in today's era of globalisation, as it equips individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate a variety of situations (Lin et al., 2021). The present study investigates the roles of self-efficacy, ICC, academic achievement, language proficiency programmes, and cultural immersion activities among Northern Chinese students enrolled in Thai educational institutions. As the number of international students pursuing higher education abroad increases, the relevance of these dynamics becomes increasingly pronounced. Encountering significant linguistic, cultural, and intellectual challenges in a new context necessitates a thorough understanding of these factors (Dede Yildirim & Roopnarine, 2019). This research explores cross-cultural education and provides insights aimed at informing educational policy and practice. Studies on cultural immersion programmes and language proficiency activities are predicated on the notion that linguistic competence and cultural assimilation are crucial components of effective cross-cultural communication (Yu et al., 2021).

The investigation of self-efficacy as a mediating variable seeks to elucidate the psychological mechanisms underpinning academic success, cultural immersion, and language acquisition. This research aspires to enhance knowledge of cross-cultural education and its impact on global adaptability by analysing these interconnected factors (Huang, 2021). Previous studies have demonstrated that language proficiency programmes significantly improve overseas students' linguistic and cultural competencies. Language proficiency is a vital element of cross-cultural education, as it facilitates students' communication and adaptability within diverse cultural environments (Wang et al., 2023). Cultural immersion activities, including language exchange events, intercultural seminars, and study abroad experiences, have been instrumental in advancing intercultural competence programmes (Matthews et al., 2021). Such experiences expose individuals to multiple cultures, thereby fostering adaptation and the development of intercultural awareness. Moreover, self-efficacy significantly influences motivation, engagement, and outcomes across various educational settings (Murphy & Kelp, 2023). According to social cognition theory, beliefs regarding self-efficacy impact individuals' problem-solving approaches and their confidence in their ability to succeed. Consequently, self-efficacy is crucial in cross-cultural education as it influences students' linguistic confidence, cultural adaptability, and academic performance (Taherkhani et al., 2022).

Language proficiency programmes, cultural immersion activities, self-efficacy, ICC, and academic performance have been extensively investigated within the realm of cross-cultural education. Language proficiency programmes enhance communication skills and language acquisition among international students. These programmes, typically integrated into university curricula, are associated with improved language proficiency and cultural confidence. According to Gudmundsdottir et al. (2020), research highlights the necessity of incorporating cultural elements into language education. Studies in cross-cultural education have explored intercultural seminars and study abroad programmes as forms of cultural immersion. Such activities are shown to expose participants to diverse cultures and foster cross-cultural connections, which are essential for acquiring intercultural competence. Sheridan et al. (2022) assert that these encounters facilitate international cultural adaptation and enhance global understanding. Furthermore, cultural immersion activities provide various benefits, with long-term study abroad programmes positively impacting academic performance (Kang & Lee, 2020). Research indicates that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in influencing students' motivation, confidence, and adaptability in cross-cultural education contexts. Social cognition theory elucidates how self-efficacy beliefs affect cross-cultural behaviours and outcomes (Ducker, 2022). Empirical evidence suggests that self-

efficacy contributes to improved academic performance among international students, as it is vital for students to possess confidence in their ability to navigate academic challenges while studying abroad (Silva et al., 2021).

While significant progress has been made in understanding certain aspects of cross-cultural education, substantial gaps persist, particularly regarding language proficiency programmes, self-efficacy, ICC, academic success, and cultural immersion activities. Many studies have overlooked the intricate relationships among these factors. This research employs a complex methodology to connect language proficiency and cultural immersion, highlighting their interdependence in fostering ICC and academic performance (Jang et al., 2023). Prior studies predominantly focused on the effects of cultural proficiency and language immersion on individual outcomes, often neglecting self-efficacy as a mediating variable (Ducker, 2022). This investigation explores self-efficacy as a mediator between language proficiency, cultural immersion, ICC, and academic performance, advancing the understanding of cross-cultural education processes (Wang et al., 2023). Previous research has often lacked a comparative approach that considers diverse cultural and educational contexts, resulting in limited generalisability (Tan & Seidelson, 2023). By examining Northern Chinese students in Thai institutions, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap and provide insights for global education. The integration of various cultural backgrounds and educational environments elucidates the dynamics of cross-cultural education. Additionally, while many studies have relied on quantitative methods, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of subjective experiences related to academic achievement, self-efficacy, ICC, language learning, and cultural immersion (Li et al., 2022).

This study holds significant implications for international students, educational institutions, and policymakers in cross-cultural education. By examining language proficiency programmes, cultural immersion activities, self-efficacy, ICC, and academic performance, it addresses critical gaps in the literature (Katinka et al., 2024). The findings enhance understanding of effective learning strategies in diverse educational settings, providing valuable insights for educators to develop more impactful language curricula and immersive experiences. By using self-efficacy as a mediator, the research offers educators strategies to boost students' confidence, motivation, and adaptability in cross-cultural contexts. Additionally, it informs institutional policymakers on planning cross-cultural education programmes that foster linguistic and cultural integration. Ultimately, this study highlights the importance of language proficiency programmes and cultural immersion activities for international students in Thai universities, particularly Northern Chinese students. Understanding the impact of cross-cultural experiences on academic achievement and international communicative competence can enhance students' learning outcomes and inform their educational choices (Aziz et al., 2022). This research fosters the development of culturally competent and integrated global citizens within an interconnected society. Moreover, the findings may contribute to the formulation of policies that encourage collaboration, effective communication, and cross-cultural understanding in a diverse global context. By investigating the challenges of cross-cultural education, this study aims to enhance educational systems and expand knowledge in the field (Manee et al., 2023).

Literature Review

Language Proficiency Programs and Intercultural Communicative Competence

Language proficiency programmes enhance intercultural communicative competence, facilitating effective communication across cultures. The significance of these programmes lies in their capacity to foster intercultural communicative competence (Huang, 2021). Enhanced language skills not only support intercultural communication (John Vijayakumar & Karthikeyan, 2019) but also enable students to engage in conversations while appreciating cultural differences. Furthermore, language proficiency programmes promote cultural empathy and understanding. According to AUM theory, improved linguistic abilities can alleviate communicative anxiety and uncertainty during cross-cultural interactions. This reduction in cross-cultural anxiety contributes to the establishment of more positive interpersonal relationships (Ducker, 2022). Typically, language proficiency programmes incorporate cultural content, which familiarises learners with the customs, beliefs, and social norms of the target culture (Fathi et al., 2020). By acknowledging cultural differences and adapting communication strategies accordingly, learners can enhance their international communicative competence. However, language proficiency alone is insufficient; cultural immersion is crucial for developing sociocultural understanding. Martí et al. (2020) linked language proficiency with intercultural communicative competence, highlighting that such proficiency enhances students' cultural awareness and adaptability to various communication norms. Additionally Huang, (2021), posits that the paradigm of international communicative competence integrates linguistic, social, and strategic skills (Praditya et al., 2023).

H1: *Language proficiency programs have a significant impact on intercultural communicative competence.*

Cultural Immersion Initiatives and Intercultural Communicative Competence

Modern education increasingly prioritises ICC, with cultural immersion activities identified as effective tools for enhancing this skill. These activities improve cross-cultural communication by exposing participants to diverse cultures, challenging stereotypes, and presenting alternative perspectives (Duman et al., 2021). Direct engagement in the host culture fosters language proficiency, cultural awareness, and sensitivity. Research by Kang and Lee (2020) emphasises the role of cultural immersion in study abroad programs, revealing that immersive experiences enhance intercultural sensitivity and adaptability. Brief cultural immersion programs have been shown to improve intercultural communication and perceptions of cultural diversity (Huang et al., 2022). Buchanan et al. (2021) highlighted the positive impact of residential programs, noting that homestays facilitate cross-cultural communication through genuine familial and cultural interactions. While cultural immersion activities significantly enhance ICC, effective program design is crucial. Arif and Abrons (2020) demonstrated that service-learning programs incorporating reflection further improve intercultural competence by encouraging participants to re-evaluate their experiences and understand cultural differences. Duman et al. (2021) advocated for extended cultural immersion, which offers deeper assimilation into the host community, fostering relationships and a better understanding of cultural dynamics (Mohammed et al., 2024).

H2: *Cultural immersion initiatives have a significant impact on intercultural communicative competence.*

Language Proficiency Programs and Academic Success

Ducker (2022) identified a significant correlation between language proficiency and academic achievement, indicating that students with higher language skills tend to excel academically across various domains (Wang et al., 2023). To enhance language abilities, numerous educational contexts have implemented language proficiency programs. For example, Al-Jahwari et al. (2019) developed an intensive curriculum for international college students, resulting in notable improvements in academic performance due to enhanced linguistic skills and confidence. However, academic success is not solely dependent on linguistic competence; it also involves the ability to comprehend complex subjects and engage in academic discussions (Courtney., 2023). Yanagawa (2024) highlights that language proficiency programs foster essential academic language skills necessary for reading comprehension, essay writing, and classroom discussions. Furthermore, bilingual education enhances academic success by improving analytical and problem-solving skills (Noguerón-Liu, 2020). The effectiveness of language proficiency programs varies based on their duration and pedagogical approaches. (Vaquero et al., 2020) found that immersive language programs emphasizing academic and social language use significantly boost academic achievement through contextual learning.

H3: *Language proficiency programs have a significant impact on academic success.*

Cultural Immersion Initiatives and Academic Success

Courtney (2023) found that students engaged in cultural immersion programs achieved better academic performance, linking cultural immersion to enhanced adaptability, analytical thinking, and perspective-taking. Huang et al. (2022) showed that students who consistently participated in immersion programs had higher GPAs and academic growth, indicating that such programs positively influence academic achievement over time. However, the specific impact of cultural immersion on academic performance remains unclear. Kang and Lee (2020) emphasized the need to identify effective cultural immersion programs, noting that study abroad experiences have a more significant effect on academic performance compared to shorter activities. (Duman et al., 2021) explored integrating cultural elements into academic curricula, which improved both cultural competence and academic outcomes for students. Additionally, Neha et al. (2020) highlighted that individual traits, such as personality and intercultural experiences, influence the academic benefits gained from cultural immersion programs (Minh et al., 2023).

H4: *Cultural immersion initiatives have a significant impact on academic success.*

Self-Efficacy as Mediator

The study by Tsang and Lo (2020) supports the concept of self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks and achieve goals. In the context of language acquisition, self-efficacy significantly influences motivation, persistence, and the development of linguistic and cultural competence. There is an overlap between intercultural communicative competence and language proficiency programs. Taherkhani et al. (2022) found that a rigorous language proficiency program not only enhanced international communicative competence but also bolstered self-efficacy, thereby promoting cross-cultural engagement. Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) further demonstrate that self-efficacy serves as a mediating factor; language proficiency and communicative efficacy programs improved self-cultural attitudes and intercultural competence. The findings indicate that an individual's perceived ability to navigate

diverse cultural contexts and communicate in a foreign language is vital for enhancing intercultural communicative competence. Thus, it is essential for language proficiency programs to incorporate cultural adaptation elements to support learners' self-efficacy and intercultural communicative competence. Courtney (2023) examined cultural adaptation training within language programs, revealing that such training enhances self-efficacy and, consequently, confidence and success in cross-cultural communication.

H5: *Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between Language proficiency programs and intercultural communicative competence.*

According to Belda-Medina (2022), self-efficacy may moderate the relationship between cultural immersion activities and ICC. College students participating in study abroad programmes demonstrated increased self-efficacy and intercultural communicative efficacy. This finding highlights the importance of self-confidence in one's ability to navigate and communicate across different cultures as a key link between cultural immersion and intercultural proficiency. Ducker (2022) defines self-efficacy as the confidence in one's capability to plan and execute activities to address various situations. Cultural immersion fosters intercultural communicative efficacy; individuals who are confident, resilient, and enthusiastic engage more effectively in cross-cultural interactions. Xu and Luo (2024) examine self-efficacy as a moderator of intercultural communicative competence across different domains. They suggest that self-efficacy mediates the development of foundational international communication skills, as well as advanced competencies such as managing intercultural conflicts and navigating complex cultural contexts. This comprehensive perspective illustrates the impact of self-efficacy on various dimensions of intercultural communicative competence. Courtney (2023) asserts that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between intercultural communicative competence and cultural immersion activities, with cultural immersion enhancing self-efficacy and thereby facilitating intercultural communication. Thus, self-efficacy and intercultural communicative competence create a cyclical relationship through cultural immersion.

H6: *Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between cultural immersion initiatives and intercultural communicative competence.*

Bandura (1977) self-efficacy theory elucidates how beliefs in one's skills influence behaviour, motivation, and academic success. Self-efficacy enables students to overcome language barriers, thereby enhancing academic achievement. Part et al. (2023) demonstrate that comprehensive language proficiency programmes positively impact academic performance, indicating a link between language proficiency and academic success. Ngo (2019) suggests that self-efficacy influences both language proficiency programmes and academic outcomes, with language specialists exhibiting higher self-efficacy and improved academic performance. The structure of language proficiency programmes significantly affects learners' self-perceptions, which in turn influences academic success. Yeldham and Gao (2021) found that task-based language programmes enhance both language proficiency and self-efficacy, ultimately affecting academic performance. The multifaceted role of self-efficacy as a mediator in language proficiency programmes and academic achievement remains complex, with its moderating effects varying based on objectives and language-learning experiences.

H7: *Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between Language proficiency programs and academic success.*

Cultural immersion programmes aim to foster both academic and personal growth by

exposing participants to diverse cultural contexts. These programmes positively influence academic achievement, with students exhibiting higher self-efficacy more actively engaging in immersive experiences, thus enhancing their academic performance (Duan et al., 2022). Research indicates that self-efficacy is linked to both academic success and cultural immersion (Govorova et al., 2020), as students with strong cultural competence and navigation skills tend to demonstrate greater self-efficacy. Evaluating the impact of cultural immersion on academic achievement and self-efficacy is essential, as more rigorous immersion programmes significantly enhance both self-efficacy and academic performance. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1:

H8: *Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between cultural immersion initiatives and academic success.*
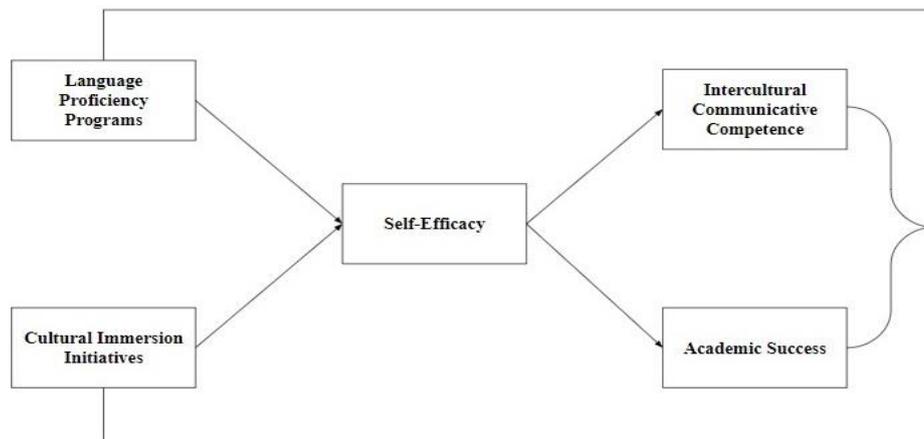
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Population:

This quantitative study investigated the enrolment of Northern Chinese students in Thai educational institutions. The cohort was selected to explore the impact of cross-cultural education on self-efficacy and academic performance within a demographic engaged in cultural immersion programs. Given the increasing number of Chinese students pursuing higher education in Thailand, the research specifically targeted Northern Chinese students enrolled in Thai universities. By focusing on this demographic, the study offered valuable insights into the academic experiences of a distinct group facing cultural and linguistic challenges. The comprehensive analysis examined the influence of cultural immersion on academic performance and self-efficacy among Northern Chinese students attending Thai universities, incorporating various demographic characteristics.

Sample Size:

This research comprised a cohort of Northern Chinese students attending Thai universities. A questionnaire was disseminated to collect a representative sample of the public's experiences with

cultural immersion. Out of 500 distributed surveys, 350 responses were deemed valid. To ensure statistical validity and relevance, the initial distribution included 500 questionnaires. The achieved response rate of 70% (350 out of 500) enhances the reliability of the data. The sample size of 350 permits a statistical analysis of the relationships among self-efficacy, academic achievement, and cultural immersion. The insights garnered from the responses of Northern Chinese students participating in cultural immersion programs at Thai universities provide valuable and significant perspectives.

Sampling Technique:

The participants in this quantitative study were selected through stratified random sampling. Northern Chinese college students in Thailand were categorised by academic discipline, gender, and academic standing. This stratification ensured diverse demographic representation to analyse how cultural immersion programs impact self-efficacy and academic achievement. Research participants were randomly recruited from each group, which minimised random sampling bias and ensured that the sample accurately reflected the population characteristics. Stratified random sampling enhances the study's capacity to generalise findings to a broader population of Northern Chinese students at Thai institutions. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the relationships while accounting for demographic disparities.

Data Collection Method:

Thai academic institutions administered structured surveys to Northern Chinese students to evaluate their participation in cultural immersion programs, perceptions of self-efficacy, and indicators of academic achievement. A range of survey questions and assessments facilitated the collection of data in a systematic manner, ensuring consistency in responses. Participants received clear instructions for completing the online questionnaires, enabling efficient data collection from a diverse group across various locations. The structured questionnaire format supported quantitative analysis, aligning with the research strategy aimed at examining statistical relationships between variables. This approach enhanced the precision and effectiveness of the quantitative research.

Data Analysis Technique (SPSS):

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed for the analysis of quantitative data due to its user-friendly interface and flexibility in various statistical techniques, making it particularly suitable for researchers with limited statistical expertise. Initially, descriptive statistics were utilised to summarise the dataset, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, thereby facilitating a preliminary exploration of trends and variability in academic achievement, self-efficacy, and cultural immersion. Subsequently, a series of inferential statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS. Correlation analyses investigated the relationships among self-efficacy, academic achievement, and cultural immersion, while regression models were employed to ascertain the predictive influence of self-efficacy and cultural immersion on academic success, accounting for relevant covariates. The rapid statistical analysis capabilities of SPSS facilitated the identification of trends, patterns, and correlations within the data, enhancing the robustness of quantitative findings and enabling a comprehensive evaluation of the research questions and hypotheses.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the primary constructs of the study: language proficiency program, cultural immersion initiatives, self-efficacy, intercultural communication competence, and academic performance. The mean scores indicate the central tendencies of participants' responses, while the standard deviations reflect the variability within those responses. The language proficiency program exhibits a high mean score of 4.21, suggesting that participants generally perceive it as beneficial; however, the moderate standard deviation of 0.76 indicates some variability in perceptions. In contrast, cultural immersion initiatives have an even higher mean of 4.62, indicating significant perceived value, with a lower standard deviation of 0.69 suggesting a consensus among participants regarding the benefits of these activities, highlighting their effectiveness in enhancing cultural knowledge and competence. Self-efficacy scores average at 3.89, accompanied by a larger standard deviation of 0.79, indicating a lower yet positive perception, with greater variability reflecting diverse experiences and individual characteristics influencing participants' confidence in their abilities. Finally, intercultural communication competence and academic performance yield mean scores of 3.93 and 4.52, respectively, with standard deviations that fall between those of the language proficiency program and self-efficacy, indicating moderate levels of competence and success alongside some variability among participants.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mini	Maxi
Language Proficiency Program	4.21	0.76	1	5
Cultural Immersion Initiatives	4.62	0.69	1	5
Self-Efficacy	3.89	0.79	1	5
Intercultural Communicative Competence	3.93	0.68	1	5
Academic Success	4.52	0.66	1	5

Table 2 presents the skewness and kurtosis scores, which indicate the normality of each construct's distribution. Skewness measures the asymmetry of the distribution, while kurtosis assesses the heaviness of the tails or the presence of extreme values. The language proficiency program exhibits a left-skewed distribution with a skewness score of -1.368, suggesting a slight left tail, indicating that some participants rated the program lower than the mean. The positive kurtosis score of 1.485 indicates heavier tails and a more peaked central region, suggesting the presence of outliers or extreme responses. Similarly, cultural immersion initiatives display a leftward skewness of -0.965, reflecting generally high ratings from participants, albeit with a minor left tail. The positive kurtosis of 1.262 suggests that this distribution may also contain outliers or extreme responses due to its heavier tails and peaked core. In contrast, self-efficacy, intercultural communication skills, and academic performance show minimal skewness and kurtosis, indicative of normal distributions. Their skewness scores (-0.851, 0.689, and -0.644) are closer to zero, suggesting greater symmetry. Correspondingly, the kurtosis values of 0.651, 0.315, and 0.322 are near zero, indicating lighter tails and a less pronounced peak in their distributions.

Table 2

Normality Assessment

Construct	Skewness	Kurtosis
Language Proficiency Program	-1.368	1.485
Cultural Immersion Initiatives	-0.965	1.262
Self-efficacy	-0.851	0.651
Intercultural Communicative Competence	0.689	0.315
Academic Success	-0.644	0.322

Table 3 presents a comparative analysis of the Language Proficiency Program (LPP), Cultural Immersion Initiatives (CII), Self-efficacy (SE), Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), and Academic Success. The correlation values range from 1, indicating a perfect positive correlation, to -1, indicating a perfect negative correlation, with 0 representing no relationship. Notably, the strong positive correlations between the Language Proficiency Program and Cultural Immersion Initiatives (0.790) and Self-efficacy (0.761) imply that participants who evaluate language proficiency programs favourably also tend to have positive assessments of cultural immersion initiatives and self-efficacy. This suggests a potential interrelationship among these constructs in the context of language learning. Furthermore, participants who appreciate cultural immersion initiatives demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy, intercultural communicative competence, and academic success, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.693 to 0.812. This indicates that a positive perception of cultural immersion projects may enhance both language acquisition and academic achievement.

Table 3

Correlation Analysis

	LPP	CII	SE	ICC	AS
Language Proficiency Program	1.00				
Cultural Immersion Initiatives	0.790	1.00			
Self-Efficacy	0.761	0.789	1.00		
Intercultural Communicative Competence	0.602	0.771	0.796	1.00	
Academic Success	0.677	0.693	0.812	0.793	1.00

The reliability analysis reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Language Proficiency Program	0.93
Cultural Immersion Initiatives	0.84
Self-Efficacy	0.81
Intercultural Communicative Competence	0.86
Academic Success	0.91

Table 5 presents the outer loadings of the structural equation model for latent variables and their corresponding items. These outer loadings indicate the strength and direction of the relationships between each observed variable and its associated latent construct. The outer loadings for the language proficiency program range from 0.614 to 0.762, with LPP5 exhibiting the

highest loading at 0.762, signifying a strong connection to the latent variable. Cultural immersion initiatives display outer loadings between 0.606 and 0.678, with CII5 showing the highest loading at 0.678, indicating its reliability as a measure of perceptions related to cultural immersion. The outer loadings for self-efficacy range from 0.658 to 0.702, with SE2 having the highest loading at 0.702, establishing it as a key indicator. Outer loadings for intercultural communicative competence range from 0.637 to 0.645, suggesting moderate to strong relationships between the items and the latent variable. Lastly, the outer loadings for academic success vary from 0.628 to 0.798, with AS2 having the highest loading at 0.798, indicating its significant influence on the measurement of academic achievement within the model.

Table 5

Outer Loadings

Variables	Item	Outer Loadings
Language Proficiency Program	LPP1	0.790
	LPP2	0.654
	LPP3	0.761
	LPP4	0.614
	LPP5	0.762
Cultural Immersion Initiatives	CII1	0.629
	CII2	0.606
	CII3	0.624
	CII4	0.637
	CII5	0.678
	CII6	0.609
	CII7	0.617
Self-Efficacy	SE1	0.682
	SE2	0.702
	SE3	0.658
Intercultural Communicative Competence	ICC1	0.639
	ICC2	0.645
	ICC3	0.637
Academic Success	AS1	0.628
	AS2	0.798
	AS3	0.771
	AS4	0.780
	AS5	0.634

Table 6 presents the R Square values for intercultural communicative competence and academic success within the structural equation model. R Square, also known as the coefficient of determination, quantifies the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables in the model. The R Square value for intercultural communicative competence is 0.620, indicating that the independent variables in the model account for 62% of the variance in participants' intercultural communication skills. This suggests that the factors and constructs explored in the study significantly contribute to the variability in intercultural communicative competence among participants. In terms of academic success, the R Square value

is 0.583, reflecting that the model explains 58.3% of the variance in academic performance. This substantial R Square value underscores the significant influence of the model's variables and constructs on participants' academic success, providing valuable insights into the determinants of academic performance.

Table 6

R Square

Dependent Variable	R Square
Intercultural Communicative Competence	0.620
Academic Success	0.583

Table 7 presents the results of the regression analysis examining the relationships between language proficiency programs, cultural immersion initiatives, intercultural communication ability, and academic performance. The analysis indicates a significant positive correlation between language proficiency programs and intercultural communication ability, with a beta coefficient of 0.63, a t-value of 3.963, and a p-value of 0.000. This finding suggests that participants in language proficiency programs demonstrate enhanced intercultural competence. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that engagement in cultural immersion initiatives is associated with improved intercultural communication skills, evidenced by a beta coefficient of 0.39, a t-value of 5.448, and a p-value of 0.000. The impact of language proficiency programs on academic success is also noteworthy, as indicated by a beta coefficient of 0.27, a t-value of 4.908, and a p-value of 0.000, suggesting that these programs contribute positively to academic performance. Similarly, cultural immersion efforts significantly enhance academic performance, as reflected by a beta coefficient of 0.58, a t-value of 7.681, and a p-value of 0.000. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of language proficiency and cultural immersion programs in fostering both intercultural communication skills and academic success.

Table 7

Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	Beta (β)	T Value	P Value
LPP -> ICC	0.63	3.963	0.000
CII -> ICC	0.39	5.448	0.000
LPP -> AS	0.27	4.908	0.000
CII -> AS	0.58	7.681	0.000

Table 8 presents the mediation analysis results examining the indirect effects of self-efficacy on intercultural communicative competence and academic success through language proficiency programs and cultural immersion initiatives.

Table 8

Mediation Analysis

Path	Beta (β)	T Value	P Value
SE -> LPP -> ICC	0.126	3.662	0.000
SE -> CII -> ICC	0.137	8.447	0.000
SE -> LPP-> AS	0.684	5.368	0.000
SE -> CII -> AS	0.248	3.877	0.000

The findings indicate significant indirect pathways from self-efficacy to both outcomes. Specifically, self-efficacy positively influences intercultural communicative competence, with an indirect effect through language proficiency programs (Beta = 0.126, T-value = 3.662, P-value = 0.000) and a stronger effect via cultural immersion initiatives (Beta = 0.137, T-value = 8.447, P-value = 0.000). For academic success, a substantial positive indirect effect of self-efficacy is observed through language proficiency programs (Beta = 0.684, T-value = 5.368, P-value = 0.000) and a significant effect through cultural immersion initiatives (Beta = 0.248, T-value = 3.877, P-value = 0.000). These results suggest that self-efficacy positively contributes to both intercultural competence and academic success, with its influence partially mediated by engagement in language programs and cultural immersion initiatives.

Discussion

This study investigates the impact of language proficiency programs and cultural immersion activities on ICC among Northern Chinese students in Thai institutions. The findings confirm that these programs enhance ICC, aligning with previous research indicating that structured language proficiency initiatives improve students' ability to engage in diverse cultural contexts (Belda-Medina, 2022; Xu & Luo, 2024). The integration of cultural components in curricula aids students in adapting to diverse cultures, reinforcing the notion that language education must encompass both linguistic and cultural elements (Saka et al., 2021). The relationship between ICC and language proficiency highlights the significance of language in cross-cultural communication (Ionov et al., 2023), as language acquisition significantly influences intercultural competence. Additionally, the study finds that cultural immersion activities, such as study abroad programs and language exchanges, enhance ICC, with participants displaying greater intercultural sensitivity and adaptability (Mendez et al., 2021; Shih et al., 2022). These immersion experiences foster genuine cultural connections, supporting theoretical frameworks that emphasize the value of immersive learning (Ardıç & Çiftçi, 2019).

The duration and intensity of cultural immersion activities significantly impact ICC, with longer, more rigorous programs yielding greater improvements (Guo et al., 2022). Data indicates that language proficiency programs enhance academic performance among Northern Chinese students in Thai colleges, corroborating previous research linking language proficiency to academic success (Curle et al., 2024). Participants in intensive language programs tend to perform better in subsequent coursework, highlighting the importance of language proficiency for understanding course content and producing high-quality academic work. However, the effectiveness of these programs relies on aligning academic curricula, program design, and training (Courtney 2023). Additionally, cultural immersion activities, such as study abroad and language exchanges, are shown to boost academic achievement, aligning with prior findings that immersive experiences enhance performance (Zhang et al., 2024).

 The duration and intensity of cultural immersion programs were assessed for their impact on academic achievement. The findings indicate that longer and more intensive programs correlate with increased academic performance, aligning with Vellanki et al. (2022), who reported sustained academic benefits from ongoing cultural immersion activities. Furthermore, the study revealed that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between language proficiency programs and intercultural communicative competence among Northern Chinese students in Thai universities. According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs significantly influence individuals' behaviors, motivations, and ability to undertake challenging tasks. The results suggest that language proficiency programs enhance participants' self-efficacy and linguistic capabilities,

thereby improving their confidence in language use and cross-cultural communication. This positive relationship between self-efficacy and ICC supports the findings of Irgin and Erten (2020), emphasizing the importance of self-efficacy in enhancing learners' international communication skills. Consequently, teaching strategies that prioritize language acquisition while fostering students' confidence in applying their language skills across diverse cultural contexts can significantly benefit educators and program providers. Self-efficacy serves as a critical link between cultural immersion activities and intercultural communicative competence.

The positive correlation supports Bandura's notion that self-efficacy enhances engagement with diverse cultures, thereby improving ICC. Participants in cultural immersion activities demonstrated higher self-efficacy, which corresponded with increased ICC levels, aligning with (Can et al., 2022). Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between ICC and cultural immersion, highlighting its role in psychological processes during such experiences. To maximize the impact of cultural immersion, educators should focus on strengthening students' self-efficacy beliefs. The study also indicates that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between language proficiency programs and academic achievement among Northern Chinese students in Thai institutions, supporting social cognitive theory. Language proficiency programs enhance self-efficacy (Taherkhani et al., 2022), as students gain foreign language skills and confidence in their academic performance. These findings align with Dalman and Plonsky (2022) and underscore the significant role of self-efficacy in influencing academic success and language proficiency, suggesting that programs enhancing self-confidence can improve academic integrity and language skills. The study highlights the importance of integrating psychology into language proficiency programs for international students. It suggests that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between academic success and participation in cultural immersion activities. This finding aligns with Ngo (2019), indicating that individuals with higher self-efficacy engage in academic activities more confidently, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Participation in cultural immersion activities enhances self-efficacy, with language exchanges and intercultural lectures contributing to academic confidence. These results support the link between self-efficacy and academic performance (Yeldham & Gao, 2021), demonstrating how psychological factors influence academic outcomes. Thus, measuring and developing self-efficacy in cultural immersion programs may enhance academic performance.

Conclusion

This study explored the effects of self-efficacy, cultural immersion programs, and language proficiency activities on academic performance and ICC among Northern Chinese students. It contributes to knowledge that informs cross-cultural education for policymakers and educators. The findings reveal a positive impact of language proficiency programs on ICC, highlighting the need for simultaneous incorporation of cultural and linguistic aspects in language education. Cultural immersion activities, such as seminars and study abroad programs, enhanced intercultural awareness, with longer and more intense programs yielding better results. Empirical research demonstrates that cultural immersion improves academic performance, showcasing the benefits of diversified education. Notably, self-efficacy emerged as a mediator in the relationships studied, aligning with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which posits that confidence in skills influences learners' outcomes and motivation. Thus, self-efficacy plays a crucial role in mediating cognitive, linguistic, and cultural immersion experiences.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study explores the complex relationships between academic success, self-efficacy, language proficiency programs, cultural immersion activities, and ICC. It highlights the need for a holistic approach to acquiring intercultural competence that integrates both language and cultural elements. The findings underscore the importance of self-efficacy as a mediator in these relationships, suggesting that enhancing students' confidence can positively impact their engagement in language acquisition and cultural immersion. To maximize the benefits of language education, programs should incorporate real-world applications and cultural experiences, such as study abroad opportunities and language exchanges, which allow students to practice their skills in authentic contexts. Building self-efficacy through supportive environments, active participation, and constructive feedback is essential for student success, and educational institutions can further promote self-efficacy by implementing mentoring programs and peer support networks. The study's implications extend to cross-cultural education policies, urging educators and policymakers to actively integrate cultural components into language programs. By funding diverse cultural immersion activities and recognizing the role of self-efficacy, institutions can enhance students' ICC and academic performance. This comprehensive approach can significantly improve cross-cultural education outcomes and inclusivity, ultimately fostering a more effective learning environment for students navigating an increasingly globalized world.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study, while insightful, has limitations that affect the interpretation and applicability of its findings. Firstly, it focuses exclusively on Northern Chinese university students in Thailand, which restricts the generalizability of the results. Future research should expand the sample to include students from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds to enhance external validity. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported measures for academic performance, self-efficacy, ICC, and language proficiency may introduce biases. Incorporating objective metrics, such as academic records and proficiency tests, could provide a more comprehensive view of these relationships. Moreover, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causation or temporal connections among the variables. Longitudinal studies are recommended to track changes over time and better understand the dynamic interactions between self-efficacy, ICC, language proficiency, cultural immersion, and academic performance. Lastly, the quantitative approach may overlook the complexities of participants' experiences; thus, integrating qualitative methods like interviews and focus groups could offer deeper insights into the intricate relationships involved. Future research should consider mixed method approaches to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data for a comprehensive understanding of complex systems. While this study identified language proficiency programs and cultural immersion activities as influential factors in academic success and ICC, including self-efficacy, it may have overlooked other relevant variables. Expanding the framework to include factors such as motivation, personality traits, and cultural intelligence could provide deeper insights into the dynamics of cross-cultural education.

Future research should explore the impact of cross-cultural education on employment and global citizenship, emphasizing the roles of self-efficacy, language proficiency, and cultural immersion in preparing graduates for diverse professional environments. Investigating technology initiatives in cross-cultural education is essential, particularly as virtual platforms gain

prominence for language acquisition and cultural engagement. Additionally, understanding how mentorship and peer networks can enhance students' self-efficacy and cultural competencies will be beneficial. Studies on personality traits and their influence on language programs and cultural immersion could further enhance cross-cultural education. Comparative analyses of different cultures and educational systems may help identify effective cross-cultural learning strategies, enabling institutions to improve students' competencies in this area.

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