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### **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on the relationship between International English Language Testing System (IELTS) speaking scores and the intercultural communication competence (ICC) of two groups of Chinese speakers. Chinese international students typically experience difficulty when studying in English-speaking countries, so it is paramount to prepare them adequately with the necessary ICC to succeed abroad. This study started with a literature review providing an overview of ICC and the usefulness of IELTS in preparing students to achieve a high level of competence. The effectiveness of IELTS as a predictor of ICC was examined with a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. For the quantitative analysis, the participants were given a questionnaire that asked them to self-report on the Intercultural Communicative Competence Self-Report Scale. These results were then compared to their IELTS speaking scores. Additionally, participants were invited to participate in an additional interview to obtain qualitative data. These data supported previous findings in highlighting the strong relationship between students' IELTS speaking scores and ICC, even with regard to measuring speaking skills. The data supported the conclusion that linguistic competence should not be the sole objective of a successful IELTS exam or an efficient intercultural communication exchange. Students should continue to receive further support on their learning journey to enhance their possibilities of developing their ICC and participating in efficient communication exchanges with people from other cultures.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Because of its lingua franca status, the English language occupies a unique place in a globalised world and functions as a bridge for intercultural communication (Quyen, 2017). Therefore, researchers, educators, and scholars have widely discussed intercultural communication competence (ICC) in relation to English teaching for several decades. Although initially the role of ICC in English teaching was analysed from a theoretical lens, the emphasis has gradually shifted to practices of developing ICC in English classrooms (Quyen, 2017). China's open-door policy led to its economic opening to the rest of the world; this policy, initiated in 1979, aimed to strengthen the country's economic potential by importing foreign capital and know-how (Sutter, 2019). This policy gave an impetus to the integration of the ICC concept into the fields of comparative cultural studies and foreign language teaching. Since the 2000s, ICC has become a key element of English language courses, textbooks, and research projects in China (Kulich & Wang, 2015), whereas International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores have become the major determinants of students' language proficiency (Bayliss & Ingram, 2006). The open-door policy led to an increase in student participation in international tests such as IELTS for entry into English-speaking universities (Kulich & Wang, 2015). Developed to improve the process of selecting students for English-speaking universities, the IELTS test generates data on whether students' levels of English language proficiency (ELP) are appropriate for university study (Bayliss & Ingram, 2006; Hu, 2018). Specifically, the IELTS test evaluates students' abilities to respond to the linguistic demands of an English-speaking environment. Additionally, the Chinese Ministry of Education has shown efforts to connect the

Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) to the speaking elements of the IELTS test and other international English tests (Fong, 2021).

Universities in English-speaking countries are known for their high-quality education and emphasis on ELP. They thus set strict language requirements for international students (Hu, 2018; Xiuwen & Razali, 2020). The speaking component of the IELTS test is a gateway to an English-speaking university (Issitt, 2008). Chinese students who plan to study in English-speaking countries are required to possess high levels of ICC (Xiuwen & Razali, 2020). Although Zhang (2016) identified several factors that may affect the social and academic success of Chinese students in these countries, the researcher recommended prioritising intercultural knowledge, without which Chinese students would be unable to recognise the differences between their own culture and a foreign one or initiate meaningful communication with English speakers (Xiuwen & Razali, 2020). In short, the requirements of English-speaking universities for high levels of ICC and speaking proficiency of Chinese students have been developed to guarantee high academic attainment (Hu, 2018).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Although English teachers in China express their support for the wide use of ICC teaching strategies, they are often unaware of how to effectively apply them in practice (Kulich & Wang, 2015). To a significant extent, inconsistent and limited research evidence on the ways to develop and assess Chinese students' ICC can explain this lack of understanding. Even though Chinese students pass the IELTS test and enter English-speaking universities, their low levels of ICC and speaking competence create obstacles to intercultural adaptation and academic study (Yang, 2016; Wang-Taylor & Milton, 2019). The researcher's analysis of recent research and

academic literature revealed that Chinese students studying abroad suffer from significant culture shock and language anxiety (e.g. Trenkic & Warmington, 2018; Wang, 2018; Xiuwen & Razali, 2020). These complexities Chinese students face are understandable, given that their speaking scores in IELTS are generally lower than their scores in reading and writing (Xiuwen & Razali, 2020). As a result of these low speaking scores, Chinese students often keep silent and prefer to be invisible in face-to-face environments in English-speaking universities (Zhang, 2016). Moreover, their low level of ICC prevents Chinese students from participating in social activities with culturally different peers (Xiuwen & Razali, 2020).

These experiences of Chinese students in other countries is a clear manifestation of the quality of English language teaching they experience. Considering the evidence obtained in prior research that Chinese students do not always receive language and intercultural communication support in English-speaking universities (Zhang, 2016), it is essential to develop Chinese students' speaking skills and cultural competence before they transition to an environment culturally different from their own (Liu et al., 2017). To equip Chinese students with ICC and appropriately shape their speaking skills, English teachers working in China should become mediators between culture and a foreign language. However, given teachers' shortage of profound knowledge and skills in intercultural communication (Kulich & Wang, 2015), a widespread English teaching practice is to focus on reading and writing and disregard culture and speaking proficiency (Quyên, 2017). The deeply entrenched practice of preparing Chinese students for exams (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011) and the shared view of testing as a reliable indicator of students' academic attainment (Cheng, 2008) raises questions about the acquisition of ICC by Chinese students on the one hand, and the possibility of gaining a good degree after graduation from English-speaking universities on the other. The extensive preparation for the

IELTS test, aside from being essential to their education, increases Chinese students' opportunities for entering English-speaking universities, Prior research evidence has demonstrated that Chinese students rarely receive first-class degrees in comparison to UK students (Iannelli & Huang, 2013). The comparison between ICC and IELTS achievement conducted in Iannelli and Huang's study highlights the link between the two, as well as the efficacy of both in improving the competence of Chinese students of English. To facilitate the academic success of Chinese students in English-speaking universities, it is necessary to research key issues influencing English language teaching within the Chinese context to provide these students with further support and make their experience abroad successful.

### **1.3 Aim and Research Questions**

The aims of the study are two-fold: (1) to explore the relationship between Chinese students' IELTS speaking scores and their ICC and (2) to generate recommendations on the best approaches to increase IELTS speaking scores and improve ICC in Chinese students. These aims stem from the need to shed light on the intercultural communication dimension within the field of English language education and investigate the relation of this dimension to Chinese students' IELTS speaking scores. Researchers have made little effort to bring together the ICC dimension and IELTS speaking proficiency.

Based on the study aims, the researcher will address the following research questions:

1. To what extent can the outcomes of Chinese students' intercultural communication be predicted with test results?
2. Is linguistic competence assessed by the IELTS test a reliable determinant of Chinese students' ICC?

3. Do IELTS speaking scores obtained for entry into English-speaking universities relate to high levels of ICC in Chinese students?

Answering these questions is crucial for understanding whether IELTS speaking scores may be used for the prediction of students' ICC and whether the IELTS test is a valid assessment tool.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Research**

Given the increasing interest of the Chinese Ministry of Education in the cultural dimension of foreign language education (Kulich & Wang, 2015), it is crucial to explore the relationship between Chinese students' IELTS speaking scores and their ICC. Prior studies have explored the validity of IELTS and other language tests for the academic success of international students (e.g. Cotton & Conrow, 1998; Kerstjens & Nery, 2000; Dooley & Oliver, 2002; Feast, 2002; Yen & Kuzma, 2009; Daller & Wang, 2017; Hu, 2018), the value of ICC for Chinese students (e.g. Liu, 2009; Li et al., 2016; Zhou, 2020), and the ways to develop ICC in students studying English (e.g. Lin, 2012; Lim & Griffith, 2016; Wang, 2018; Li, 2021). However, additional empirical research on the relationship between test results and students' ICC using various methods of data collection is necessary (Kulich & Wang, 2015). It is paramount to obtain an insight into the relationship between speaking scores and intercultural knowledge to aid the development of ICC in Chinese students. This in combination with the continued emphasis on ICC by English teachers and policymakers should benefit English learners.

The present study will contribute to language teaching and learning by scrutinising the Chinese educational context and delving into the nuances of Chinese students' speaking scores and development of ICC. Such a nuanced exploration will paint a more comprehensive picture of whether Chinese students' achievement in the IELTS speaking test helps them overcome

communication and academic difficulties within an English-speaking environment. Additionally, this study will provide answers to questions that prior research and the academic literature has not posed, including questions about IELTS speaking scores as reflections of students' ICC and the effects of speaking proficiency and ICC on academic success in English-speaking universities. The researcher expects that the study will extend the research literature on Chinese students' English proficiency, levels of ICC, and participation in the IELTS test.

### **1.5 Structure of the Dissertation**

Chapter 2 will consist of a critical review of the relevant academic and research literature on ICC, the significance of ICC for Chinese students, the role of the IELTS test in the Chinese context, and barriers to the development of ICC in Chinese students. In the process of this review, the researcher will identify key gaps in prior research and provide justification for the present study. Chapter 3 will outline the research methodology, explain the reasons for choosing specific methods of data collection and analysis, and specify how the chosen research design matches the aims and research questions of the study. The chapter will also address relevant ethical issues, drawing on the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018). Chapter 4 will present the findings, and Chapter 5 will consist of a discussion of these findings in light of the prior academic and research literature. Additionally, the researcher will draw parallels between previous and acquired evidence to reveal similar and different aspects of the research on ICC and IELTS testing. Finally, Chapter 6 will summarise the results and generate implications for improving Chinese students' development of speaking skills and ICC.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

In this literature review, the researcher aims to lay the ground for examining the issue of ICC and spoken language testing. ICC is one of the most crucial tools of survival and economic success in today's globally interrelated world and thus must be researched further (Dai & Chen, 2014). Given that globalisation has weakened cultural and national boundaries, people are encouraged to actively participate in international trade and intercultural dialogue (Fantini, 2012). With the help of ICC, individuals can engage in complex global communication and effectively address cultural conflicts. Even though scholars from diverse disciplines have shown great interest in investigating ICC, the complexities of its conceptualisation create significant barriers to gaining comprehensive insights (Dai & Chen, 2014). To resolve these complexities, the present review begins with a general discussion of different perspectives on ICC and the application of the concept to English language teaching in China. The review proceeds to a more nuanced exploration of the importance of ICC for Chinese students and the relationship between English-speaking proficiency and ICC and, more specifically, between test results and ICC. It is apparent that assessing speaking skills is an area that has not attracted much attention in the field, even though a focus on speaking skills is crucial for learners to achieve full competence in a language. According to Fulcher (2014), the practice of testing English-speaking proficiency is a comparatively recent phenomenon in applied linguistics. The researcher concluded his review by identifying the key barriers to developing effective ICC based on evidence obtained from prior research and the relevant literature.

## 2.2 Defining ICC

For the purposes of the present study, the first aspect that must be addressed is the definition of ICC itself. According to Del Villar (2017), this concept incites lively debate among experts, given that a consensus about its basic components has not yet been reached. Chan and Starosta (1998) emphasised its context-specific and goal-oriented components, claiming that ICC largely depends on one's ability to demonstrate specific communication behaviours in a particular environment to realise their communication goals. Following this line of argument, culture and goal setting determine the kinds of communication behaviours interlocutors use. Delving deeper, the ways through which a specific message is conveyed to an interlocutor affects the outcomes of communication. Lustig and Koester (2010) took a slightly different stance, arguing that interlocutors evaluate the effectiveness of ICC. What ensues from this position is a focus on the component of social judgment in the analysis of ICC. According to Jandt (2020), this social component refers to the ability of the participants of a communicative event to consider and respect each other's perceptions and values. More specifically, individuals participating in a communicative event in a particular place and time perceive communicative behaviours as appropriate or inappropriate.

Bringing together the perspectives discussed above, a generic definition of ICC is an individual's ability to maintain effective communication with people of a different culture. This definition has been integrated into a cognitive-behavioural and functional approach to ICC developed in the sphere of foreign language education in China in the 1980s (Kulich & Wang, 2015). The functional approach to ICC signifies that, in theory, the responsibility of English teachers is to endow students with the appropriate knowledge and skills to reinforce their effectiveness in intercultural communication (Zhang, 2014). In response to the lack of emphasis

on ICC in Chinese contemporary models of foreign language teaching, Wen (1999, 2004) developed an intercultural communicative competence model that combines communicative and intercultural competence. The scholar identified three crucial components of ICC that should characterise Chinese contexts: tolerance to cultural diversity, sensitivity to cultural diversity, and a flexible response to cultural diversity. Considering Wen's (1999, 2004) model, Chinese students who possess all three crucial components may have a competitive advantage in national and international labour markets. Wen (1999, 2004) has clearly influenced the field because his model has been successfully integrated into the recent Chinese English syllabus for English majors and other postgraduate programmes of Chinese universities (Kulich & Wang, 2015).

Zhang (2007) delved deeper into the analysis of ICC components in relation to foreign language teaching in China. The researcher claimed that ICC is grounded in knowledge, attitude, and behaviour. The first component – knowledge – belongs to the cognitive layer and refers to students' awareness of the values, politics, geography, and religion of the target culture. The second component – attitude – is an affective layer and, to a certain extent, corroborates with Wen's (1999, 2004) categories discussed above. More specifically, it covers students' profound understanding, respect, and tolerance of a different culture. Finally, behaviour comprises students' nonverbal competence, linguistic competence, and ability to engage in relationships. Overall, Chinese researchers and scholars draw on Western conceptualisations of ICC and adjust them to better fit the Chinese context. Such an approach raises questions about the validity of the findings Chinese researchers and scholars have obtained. According to Kulich and Wang (2015), it is essential for Chinese scholars to develop a unique conceptualisation to reflect the complexity and dynamics of English language teaching and ICC in China specifically. It is paramount that Chinese researchers and scholars extend the theoretical and empirical bases for English language

learning and teaching to cover the importance of ICC for Chinese students. The following section addresses this issue and provides a justification for the interest of researchers in ICC within the sphere of foreign language education.

### **2.3 Importance of ICC for Chinese Students**

In recent decades, many researchers and authors have promoted the idea of the significance of ICC for Chinese students, placing the major burden of developing this competence on EFL teachers (Kulich & Wang, 2015; Lei, 2021b). Further, the Chinese Ministry of Education has set ICC as a new objective for English teaching in basic and higher education (Lei, 2021b). What is behind the discourse on ICC is the preparation of Chinese students for effective global communication (Mu & Yu, 2021). China is the global leader in the number of enrolled students in British, American, Australian, and New Zealand higher education institutions (Burrows, 2016; Yu & Jin, 2016). Given their continually increasing interest in studying abroad or leaving their home country to gain personal independence and build their careers, Chinese students need robust ICC to interact with foreigners and successfully adjust to diverse cultural environments (Hong & Petraki, 2007). Hong and Petraki's evidence of ICC among Chinese students studying at an Australian University is especially valuable. These researchers focused on the difficulties Chinese students face in their interactions with culturally different peers. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys to obtain rich subjective data on the intercultural experience of Chinese male and female students and their intercultural communication statuses. Participants were selected randomly from a group of respondents who answered an initial questionnaire about their interest in further interviews. The random selection of participants reinforced the validity of the findings. Hong's

and Petraki's chosen research tools helped them identify a lack of ICC as a key barrier to students' successful intercultural communication. For instance, the authors noted that students' lack of knowledge about values and differing faiths and political views made them reluctant to participate in certain conversation topics. From their interviews, the authors noted that participants' lack of ICC may result in embarrassment and estrangement due to their fear that their participation would lead to misunderstandings. This lack of ICC often cannot be overcome because instructors may, too, lack the necessary knowledge to pass along to their students. Without high levels of ICC, Chinese students often restrict their communication with individuals from various cultural backgrounds, thus reducing their chances of achieving success in work and life.

According to Xing and Bolden's (2019) study, a low communication capacity of students in English-speaking countries creates significant obstacles to academic acculturation. The use of the narrative inquiry and the expectancy-value theory provided the researchers with an opportunity to gain insights into the complex experiences of Chinese students studying at a Canadian university. Narrative inquiry is particularly effective for understanding and representing experiences because it allows speakers to produce 'storied descriptions' on 'the meaning they attribute to life events', allowing researchers to obtain data about 'the realm of people's experience' (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.479). Narrative inquiry also allows researchers to understand not only the way people think but also their values (Riley & Hawe, 2005, p.229). As such, it may provide an understanding of the motivational factors of English language learners. This is particularly interesting within the framework of the expectancy-value theory. The theory argues that either their expectancy of success with the activity or the value attached to the

activity itself may explain individuals' motivations to complete an activity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002).

A key feature of Xing's and Bolden's (2019) study is their intentional involvement of Chinese students with low TOEFL/IELTS speaking scores and focus on a small sample size to gather detailed stories from participants. Their multiple data collection sessions consisted of face-to-face interviews that helped the researchers create and delve deeply into participants' narratives. Their findings revealed that Chinese students' expectations of academic acculturation in Canada started to decline with their failure to engage in intercultural communication. The students came to terms with the fact that learning to communicate in English would not be as easy as they had anticipated. Similarly, Burrows (2016) conducted an in-depth investigation of Chinese students studying at English institutions of higher education. The selection of the qualitative research methodology signified that the aim of the study was to capture the feelings, thoughts, and beliefs of Chinese students and observe their intercultural communication within the UK setting. Burrows concluded that the exclusion of Chinese students from host culture communities signifies that students have a lack of motivation for studies, feel anxious about learning, remain unfamiliar with the new culture, and fail to make friends with those from a different culture.

Using the methods of participant observations, questionnaires and interviews, Burrows (2016) found that Chinese students without good ICC were unable to successfully engage in debates with lecturers and peers in international higher education institutions. Despite their high scores on the IELTS test, the Chinese participants acknowledged that they had communication difficulties during classroom discussions. As such, Chinese students experienced difficulties with the development of interpersonal, problem-solving, and reasoning skills. However, these are

attributes that the majority of employers require. Given the importance of ICC for Chinese students, research on the factors affecting the development of ICC is timely. In the following section, the researcher will provide an overview of the prior research that provides necessary insights into the efforts of researchers to analyse ICC through an empirical lens. However, before proceeding to this overview, it is essential to discuss the position of the IELTS within the Chinese context.

#### **2.4 Outlining the Position of the IELTS Within the Chinese Context**

According to Yu and Jin (2016), the number of Chinese students who complete the IELTS test, has gradually increased since the 2010s. Considering that several international higher education institutions use IELTS results as a crucial admission criterion (Yu & Jin, 2016), this increase is understandable. For instance, Chinese students who want to receive an Australian student visa are required to pass only the IELTS test (Fox & Curtis, 2010). The speaking component of the test consists of three parts: (1) answers to general and personal questions, (2) a monologue on a predefined topic, and (3) answers to challenging questions related to that monologue (Fox & Curtis, 2010). Given the popularity of the IELTS test among Chinese students, many public Chinese companies have started gaining their income from test preparation courses. However, as the Burrows' (2016) study showed, even with high IELTS speaking scores, Chinese students are often incapable of communicating within a multicultural setting (Burrows, 2016). More specifically, in their discussions with international students and with the teacher, the author found that Chinese students failed to fully understand the meaning of the messages the teachers provided.

The findings of Burrows (2016) align with those of Parris-Kidd and Barnett (2011). In their research, Parris-Kidd and Barnett employed a case study approach to observe and assess lived experiences of several Chinese students in an Australian preuniversity English class. In addition to observations, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the students and one Australian teacher. Both research methods helped the researchers reveal a significant gap between students' IELTS speaking scores and their communication in practice. For instance, students may not be used to thinking critically and challenging their teachers when communicating. As a result of this knowledge gap, Chinese students suffered from academic and social distance and experienced significant dissatisfaction with the IELTS test. Another intriguing aspect Xing and Bolden (2019) identified that correlated with the findings of Parris-Kidd and Barnett (2011) is the low perceived subjective value of English-speaking proficiency. Specifically, Chinese students placed more value on reading and writing proficiency than on speaking proficiency. Parris-Kidd and Barnett (2011) attributed this low subjective value of speaking to the widespread belief that Chinese students need English writing and reading skills more than they need speaking skills. According to this belief, Chinese students can acquire speaking skills and ICC after their arrival in an English-speaking country. More specifically, when Chinese students begin their immersion in an English-speaking environment, they will gradually shape their speaking skills and ICC. In Xing and Bolden's (2019) study, even when Chinese students prepared for the IELTS test, they did not devote sufficient attention to the test's speaking component. Leedham (2014) went further in his discussion of Chinese students' preparation for the IELTS test. In his corpus-driven study, Leedham revealed that the results of the IELTS test could not be regarded as an indication of Chinese students' ICC because these students tended to spend months attempting to memorise model written answers for this

international exam. According to the acquired evidence, such an approach facilitated students' acquisition of test-taking strategies but created obstacles to their improvement of speaking skills.

Nevertheless, Leedham (2014) relied on the dataset of Chinese students' written assignments to evaluate their language proficiency. His findings were crucial in two respects. First, the researcher compared the written assignments of Chinese students to those of English students. Second, he juxtaposed the analysis of the written assignments with findings from interviews with students and lecturers. From the interviews, Leedham (2014) acquired additional details about Chinese students' experiences in relation to their preparation for the IELTS test. Fox and Curtis (2010) used a similar research tool. Through interviews with 15 students from Hong Kong and the PRC on their IELTS experiences, the researchers found that students exert significant effort when practicing IELTS daily to successfully pass the test. As was evident from this finding, such intense preparation for a high-stakes test is justified, given that it virtually determines Chinese students' future. This finding underlines the need to reconsider the methods Chinese students use in preparing for the IELTS test. The interviews revealed a significant discrepancy between students' perceptions of their ICC and their IELTS scores. According to one participant, their high IELTS score did not help them engage in communication with Canadian university classmates (Fox & Curtis, 2010). Having outlined the position of IELTS within the Chinese context, the following section focuses on empirical evidence from previous studies.

## **2.5 Recent Research on the Relationship between Linguistic Competence and ICC and between Test Results and ICC**

ICC encompasses linguistic competence and knowledge of target culture and is closely intertwined with language teaching and testing (Romanowski, 2017). Hence, it is relevant to analyse how different studies examine the relationship between linguistic and intercultural communication competencies as well as how these competencies may be achieved or assessed through testing. Considering the shortage of studies on this relationship between linguistic competence and ICC and between ICC and test results within the Chinese context, the present analysis is expanded to cover studies with a focus on not only Chinese students but also Asian and Arab students. In particular, given the importance placed on standardised tests such as the IELTS, it is paramount to consider the relationship between performance on this type of test and how this relates to other measures of ICC outcomes. For IELTS, most earlier studies and reports (e.g. Ciccarelli, 2001; Feast, 2002) focused on connecting IELTS scores of Chinese students to their academic outcomes. The correlation between IELTS results and academic performance is not always a positive one (Yen & Kuzma, 2009). These earlier studies were limited in that they did not address students' ICC or single out the speaking component of the IELTS test. An exception was the study by Li and Li (2003), which generated important findings on Chinese learners' intercultural competence. The researchers studied 80 Chinese students with high ELP from Heilongjiang University and Harbin Institute of Technology and found that the students' linguistic competence in the Test for English Majors and Common Entrance Tests was not correlated to ICC. These two types of tests have the same components as an IELTS test: writing, reading, speaking, and listening.

The value of the findings of Li and Li (2003) included the selection of participants with extensive experience with learning English. Such participants would have been more likely to develop ICC during their learning experience. Moreover, to ensure the validity of their results,

the researchers used three self-designed tests for assessing students' ICC: a Test of Intercultural Ability, a Test of Socio-Cultural Appropriateness, and a Test of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity.

These tests were developed and measured with the support of foreign language teachers. The implication, based on the evidence, is that the focus of ELT in China should be on shaping not only students' linguistic competence but also ICC. According to Li and Li (2003), this shift of focus should be reflected in the English syllabus and teaching materials to provide students with insight into the function of the English language in various speech situations. The researchers recommended implementing an integrative approach to teaching the English language in China to help shape students' skills in using English in meaningful sociocultural contexts. Specifically, students were insensitive to cross-cultural differences during communication, found it difficult to formulate utterances from socio-cultural perspectives, and were unable to cope with problems in the process of intercultural communication.

However, Wang and Huang (2013) found results that sharply contrasted with those of Li and Li (2003). Through an exploration of English proficiency and intercultural sensitivity of 258 English major juniors from Chinese universities, Wang and Huang (2013) identified a correlation between high TEM-4 scores and high intercultural sensitivity. The researchers attributed the positive impact of high language proficiency on students' intercultural sensitivity to the fact that this proficiency helped students speak fluently to culturally different interlocutors and thus deepen their understanding of culture-specific nuances. However, Wang and Huang (2013) also found that the TEM-4 scores did not affect students' confidence, attentiveness, and enjoyment during intercultural communication. The contrasting results of Wang and Huang (2013) and Li and Li (2003) may be attributed to their different methodologies, participants, and study scopes. In particular, whereas the study of Li and Li (2003) involved 80 Chinese students, that of Wang

and Huang (2013) involved 258 students. Moreover, in contrast to Li and Li (2003), who collected data from three tests, Wang and Huang (2013) gathered evidence from a questionnaire based on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. Finally, Wang and Huang (2013) limited their research to the assessment of students' intercultural sensitivity; Li and Li (2003), in contrast, took a wider perspective, focusing on the correlation between linguistic competence and ICC and on the role of the CET and TEM tests in the evaluation of these competencies. That is, Li and Li (2003) examined both CET and TEM rather than just the TEM scores Wang and Huang (2013) evaluated.

Further, Lei (2021a) examined the impact of the IELTS speaking test preparation on Chinese students' socialisation in Canada. Through interviews with five Chinese students, the researcher revealed that whereas two participants acknowledged the significance of the IELTS speaking test preparation in their socialisation, others expressed either a neutral or negative attitude toward the test's value. In addition to qualitative data, Lei (2021a) gathered quantitative data through a survey consisting of self-reporting open- and close-ended questions measured on a Likert scale. The questionnaire considered both communicative competence, divided into linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence, and intercultural competence, divided into intercultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills. Overall, 60 international students were asked to complete the survey. Lei's (2021a) qualitative study results indicated that attitude and strategic competence were the more highly valued aspects of competence. This in turn indicated that preservice English teachers had a high positive attitude towards different cultures, a high strong willingness to communicate interculturally, and a desire to overcome communication difficulties with either verbal or nonverbal strategies. The teachers also appeared to be moderately sensitive to different cultures, and they tended to take a critical attitude towards

these. Finally, lower scores in the sociolinguistic competence and skills category indicated that preservice English teachers had sufficient sociolinguistic abilities and skills to cope with intercultural communication. As such, the use of a mixed method approach to gather data reinforced the integrity of the evidence and allowed Lei (2021a) to explore IELTS speaking test preparation experiences of Chinese students from the perspective of students' socialisation. The contradictory evidence implied that IELTS speaking test preparation might or might not facilitate Chinese students' socialisation in an English-speaking country: on the one hand, participants acknowledged that some speaking topics of the IELTS test were reiterated in their daily communication with Canadian speakers, whereas on the other hand, they demonstrated mixed feelings about their socialisation in a culturally different environment.

Sarwari and Wahad's (2018) study mirrored Wang and Huang's (2013) and demonstrated that Arab students with high attainment in the ELP test demonstrated better overall scores in ICC than students with low attainment in the ELP test. This correlation was well established even in cases in which the Arab students experienced difficulties with intercultural communication. Additionally, Sawwari and Wahab (2018) discussed the underlying difference between students with high and low levels of ELP, suggesting that high levels of ELP increase students' ICC and arguing that they both encourage and enable learners to engage in daily interactions with peers from different countries who speak different languages. These interactions help learners improve their ELP levels. Further, ICC gave an impetus to improved intercultural communication and, hence, the acquisition of new linguistic and social skills by students. The research methodology Sarwari and Wahad (2018) chose used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, allowing the researchers to conduct a nuanced and detailed analysis of ICC for Arab students. In particular, the authors used recorded English Proficiency Test, IELTS, and

Intercultural Communication Competence Questionnaire (ICCQ) scores. In the subsequent research stage, 10 students were interviewed to obtain qualitative evidence that expanded the understanding of students' views on ICC and linguistic competence. The difference in results from the study may be attributed to the fact that the participants came from diverse Arab countries rather than a single country and culture of origin. This fact may have significantly influenced their ICC.

The results of Sarwari and Wahad (2018) are somewhat inconsistent with various studies, including an earlier study by Paul (2007). Paul recruited four participants for an exploratory study using a case study approach, finding that high entry-level IELTS scores did not ensure students' successful responses to complex academic demands and effective language production within academic settings. Hence, Paul did not explicitly address the relationship between IELTS scores for all skills and ICC, highlighting that IELTS test results cannot predict students' language behaviours in real-life contexts. However, this evidence may be questionable, considering the researcher's use of only four participants for the exploratory study and use of a case study approach. Although Paul explored IELTS as a predictor of students' language performance through interviews, observations, and test results, the use of a small sample challenges the reliability of his findings.

In contrast to Paul's (2007) study, Atashpanjeh and Shahrokhi's (2021) study specifically emphasised the relationship between students' IELTS speaking performance and their intercultural competence. Sixty Iranian female and male EFL learners who participated in pre-IELTS and IELTS courses at intermediate or advanced levels were involved in this research. With the help of three quantitative research instruments, the Oxford Quick Placement Test, the ICCQ, and the IELTS Speaking Mock Test, Atashpanjeh and Shahrokhi revealed the significant

positive impact of IELTS training courses on students' intercultural competence. The Quick Placement Test is regarded as a reliable and time-saving test that is easily corrected by an overlay. The test has two versions, the pen and paper version and the computer-based version, only the latter of which contains a listening component. There are 60 multiple choice questions to be answered in 30 minutes and two parts. Only students with higher abilities complete part two. (Hassaskhah & Roudsari, 2015). In contrast, the ICCQ test contains 22 questions, to be answered on a 5-point Likert scale, to test participants' knowledge of culture and language, their skills in communicating across cultures, and their attitudes towards other cultures (Şen, 2020). Finally, the IELTS Speaking Mock Test offers learners the opportunity to practice for a speaking test, focusing on three different topics. Atashpanjeh and Shahrokhi (2021) argued that the IELTS training courses had a positive impact on all tests results because they appeared to improve Iranian learners' intercultural competence. As such, their speaking performance improved alongside their ICC. The researchers concluded that the students' participation in the pre-IELTS and IELTS courses reinforced their development of skills and knowledge necessary for real-life communication in a culturally different environment. More specifically, the researchers found that teachers in the pre-IELTS and IELTS courses gave detailed information about the target culture and attracted students' attention to the differences between the source and target cultures. Because of the insights that students gained in these courses, they were well prepared for their face-to-face interviews with the IELTS examiner.

Tran and Duong (2018) conducted another important study on ICC within the Vietnamese context. The researchers integrated the intercultural communicative language teaching (ICLT) model into a 13-week English language course. They found a positive impact of this model on students' linguistic and intercultural competence. Research instruments such as an

intercultural competence test, language test, and semi-structured group interview assessed the effectiveness of this model. These instruments helped the researchers obtain both quantitative and qualitative data on the intercultural communicative performance of 47 EFL learners from a foreign language centre in Ho Chi Minh City. The authors tested the candidates before and after the course. All teachers were trained to follow the same approach and encouraged to use the same materials. The researchers conducted a pilot study; however, they did not have a control group to contrast the results with the intervention group, indicating that the study could not provide a point of comparison with other groups.

Tran and Duong's (2018) study demonstrated that an appropriate ICLT model may help teachers transform EFL learners into effective intercultural speakers. However, the researchers concluded that the effectiveness of an ICLT model within the Vietnamese context would depend on radical changes in teaching strategies and testing of this model at different education levels. Although the studies discussed in this section have provided important evidence on some aspects of ICC and the correlations among linguistic competence, test results, and ICC, the understanding of the relationship between IELTS scores and ICC in diverse Chinese contexts and among different groups of Chinese students should be deepened by analysing obstacles to ICLT. The following section clarifies the key barriers to developing Chinese students' ICC in EFL programmes.

## **2.6 Barriers to Developing Effective ICC in Chinese Students**

As is evident from the research literature discussed above, a significant barrier to developing effective ICC in Chinese students is the unbalanced focus of Chinese EFL programmes on linguistic competence over ICC. Mu and Yu (2021), in their exploration of

Chinese college students' intercultural competence, used face-to-face interviews and survey questionnaires to conduct a deep examination of the current situation regarding the development of ICC in English majors. Although the data from the questionnaire provided insights into students' levels of intercultural competence, the interview data revealed the confusions and problems Chinese students experienced in cultural learning. For instance, students mentioned their lack of opportunities and subsequent frustration when going through first-hand cultural learning experiences. One student stated,

Well, I tried to find it by myself, and there is some software that can be used, but it is infrequent because I didn't dare to take the initiative, especially in real life, I am willing to do but don't have the courage. (Mu & Yu, 2021, p.50).

Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, Mu and Yu (2021) revealed that the existing teaching methods constrained students' acquisition of skills necessary for their further intercultural communication. By overemphasising linguistic competence, teachers may fail to prepare Chinese students for real-life intercultural communicative situations. These findings imply that despite recent efforts by the Chinese Ministry of Education to connect the CSE to the speaking elements of the IELTS test and other international English tests (Fong, 2021), English teachers working in China are not ready or are reluctant to use the intercultural communicative approach in EFL teaching. Zhang (2014) attributed this lack of preparedness to their inability to achieve a common understanding of the concept of ICC and of the place of ICC in English teaching.

Chinese students who arrive in an English-speaking country cannot successfully engage in intercultural communication because of difficulties with accurate self-expression, negotiation of meaning, and choice of words (Zhou & Huang, 2018). Although the intercultural communicative approach is often integrated into IELTS preparation classes in China, Badger and

Yan (2012) highlighted in their report on IELTS teaching that the use of grammar translation and audio-lingual teaching methods (or a combination of both) as well as L1 was a widespread phenomenon in such classes. Drawing on data collection instruments such as stand-alone interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations, the researchers revealed an existing focus on teacher-centred approaches and teachers' reliance on the Chinese language during English teaching. The evidence obtained in this study identified several factors that reinforced these teaching practices. Above all, most language schools that prepare Chinese students for the IELTS test are commercial enterprises that focus on teaching strategies tailored to the demands of students and their parents. These are largely teacher-centred strategies that promote a passive role for learners and a pedagogy that is not culture oriented. The latter signifies that although teachers use culture to support English language teaching, it is not positioned at the centre of their pedagogy. The second crucial factor is the preparation of Chinese students by non-native speakers of English. As such, teachers often draw on L1 to provide students with explanations or to communicate during a lesson. Although the use of L1 does not preclude the teaching of ICC, it deprives Chinese students of the opportunity to widely communicate in the target language during a lesson and deepen their understanding of crucial linguistic and cultural aspects. Based on the evidence Badger and Yan (2012) obtained, it can be difficult for English language teachers to include multicultural content in their teaching when significantly relying on L1.

Finally, teachers do not receive specific training in IELTS preparation. Although the British Council holds some IELTS conferences, these conferences tend to clarify the process of IELTS testing rather than deepen teachers' understanding of IELTS methodologies. Badger and Yan's (2012) finding is echoed by Kulich and Wang's (2015), who claimed in their analysis of intercultural communication in China that, despite presentations, discussions, role-plays and case

scenarios, English teachers in China perceive the integration of ICC into teaching as a serious challenge.

## **2.7 Summary**

Through an analysis of the theoretical and empirical evidence on ICC and the assessment of ICC using the IELTS and other tests, this part of the dissertation underlines the need to develop ICC in Chinese students and reveals a lack of comprehensive research on the relationship between students' IELTS speaking scores and their ICC. Although some earlier and recent studies have implicitly or explicitly addressed the possible relationship between these variables, they have failed to delve into whether IELTS speaking scores reflect not only students' linguistic proficiency but also ICC when applied to the Chinese context in particular. The limited scope of studies' inquiries can explain the difficulties associated with identifying the relationship between students' IELTS speaking scores and ICC within the Chinese context. In most of the studies, researchers do not draw parallels between test scores and ICC. Rather, most of the research focuses on the development of ICC in EFL classrooms, the intercultural communicative experience of students during their studies abroad, or the assessment of language proficiency through the IELTS test as a whole. The speaking element of IELTS has been only briefly examined and requires further exploration because it may prove to have a crucial link with ICC. The choice of data collection tools in previous studies clearly illustrates the reluctance of researchers to take a broader perspective of ICC, linguistic competence, and test scores. This is clearly a point of development in the field, Exploring it would fill the lacuna in the research on ICC by placing a clear emphasis on the relationship between students' IELTS speaking scores and ICC within the Chinese context.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Methodological Overview**

ICC has played a fundamental role in equipping teachers with the knowledge to help their learners improve their intercultural capacities, thereby offering a basis for enhancing learner motivation, tracking development and outcomes, and indicating academic areas that require improvement, especially in terms of course instructions (Norris & Watanabe, 2007). As Fantini (2012) explained, scholars throughout history have developed over 100 instruments to measure ICC, but the instrument selection in the present study was based on the appropriateness of the instrument for answering the research question. This chapter outlines the methodological considerations, including the selection of the research design and justification of the methods used based on the identified research aims and questions. This section also outlines the selection of the research participants and ethical considerations. Moreover, details on the data analysis methods employed for the purpose of answering the research questions are provided in this chapter.

### **3.2 Research Design**

In the present study, the researcher adopted a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to understand the effectiveness of using the IELTS test to measure the ICC of Chinese students. Marais (2012) noted that qualitative research seeks to understand the construction of a phenomenon in its natural setting by using methods such as semi-structured interviews, pictures, and non-numeric symbols. This is considered a subjective induction process (Doyle et al., 2009). In contrast, in quantitative research, the researcher seeks to pursue a more objective induction approach by using numerical indicators and statistical methods to construct

knowledge and understand an issue under consideration (Doyle et al., 2009). In the current study, whereas the quantitative part of the research involves using a statistical approach to determine the relationship between Chinese students' IELTS score and the Intercultural Communicative Competence Self-Report Scale (ICCSRS), the qualitative part of the research focuses on the perception of Chinese students regarding the effectiveness of the IELTS score and on whether this test has helped students achieve greater levels of intercultural communicative competence.

To examine the relationship between Chinese students' IELTS speaking scores and their ICC, in the quantitative part of the research, the group of participants was divided into two: one group of 117 participants who had received low scores of less than or equal to 6 on the IELTS and another group of 116 participants who had received scores higher than 6. Dividing the participants in these two groups allowed the researcher to determine the relationship between the test results received and the level of ICC between the two sets of participants.

### **3.3 Instruments of Data Collection**

The review of the ICCSRS instrument was important in demonstrating the rationale for selecting the instrument to measure the relationship between IELTS speaking scores and ICC among the selected Chinese students.

#### ***ICCSRS***

Zhong et al. (2013) constructed the ICCSRS based on their proposed theoretical models. They based it on the studies of Byram (1997), Wen (1999), and Deardorff (2006). The ICCSRS uses a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). The original ICCSRS instrument contains two wider categories subdivided into eight parts; in total, there are 63 items.

The questionnaire was customised to ensure that the items addressed the relationship between IELTS speaking scores and ICCS.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts: the first part collected participants' demographic information, such as their gender, major, and English proficiency, whereas the second part contained 48 items classified into two major categories (Appendix 1). The instrument was used to collect data for determining the extent to which IELTS speaking scores influenced the level of ICC among Chinese students.

The communicative dimension comprised the following:

- Discourse competence
- Linguistic competence
- Sociolinguistic competence
- Strategic competence

The intercultural competence dimension comprised the following:

- Intercultural knowledge
- Intercultural awareness
- Intercultural attitudes
- Intercultural skills

Table 1 displays the items in the eight parts of the assessment instruments.

**Table 3.1:** Classification of Items in Assessment Instruments

Dimension	Name	Item	Example
Communicative dimension	Discourse competence	3	I can choose the right topic when communicating with people from different cultures.

	Linguistic competence	12	The difficulty with my listening is that the other party speaks too fast, and I can't react.
	Sociolinguistic competence	5	I can adjust my ways of speaking according to different communication situations.
	Strategic competence	8	I will keep silent when I encounter something I cannot express in English.
Intercultural competence	Intercultural knowledge	11	When communicating with people from different cultures, I don't know the lifestyle of the other cultures.
	Intercultural awareness	2	When communicating with people from different cultures, I am good at observing cultural differences between us.
	Intercultural attitudes	4	I am very interested in the lifestyle and values of different countries, and I am willing to communicate with people from different cultures.
	Intercultural skills	5	When interacting with people from different cultures, I can get along well with them.

The instrument was tested for internal consistency. Its Cronbach's Alpha was 0.824, which indicated an acceptable range of internal consistency.

### ***Questionnaire and Interviews***

Based on the research design, the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data to ensure that the data were comprehensive enough to answer the research questions.

Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire comprising 10 items; the questionnaire was devised for measuring the level of IELTS speaking scores, the preparedness of learners before taking the IELTS test, the learners' understanding and tolerance of others' cultures and languages, and the learners' appreciation of cultural differences and the effects of such appreciation on the learners' school, work, and social situations. The insights obtained from this survey would help determine the extent to which IELTS speaking scores among students studying abroad influence their intercultural communication competence.

### **3.4 Sample and Sampling**

The researcher selected a sample of 270 students to provide feedback through the customised questionnaire survey. A convenient sample was selected because it was purposeful and non-random, thereby ensuring that only students who had the required information were recruited (Benoot et al., 2016). The criteria was that students must be from non-English-speaking nations who are studying abroad, especially in English training institutions. The screening criteria included IELTS speaking scores in the range of 5–8.5 depending on the individual's English ability. The questionnaire was sent online, and respondents were required to fill in their answers and return the questionnaire. The data collected were then coded and input into the SPSS software for analysis.

The study data were collected from June 2022 to July 2022 using a questionnaire application called QUESTAR and with the help of the researcher's teacher colleagues. The questionnaire was distributed to 270 students with IELTS scores who are currently studying in English-speaking countries. A total of 240 responses were received, a response rate of 89%.

Among them, seven responses were not finished accurately and thus were excluded from the data analysis. The final participants for quantitative research are 233 ( $N = 233$ ,  $Mean\ age = 24.6\ years$ ).

Additionally, these participants were also divided into two categories: a group had been in an English speaking country for less than a year (a total of 102 out of the 233); whilst the other group had a longer experience abroad (the remaining 131 out of the 233). This set of categories is intended to show more clearly the direct impact of IELTS training on the ICC. This is because if IELTS has a relevant relationship for ICC, then it should be reflected directly, i.e. for those students who have studied in an English-speaking country for no more than one year after taking the test. As students grow in years of study in an English-speaking country, the factors that affect their ICC may be more complex, such as an overall improvement in language skills, making it difficult to investigate the correlation with IELTS results.

Qualitative data were collected from five students who were randomly selected for the purpose of providing rich, raw, and detailed data about the perception of Chinese students regarding the relationship between their IELTS speaking scores and their ICC. The interview questions focused on determining the ICC scores of respondents, the factors that have contributed towards the respondents' identified level of ICC, and respondents' understanding of cultural and intercultural communication. The interview questions were selected to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of IELTS speaking on ICC and develop effective teaching strategies for non-English-speaking students studying abroad.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The researcher carried out the data collection in phases to ensure that both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and effectively analysed. Interviews were conducted via

Microsoft Teams and recorded after obtaining authorisation of the participants. The interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes each. No monetary compensation was offered to the participants. Additionally, the researcher took notes during the interviews and identified emerging themes. Interviews were appropriate for this study because they provided additional research data. Interviews are a useful data collection method, especially when conducted with suitable and accessible respondents who are able to provide rich and deep background data about the research topic. Moreover, the interviewees were considered individuals with the necessary knowledge and understanding of the research topic; hence, they could provide the desired outcomes and help achieve the research results.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) noted that interviews in qualitative research are relevant because they allow researchers to gain insights into the manner in which individuals make sense of their reality. Participants' responses are based on an interplay of complex personal frameworks of values and beliefs that have been developed over time; as such, information provided in interviews can help researchers gain the knowledge required to accurately predict future events. In this case, considering that they were the primary group of focus, Chinese students were recruited as the study's respondents to provide insights into the effectiveness of IELTS speaking scores in improving Chinese students' ICC and allowing them to gain access to English-speaking countries for school, especially higher learning.

For the quantitative part of the research, data were collected using a questionnaire. At first, the respondents filled in the ICCSRS, which was sent directly to their email addresses. After obtaining the ICCSRS, they filled in the customised questionnaire survey to provide information on their perception of their level of ICC. This data collection method was necessary to understand the relationship between Chinese students' IELTS speaking scores and their ICC

using a large sample of respondents – particularly students who comprised the primary group affected by the research topic. Some of the questions asked in the questionnaire focused on the experiences of Chinese students in English, including the number of hours each day they interact with native English speakers. The questions additionally evaluated the students based on whether they had taken IELTS preparation courses before enrolling in the institution. It was also important to determine the perception of Chinese students regarding their level of ICC.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

For the quantitative analysis, the researcher used SPSS and ANOVA to test for correlation between IELTS speaking scores and ICCSRS. Both sets of data were provided in the questionnaire: IELTS and ICCSRS were analysed using ANOVA to measure the correlation between IELTS speaking scores and ICC given the large range of the IELTS (5–8.5). In contrast, for the qualitative analysis, the researcher used content analysis as a means of generating emerging themes from the five respondents. The process of data analysis was simultaneous with the process of data analysis; the interview process was also an opportunity for finding important themes and clarifying them with the respondents to ensure data saturation.

### **3.7 Research Ethics**

The researcher ensured compliance with the relevant ethical guidelines when working with human respondents, including protection of human participants; conflict of interest; and ethical principles of autonomy, justice, and beneficence. The nature of this quasi-experiment entailed human participation, and hence the researcher sought ethics approval from the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) before commencing the data collection

process. The respondents were assured that the test was in line with the study objectives and that no unauthorised third parties would obtain their results. According to Orb et al. (2001), this assurance allowed the respondents to exercise their right to decide whether they wanted to participate in the study. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw at any time. After the respondents signed informed consent forms, they were given a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and its benefits in helping Chinese students who need to improve their ICC.

Moreover, all data used in the current study were anonymised to protect the identity of the respondents (Goodwin et al., 2020). The researcher did not publish any personal data, such as emails or contact information of the respondents, to avoid these from falling into the hands of third parties. The researcher also complied with the ethical considerations of data storage in line with the Data Protection Act (1998); this act ensures that a researcher protects collected data in a password-protected laptop that has an encrypted hard drive. The researcher reassured participants that all data collected would be deleted at the end of the research project. This process was important especially because the voices of the participants had been recorded on tape during data collection. The

#### **Chapter 4. Results**

This chapter focuses on the results obtained in this study intending to determine whether there is a correlation between Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and speaking competence (IELTS speaking) in students who are studying abroad. In the following chapter, a descriptive analysis on the scores reflects on the results and their strong and the weak points of these students' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). In Table 4.1., the results that the

sample of 233 participants obtained in their IELTS tests are specified both regarding their general scores, as well as the individualised scores for each component of the test.

**Table 4.1** Descriptive Statistics of participants' IELTS scores (overall and each section)

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IELTS	233	4.5	8.0	6.562	0.6802
Speaking	233	5.0	8.0	6.172	0.6651
Listening	233	3.5	9.0	6.837	1.1138
Writing	233	5.0	8.5	6.185	0.6435
Reading	233	3.5	9.0	6.811	0.9950
Valid N (listwise)	233				

To ensure the data is suitable for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's test of Sphericity were conducted. From the result of KMO, the data had the value of .873. and this indicates that the degree of information among the variables overlap greatly/the presence of a strong partial correlation. Hence, it is plausible to conduct factor analysis. Moreover, the statistical significance of Bartlett's sphericity test was .000 (<0.01), indicating that the correlation between the original variables is suitable for factor analysis. These results are provided in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2** KMO and Bartlett's Test result.

<b>KMO and Bartlett's Test</b>	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.873

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6706.998
	df	1081
	Sig.	0.000

Additionally, to ensure the accuracy of the measurement results, reliability analysis should be conducted on the valid data in the questionnaire before the analysis. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was used for analysis the reliability of the data that has been collected. In this research, the reliability coefficient is above 0.9, which indicates that the stability, consistency and reliability of the measurement results is qualified (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3** Reliability Statistics result.

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items
0.926	0.926	47

#### 4.1 Comparison of ICC Between Students of High and Low IELTS Speaking Scores

The total of 233 students in the questionnaire can be divided into two groups, those who passed IELTS and those who did not pass IELTS, whereby the passing score of IELTS for the entrance of most universities is 6. In order to identify any significant difference between the two groups, a comparison is made between the two groups. Among the 233 subjects, there are in total 117 students whose speaking scores are under or equal 6, and 116 of them are above 6. Hence, the group with the speaking score under 6 provides a point of comparison to the group with higher

speaking scores, which would indicate the existence of a positive correlation between IELTS scores and ICC.

**Table 4.4** Descriptive statistics of ICC and each factor between high and low IELTS speaking score

	IELTS Speaking	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
DC <sup>1</sup>	low	117	3.5071	1.18709	0.10975
	high	116	4.1925	0.67695	0.06285
LC	low	117	2.7828	0.61247	0.05662
	high	116	3.6509	0.47560	0.04416
SC	low	117	3.2735	0.76411	0.07064
	high	116	3.9966	0.59854	0.05557
SC*	low	117	2.9416	0.61795	0.05713
	high	116	3.3376	0.66683	0.06191
IK	low	117	2.8775	0.71614	0.06621
	high	116	3.6753	0.48646	0.04517
IA	low	117	3.4615	0.94265	0.08715
	high	116	3.8190	0.69141	0.06420
IA*	low	117	3.0684	0.91834	0.08490
	high	116	3.8254	0.62138	0.05769
IS	low	117	2.6171	0.87201	0.08062
	high	116	3.6379	0.68164	0.06329
Total (ICC)	low	117	2.9696	0.37977	0.03511
	high	116	3.7111	0.19464	0.01807

<sup>1</sup> Discourse Competence ( DC ) Linguistic Competence ( LC ) Sociolinguistic Competence ( SC ) Strategic Competence ( SC\* ) Intercultural Knowledge ( IK ) Intercultural Awareness ( IA ) Intercultural Attitudes ( IA\* ) Intercultural Skills ( IS )

Table 4.4 provides the descriptive statistics of ICC and each factor between high IELTS score and low IELTS score. The data shows that the mean of ICC for students of high IELTS speaking (3.71) is higher than that of low IELTS speaking students (2.97). Thus, students of high IELTS speaking score have better intercultural communicative competence than students of low IELTS score in general. Additionally, among the eight factors, students of high IELTS have higher means in each factor, albeit some factors the difference appears to be more remarkable than in others. This appears to reveal that the preparation and scores for IELTS do reflect on all ICC components.

#### 4.2 Correlation between ICC and IELTS Speaking Score

This section focuses on the correlation between Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and IELTS speaking score and also the correlation of each specific part of ICC and IELTS speaking score. This data is analyzed with SPSS 24 software. The results of correlation analyses conducted by SPSS 24 are demonstrated in the following parts.

**Table 4.5** The correlation within ICC and IELTS speaking score

	IELTS speaking	ICC
IELTS speaking Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 233	<b>.736*</b> .000
ICC Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	<b>.763*</b> 233	1 233

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.5 clearly shows the correlation within ICC and IELTS. The results of the table show that the Pearson Correlation between Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and speaking competence (IELTS speaking) is 0.736 ( $r=0.736$ ). This is considered to strong correlation according to the guidance in Quin (2003). That is, students who have high scores in IELTS speaking have higher scores in ICC than those who have low scores in IELTS speaking.

### 4.3 Correlation within Specific Factors in ICC and IELTS Speaking Score

**Table 4.6** The correlation within ICC and IELTS speaking score

	Speaking
DC	0.437**
LC	0.427**
SC	0.405**
SC*	0.212**
IK	0.443**
IA	0.327**
IA*	0.336**
IS	0.472**
Total(ICC)	0.643**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.6 shows that the Pearson Correlation within specific factors in ICC and IELTS speaking score. From the data, it is clear that Intercultural Skills, Intercultural Knowledge, Discourse Competence and Linguistic Competence are the factors showing a higher correlation, whilst the lowest correspond to Strategic Competence. Hence, this is important to review as IELTS may provide a stronger tool in assessing certain aspects of ICC when compared to others. This is further discussed in the next chapter.

#### 4.4 Correlation within ICC and Specific Factors in IELTS

Recall that IELTS has four subparts, listening, speaking, reading and writing, with each part the same score of nine. The final score of each examinee is the average score of the four parts. So, it is worth reviewing any possible correlation within ICC and specific factors in IELTS. The correlation between different factors may be observed in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.7** The Correlation within ICC and Specific Factors in IELTS

	IELTS	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading
DC	0.564**	0.437**	0.552**	0.328**	0.459**
LC	0.513**	0.427**	0.491**	0.333**	0.409**
SC	0.537**	0.405**	0.516**	0.323**	0.465**
SC*	0.224**	0.212**	0.243**	0.1	0.180**
IK	0.590**	0.443**	0.576**	0.455**	0.431**
IA	0.438**	0.327**	0.418**	0.222**	0.363**
IA*	0.445**	0.336**	0.431**	0.346**	0.352**
IS	0.644**	0.472**	0.626**	0.411**	0.540**
Total ICC	0.826**	0.643**	0.803**	0.540**	0.641**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In Table 4.7, the data shows that the Pearson Correlation between ICC and each factor. To see it in a descending order, the highest Pearson Correlation is between ICC and listening, which is 0.803 ( $r=0.803$ ). The second highest Pearson Correlation between ICC and speaking is 0.643 ( $r=0.643$ ). The data is higher than 0.5, which suggests that there is a strong relationship between them. The third highest Pearson Correlation between ICC and reading is 0.611 ( $r=0.641$ ), which means that there is a still a strong weaker relationship between them. And the Pearson Correlation between ICC and writing is 0.540 ( $r=0.540$ ). Hence, it would appear that

there is a stronger correlation with listening, although speaking comes close second. This is further discussed in the next chapter.

#### 4.5 Participants with longer experience abroad

There was a further division made to account for the experience of participants in an English-speaking country. Out of the 233 participants, 102 had just finished their IELTS and had lived in an English-learning country for a year or less, the rest may have been in an English-speaking country for longer. The group with the least experience may be significant as their exam was taken more recently; hence the relationship between the IELTS exam and the ICC would be closer, as they have not had further time and experience abroad to expand their ICC further. It is paramount to highlight that the length of experience in a country where they speak the target language may have a strong impact on the learners' ICC.

**Table 4.8** Length of study abroad for participants

Participants took IELTS test less than one year.	N=102
Participants took IELTS test between one and five years.	N=131

**Table 4.9** Descriptive Statistics of IELTS score and ICC score for those who have been studying in English-speaking country less than one year.

<b>Descriptive Statistics<sup>a</sup></b>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IELTS	102	5.0	7.5	<b>6.225</b>	0.6624
Speaking	102	5.0	7.0	<b>5.912</b>	0.5777
Listening	102	3.5	9.0	<b>6.299</b>	1.0347
Writing	102	5.0	8.5	<b>5.990</b>	0.5449
Reading	102	4.5	8.5	<b>6.382</b>	0.8960

DC	102	1.00	5.00	<b>3.5000</b>	1.18735
LC	102	1.33	4.42	<b>2.9175</b>	0.68993
SC	102	1.00	5.00	<b>3.3627</b>	0.82569
SC*	102	1.67	4.50	<b>3.0605</b>	0.63531
IK	102	1.56	4.44	<b>2.9259</b>	0.74942
IA	102	1.33	5.00	<b>3.4739</b>	0.93864
IA*	102	1.00	5.00	<b>3.0858</b>	0.89726
IS	102	1.00	5.00	<b>2.7588</b>	0.90075
Total (ICC)	102	1.70	3.89	<b>3.0549</b>	0.45840
Valid N (listwise)	102				

**Table 4.10** Descriptive Statistics of IELTS score and ICC score for those who have been studying in English-speaking country between one and five years.

#### Descriptive Statistics<sup>a</sup>

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IELTS	131	4.5	8.0	<b>6.831</b>	0.5422
Speaking	131	5.0	8.0	<b>6.368</b>	0.6575
Listening	131	3.5	9.0	<b>7.264</b>	0.9791
Writing	131	5.0	8.5	<b>6.322</b>	0.6450
Reading	131	3.5	9.0	<b>7.174</b>	0.9392
DC	131	1.00	5.00	<b>4.1047</b>	0.78414
LC	131	1.92	4.67	<b>3.4573</b>	0.60161
SC	131	2.00	5.00	<b>3.8661</b>	0.65594
SC*	131	1.33	5.00	<b>3.2039</b>	0.70234
IK	131	1.67	4.78	<b>3.5574</b>	0.57770
IA	131	1.33	5.00	<b>3.7824</b>	0.71971
IA*	131	1.50	5.00	<b>3.7397</b>	0.72557

IS	131	1.00	5.00	<b>3.4264</b>	0.83902
Total (ICC)	131	1.94	4.02	<b>3.5704</b>	0.34433
Valid N (listwise)	131				

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a. year = 1-5

In Table 4.9 and 4.10, one may observe that there are different scores both in terms of minimum and maximum grades obtained for both groups, the size of the groups is not equivalent, so it is not a straight-forward comparison as one is relatively larger than the other, hence it contains more data. This may explain the wider ranges of grades obtained, and as a consequence, it may affect the different correlation scores for the values of ICC. The group that had been abroad for longer also has a higher ICC score (M=3.05/M=3.57). This also adds an additional variable to consider when thinking about the relationship between IELTS speaking scores and ICC, which is the time that spent living abroad. While we get a strong correlation between IELTS speaking and ICC in the correlation, it is worth considering whether language proficiency varies with time spent living abroad and, if so, the more compelling data are for participants who have just completed their IELTS and have lived abroad for less than a year. This would give a more direct, clear and unambiguous picture of the direct impact of the IELTS test on ICC. Therefore, the study did another correlation analysis using participants who had only lived abroad for less than one year (no more than one year after finishing the IELTS exam) and came up with the following results.

**Table 4.11** The correlations between IELTS (speaking) and ICC for those who have been studying in English-speaking country less than one year.

	IELTS	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading
DC	-0.333**	-0.224*	-0.270**	-0.234*	-0.169
LC	0.356**	0.260**	0.276**	0.231*	0.347**
SC	0.046	0.113	0.088	0.086	-0.095
SC*	-0.01	0.102	0.086	-0.053	-0.105
IK	0.167	0.065	0.114	0.282**	0.174
IA	0.232*	0.225*	0.241*	0.156	0.108
IA*	0.18	0.249**	0.251**	0.087	-0.028
IS	0.346**	0.252**	0.340**	0.157	0.251**
Total ICC	0.364**	<b>0.317**</b>	0.351**	0.289**	0.247**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Previous data shows that the IELTS scores and ICC are strongly correlated in the total sample ( $N=233$ ), which is 0.736 ( $r=0.736$ )(see Table 4.5); however, Table 4.11 indicates that looking at the data of 102 students who have just finished their IELTS year, the correlation between their IELTS speaking scores and ICC in this group is not as strong as the correlation of the whole sample, which is 0.317( $r=0.317$ ).

This comparative data makes it suggestive that even though the relationship between IELTS speaking and ICC is statistically significant, the effect of actual IELTS speaking training on ICC may not be as obvious. Students who have just finished their IELTS exams are supposed to be the most representative of the effectiveness of their IELTS training, but what they get is not as relevant to the ICC as those who has been living abroad for a longer period of time. This comparative study shows the inadequacy of the correlation analysis, which is why the design of

the study also requires qualitative analysis to know the real attitudes of the participants towards the relationship between IELTS speaking and ICC.

#### 4.6 Multiple Regression Analysis

To be able to show more clearly the relationship between IELTS speaking scores and the various components of the ICC, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the proportion of the total variance of speaking score for each of the eight factors DC, LC, SC, SC\*, IK, IA, IA\*, IS of ICC

**Table 4.11** The model R-squared Value for Multiple Regression Analysis

##### **Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.877 <sup>a</sup>	0.769	0.761	1.66134

a. Predictors: (Constant), IS, IA, SC, IA\*, LC, IK, SC\*, DC<sup>2</sup>

The model R-squared value was 0.769, implying that DC,LC,SC,SC\*,IK,IA,IA\*,IS (components of ICC) explained 76.9% of the variation in ICC. An F-test of the model revealed that the model passed the F-test (F=93.226, p=0.000<0.05), which means that at least one of DC,LC,SC,SC\*,IK,IA,IA\*,IS would have an influential relationship on IELTS speaking score.

**Table 4.12** Model Summary for Multiple Regression Analysis

<b>ANOVA<sup>a</sup></b>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2058.465	8	257.308	93.226	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	618.254	224	2.760		

<sup>2</sup> Discourse Competence ( DC ) Linguistic Competence ( LC ) Sociolinguistic Competence ( SC ) Strategic Competence ( SC\* ) Intercultural Knowledge ( IK ) Intercultural Awareness ( IA ) Intercultural Attitudes ( IA\* ) Intercultural Skills ( IS )

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Total	2676.719	232
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a. Dependent Variable: IELTS speaking score

b. Predictors: (Constant), IS, IA, SC, IA\*, LC, IK, SC\*, DC

**Table 5.13** Model Summary for Multiple Regression Analysis

		<b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>				
		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant) <sup>3</sup>	13.116	0.854		15.364	0.000
	DC	0.416	0.143	0.125	2.911	0.004
	LC	1.203	0.176	0.248	6.848	0.000
	SC	0.494	0.182	0.113	2.716	0.007
	SC*	0.120	0.171	0.024	0.703	0.483
	IK	1.004	0.181	0.216	5.549	0.000
	IA	0.882	0.153	0.219	5.763	0.000
	IA*	0.476	0.146	0.122	3.271	0.001
	IS	1.174	0.142	0.323	8.258	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: IELTS speaking score

The regression coefficient for DC is 0.416 ( $t=2.911$ ,  $p=0.004<0.01$ ), for LC is 1.203 ( $t=6.848$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), for SC is 0.494 ( $t=2.716$ ,  $p=0.007<0.01$ ), or IK is 1.004 ( $t=5.549$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), for IA is 0.882 ( $t=5.763$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), for IA\* is 0.476 ( $t=3.271$ ,  $p=0.001<0.01$ ), for IS is 1.174 ( $t=8.258$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), meaning that those factors have a significant positive effect on speaking score.

However, the regression coefficient for SC\* is 0.120 ( $t=0.703$ ,  $p=0.483>0.05$ ), meaning that it does not effect speaking socre. To summarise the analysis: DC, LC, SC, IK, IA, IA\*, IS have a significant positive effect on speaking socre.while SC\*( Strategic Competence) does not

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<sup>3</sup> Discourse Competence ( DC ) Linguistic Competence ( LC ) Sociolinguistic Competence ( SC ) Strategic Competence ( SC\* ) Intercultural Knowledge ( IK ) Intercultural Awareness ( IA ) Intercultural Attitudes ( IA\* ) Intercultural Skills ( IS )

#### **4.7 Qualitative data obtained through personal interviews**

This qualitative data is complemented by the qualitative data gathered using individual interviews, where participants were asked five questions, all prepared in advance, to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between IELTS speaking and ICC. All these interviews were recorded and later transcribed, and can be found in full in Appendix 2. The few participants that answered these interviews, where asked questions on their beliefs around whether the IELTS speaking test helped their intercultural communicative competence in their studies abroad. Not all participants agreed to the existence of such link, although most noted that the test helped albeit only to a certain extent. The participants were also asked whether they thought there was a relationship between the overall IELTS score and intercultural communicative competence. The responses to this question were rather diverse, with some arguing that there was no relationship, whilst others arguing that IELTS offered them a good starting point. Additionally, participants argued that the most helpful aspect of IELTS speaking in regards to ICC included learning certain expressions, and topics as well as participating in everyday scenarios. On the other hand, the participants argued that the least helpful aspect of IELTS speaking for ICC included the memorisation teaching practices employed, preparation of monologues, mechanical strategies, as well as unreal and scripted scenarios used in the exam. Not many responded to the question on the most important skill in intercultural communication. The ones that did highlighted either linguistic competence, sociolinguistic skills, or the real practice of communicative exchanges in real life. Both these sets of qualitative and quantitative data are further discussed in the next chapter, which are compared with the results and conclusions obtained in prior studies.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

With this thesis, the researcher set out to investigate whether the outcomes of Chinese students' intercultural communication could be predicted with test results. The qualitative analysis conducted in Chapter 4 provides data to attempt an answer to this question by

comparing the results to those found in the literature. This chapter covers the reliability of the IELTS test as a means to test Chinese students' ICC. It also addresses the question of whether the IELTS speaking scores of Chinese university students have a strong relation with high levels of ICC in the same group of students. This question is essential to understand whether IELTS speaking scores may be used as a predictor for students' ICC as well as whether the IELTS test itself is a valid assessment tool. The general data obtained in the previous chapter indicates a strong correlation between IELTS speaking scores and ICC, as demonstrated in previous studies. However, this correlation appears weaker once the group is narrowed down to those who had taken the test in the previous year. This group is slightly smaller than the other cohort, and the results may be consequently affected. As such, it is important to review the consistency between the data obtained in this study and the results obtained in the existing literature.

## **5.2 Learner Attitudes Toward and Awareness of the Efficacy of IELTS on Learners' ICC**

ICC is an important consideration for Chinese learners of English, as recent higher education requirements' adoption of ICC as an objective demonstrates (Lei, 2021a). Clearly, ICC is essential to develop students' capacity to communicate globally with not just native speakers of English but also speakers of English from other countries (Mu & Yu, 2021). Students themselves have noted the great importance of ICC when it comes to communicating with others. In the present study's collected data, some participants highlighted this as well. They may not have considered that the exams prepared them sufficiently for such communication. For instance, Song noted the following: 'Sort of, here are some fixed scenarios, such as studying, shopping and travelling in everyday life, which are practiced in IELTS speaking, but there are some scenarios that are not practiced that are not so helpful'. Apart from highlighting that the

IELTS speaking exam did not prepare him for an extensive number of scenarios, Song highlighted that ICC is important and may help with learners' willingness to communicate. Confidence appears to be a common thread among the qualitative data obtained in this research. Hence, ICC is perceived as valuable to increase confidence in communication. That is, students recognise that cross-cultural communication demands a wide range of communication skills necessary to be able to carry out any real conversation.

Students in this study did not appear to be fully satisfied with the preparation that they received for ICC, similar to what Mu and Yu (2021) observed. The popularity of the IELTS test among Chinese students does not directly translate to students' ability to communicate in a multicultural setting, as Burrows (2016) indicated. For example, Keren, one of the participants interviewed in this study, noted that the test did not prepare her for communication in an English-speaking community: 'I had a hard time relating the content of IELTS to my study life abroad'. This statement is by a student who admitted having a very low IELTS score. Lee corroborated the statement by noting that 'the IELTS content alone is not enough', indicating that students are dissatisfied with the level of preparation offered by the IELTS itself. Hence, students clearly understand the importance of ICC, but they do not believe that exams prepare them sufficiently to achieve a desired level of multilingual competence. They attribute this lack of ICC training to constraints imposed on current language teaching methods, course contents, and exam-oriented learning situations. These data do not only appear in the current study – they also appear in Mu and Yu (2021). This is a conclusion derived from the perceptions of the students, indicating practical implications for English language teachers, teacher trainers and curriculum developers. These perceptions should be incorporated into the curriculum and practice to further enhance learners' ICC. However, these perceptions do not imply that the

current teaching and testing system does not prepare learners for ICC. Nevertheless, they are useful to review the influence of the speaking part of the test because it may be the part that could be enhanced to further learners' ICC. That is, speaking exams and training can be redesigned to more effectively influence the development of students' intercultural competence.

The participants of this study noted that there were some parts of the IELTS speaking test and its preparation that were useful for communicating. For instance, Song mentioned that 'some of the expressions used in IELTS speaking to set up everyday scenarios are useful'. Other participants added that exercises focusing on grammar, including the use of past tense and subordinate clauses, were useful for the development of their ICC. Further, the benefits were not limited to grammar, as another participant noted: IELTS speaking topics also introduced valuable speech acts, including 'how to initiate a conversation, such as greetings and talking about the weather, which I find useful in everyday life'. Another participant noted that the topics also covered other common issues, such as holidays and travel, 'which has given me new topics to communicate with others'. The topics were not limited to everyday life— Lee noted that the IELTS speaking test also prepared him to communicate about academic topics, 'which makes my cross-cultural communication more every day and natural'. In other words, the participants in this study apparently did learn some ICC from their preparation for the IELTS speaking test.

In contrast, the students' self-reflection also indicated certain weaknesses of the IELTS speaking test. For instance, one participant noted that 'the way my English teacher trained us to memorise the words and recite the answers did not help me at all in my future communication'. This is a complaint that has been made in several studies, including those of Parris-Kidd and Barnett (2011) and Mu and Yu (2021). Leedham (2014) and Mu and Yu (2021) noted that this appears to be a common issue: teaching practitioners do not always focus on ICC development

but rather on the repetition and memorisation of stock phrases, which does not enhance students' ICC; it only works to enhance their memorisation skills. Other participants noted that some parts of the IELTS speaking test appear unnatural; for instance, Wong noted that preparing for a two-minute monologue was unhelpful because 'I rarely need to prepare such monologues to communicate with people in my daily life'. Further, another student argued that a conversation would be more natural and less like a 'simulation'. The lack of modernisation of the exam was also highlighted by another participant, who argued that no one asks for directions these days because people tend to have navigation systems. Such topics were considered 'too mechanical', and participants stated they could be 'more updated'. These observations are key illustrators of the perceived lack of effectiveness of the IELTS speaking test in preparing students for real communication and developing their ICC. This is a common thread in the literature, where the exam does not seem to always correlate to the capacity for communication in real-life scenarios. The following sections will review the quantitative data to compare these perceptions with the results of the tests. Students' subjective opinions may not be sufficient to rule out the effectiveness of the IELTS speaking test.

### **5.3 Links Between IELTS Score and ICC**

This section reviews data from the previous chapter to analyse the different components of ICC and their correlation with the IELTS score. The literature has highlighted that the different components of ICC may be differently enhanced by IELTS preparation, and in turn, they may have a different relationship with students' IELTS scores. IELTS preparation can improve ICC because its components may be trained when students are studying, and this training may affect their assessment results. Zhang (2007) argued that knowledge, attitude, and behaviour form parts of ICC; thus, IELTS preparation and the general English language

classroom may affect the development of learners' knowledge and affect their attitudes and behaviour. An effective language course should comprise the development of students' awareness of the values, politics, geography, and religion of the target culture. Most language learning courses, including preparation for IELTS, cover, to a certain extent, these aspects of the English-speaking culture. This section examines the results of the study to determine the potential effects of preparation and IELTS assessment on measuring the attitudes and behaviours of learners. These attitudes and behaviours may be measured using an ICC test such as the one developed by Zhong et al. (2013) and employed in the current study. This model comprises the dimensions of communicative and intercultural competence. The current study evaluated the components of communicative competence, including discourse competence, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, intercultural knowledge, intercultural awareness, intercultural attitudes, and intercultural skills.

### **Discourse Competence**

According to the data in this study, a high correlation exists between IELTS score and the discourse competence of learners. Wen (1999) defined this communicative dimension element as learners' ability to produce and organise utterances in a cohesive, coherent, and complete discourse. It includes the ability of students to initiate, terminate, or maintain an interaction. The data here showed that this correlation is higher with listening and reading and lower with speaking and writing. Hence, it would appear that the test does not prepare students as well for their speaking skills as for either listening or reading. The researcher expected the organisation of a coherent and cohesive form of discourse to be more prominent in speaking than listening or reading. Discourse competence appears to be more developed in the receptive skills of reading and listening but less developed in the productive skills of speaking and writing. This may be

attributed to the focus on receptive over productive skills in the classroom. As Nation (2001) noted, ideally, students would have balanced receptive and productive skills; however, this is not always the case. In fact, the literature suggests that the receptive–productive relationship may vary across learning contexts. The different balances of the two would be affected by the quantity and quality of the L2 input received by the students as well as the teaching approach employed. From the point of view of this study, it is not possible to gauge the input that participants received, which may have enhanced either their productive or receptive skills. Nevertheless, considering that the students took the IELTS exam, they were clearly taught all four skills to some extent.

The results of this study contrast with those obtained by Lei (2021b). In a study focusing on English teachers' ICC competence in China, Lei found that the discourse competence level of teachers was much lower than other components of ICC. In fact, discourse competence was the second lowest component in this study behind knowledge. This marks a stark contrast with the results of the present study, which measured the levels of students' ICC. It is interesting to compare the discourse competence correlation between teachers and students because it may indicate that teachers are only partial communicators of discourse competence knowledge and that students may acquire discourse competence on their own. Both Iwashita and Vasquez (2019) and Dashti and Razmjoo (2020) explored the distinctive features of discourse competence performance and their correlation to the IELTS speaking band descriptor. Their analysis of discourse competence, in particular the use of cohesive and coherent devices, revealed that higher-level test takers performed better when using these devices in comparison to lower-level test-takers. However, this performance did not show any differences in features such as ellipsis and substitution. By comparing students who achieved a pass mark on their IELTS test to those

who did not in the current study (see Table 4.4), the researcher observed that students with a higher score did better in their discourse competence than those with a lower score. IELTS thus reflects positively on discourse competence, as indicated by the fact that better-prepared students achieve better grades and that IELTS is an accurate measure of the discourse competence level of students.

### **Linguistic Competence**

Another factor that demonstrated a significant correlation with IELTS scores in the present study was linguistic competence, another component of the communicative dimension. Linguistic competence indicates the ability of a learner to master not only knowledge of the target language but also the use of language skills, including phonetic, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge as well as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation skills (Hu, 1999). In the present study, learners noted that speakers occasionally spoke too fast for them to fully understand. According to the results, there was a higher correlation between IELTS scores in listening in the first place and speaking in the second. Hence, there is more preparation in the IELTS test in regards to Linguistic Competence that has an impact on the learners' speaking ability. This indicates that, regarding linguistic competence, the correlation with IELTS scores is much higher for students' listening and speaking skills than their writing and reading skills. This result is unexpected given that Lei (2020b) found that despite the positive attitude toward and good intentions regarding intercultural communication among preservice English teachers, they lack the linguistic competence to pass on their skills to their students. Gao (2014) and Hua (2019), in contrast, found that linguistic competence scored low. This indicated that Chinese students, despite having a positive attitude towards ICC, do not have sufficient strategies to cope with intercultural conversations because they lack the necessary vocabulary, grammar, or

language skills. Similarly, Li and Li (2003) in their study of Chinese learners noted that exams like the IELTS were not directly correlated to the components of students' ICC levels. However, the authors noted that linguistic competence alone was not linked to the other components of ICC. Their experiences in an English context improved participants' linguistic competence but not necessarily other aspects of their ICC. The authors suggested that the instructors and the curricula offered in China should not solely focus on linguistic competence but rather on other areas of ICC to ensure that students improve in all aspects. Linguistic competence alone is not sufficient to offer learners insights into different speech situations that may be encountered when attempting to successfully communicate in English. Hence, teaching should extend to using English in meaningful sociocultural contexts and should go beyond linguistic competence alone.

For example, Tran and Duong (2018), in their Vietnamese study, found that ICLT positively influenced students' linguistic and intercultural competence. Hence, the authors argued that ICLT may help EFL learners become competent intercultural speakers. The authors noted that a considerable percentage of learners argued that following such a teaching approach that focuses on ICC not only improved their linguistic competence but also made them pay more attention to the cultural content of the course. Additionally, about half of the participants of the study argued that the ICC-focused course developed their linguistic competence; hence, they were hoping to participate in similar courses in the future because they perceived such courses as helpful for their future careers. Tran and Duong attributed students' improvement to their awareness of the role of English in the context of globalisation. However, the authors noted that their group of participants was willing to improve even before the course – they had taken the course in addition to their existing curriculum. Tran and Duong also found that even though the speaking skills of participants did not improve as much as their other scores, the skills relatively

improved by the end of the course. Tran and Duong (2018) added that learners' speaking skills did not improve as much as their other skills because learning skills are one of the most difficult to develop. Wang and Zhou (2020), in contrast, advocated for content-based English instruction, wherein learners would acquire English within a specialised knowledge context. The master graduate students who participated in the study also noted an increase in their linguistic competence, as well as in their intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitude, intercultural awareness, and intercultural strategy. Thus, specialised context would prove helpful in improving learners' linguistic competence. Both these studies indicated that a focus on IELTS can positively influence learners' linguistic competence, but it may not always be the best path to improve students' overall ICC. This is supported by the results of the present study, which showed that, regarding their linguistic competence, students who had a higher IELTS score did not necessarily do better than those who had a lower IELTS score.

### **Sociolinguistic Competence**

The results of the present study also indicated a strong correlation between IELTS results and sociolinguistic competence, an additional element of the communicative dimension. The current results demonstrated that those with higher grades in the IELTS obtained better results regarding their sociolinguistic competence. This occurred more so in relation to listening skills and less so in relation to writing skills – although both speaking and reading skills were at a similar level. Hence, it is another component where speaking skills could be promoted further when students prepare for their IELTS exam. These results aligned with those of Lei (2021b), who highlighted that teachers have considerable skills when it comes to sociolinguistic competence in both urban and rural areas. Sociolinguistic competence indicates a speaker's ability to adjust their manner of speaking to every kind of communication context. It may also

indicate learners' ability to adjust their speaking style depending on their age, gender, and identity, and the status of the coparticipant. Moreover, speakers with sociolinguistic competence may adjust their speech depending on their closeness to the other party; that is, speakers may adapt their speech to not only the situation but also the person with whom they are conversing.

Lei (2021a) established a link between the results of the IELTS test and learners' socialisation capacity. In this case, socialisation is understood as being exposed to various forms of language that cover various domains and types of social interactions and contexts (Duff, 2011). The results of the present study replicated those found in Lei, wherein IELTS-intensive courses appeared to prepare learners before they went to study abroad so that they realised the importance of spoken English and their own speaking skills. That is, the test helps students face various challenges in their L2 socialisation process when studying abroad, including new idioms, various accents, and different cultural backgrounds. These results indicated that IELTS not only prepares students well but also has the ability to measure how students use their SC. However, this research, as well as Lei's, found that students have mixed feelings about the importance and relevance of IELTS in their sociolinguistic competence development. Whereas some students argue that they are not sufficiently prepared to deal with all types of contexts abroad, some note that they have the desire to overcome any issue they may face. That is, some students have the desire to continue improving their sociolinguistic competence by engaging in further communication opportunities. Sociolinguistic competence is a process that needs to be constantly developed, so an attitude that will ensure this is key for the success of students, who already have a good foundation built up through their IELTS preparation.

### **Strategic Competence**

Strategic competence is the last element of the communicative dimension analysed in this chapter, and it is notably different from the rest. Strategic competence had the lowest correlation with the IELTS results of participants. Students with higher grades did not necessarily have better results than those with lower grades. It is the lowest in writing, but it is still a low correlation with the other three skills. Hence, the results of the IELTS do not particularly show in the speaking skills when compared to the Strategic Competence of the learners. In particular, the participants in this study were asked whether they kept silent when they encountered something they could not express in English. These results did not align with those noted by Lei (2021b) in his study of preservice teachers. Lei found that strategic competence was the second in average scores after communication attitudes. Hence, in Lei's study, preservice English teachers displayed not only a positive attitude towards different cultures but also a strong willingness to communicate interculturally, or to at least overcome communication difficulties with either verbal or nonverbal strategies. As such, teachers appeared to have a different view of strategic competence than participants in this study. The study conducted by Huang (2013) can help explain this difference. In her study of strategic competence in the IELTS exam, the author found that the students used their strategic competence in different ways in testing and non-testing contexts. That is, they employed a number of strategies during a test, even though they may not have employed the same number of strategies outside of the test. Students were more likely to use social strategies such as asking questions and attending to the examiner's interest during a test. Additionally, Huang (2013) found that students employed metacognitive and communication more often than social strategies. In other words, the context changed students' use of strategies, which may explain the differences in strategic competence while speaking. Thus, wider topic coverage in the IELTS test and preparation may allow students to improve

their strategic competence to cover a variety of situations. Interactions in the speaking IELTS assessment certainly reproduce interactions that students may face in real-life situations. Hence, including interaction in speaking assessments has the potential to improve students' strategic competence.

### **Intercultural Skills**

The following subsections cover participants' intercultural competence. In the present study, the researcher found a positive correlation between IELTS and participants' intercultural skills (IS) – the correlation was significantly higher in reading and listening and lower in writing and speaking. This would be a further suggestion to enhance the preparation of speaking skills when it comes to the improvement of Intercultural Skills. Hence, productive skills demonstrated a lower correlation between IELTS scores and intercultural skills when compared to receptive skills. Intercultural skills include the ability to bring both the learner's culture of origin and the content of the target language together. Additionally, intercultural skills includes the development of learners' cultural sensitivity and their ability to identify and use a myriad of strategies to communicate with individuals from other cultures. Intercultural skills extend to an individual's capacity to become a cultural intermediary between their own culture and the culture of the target language; as such, being able to effectively address intercultural misunderstandings and conflict is important. Further, developing intercultural skills entails achieving the capacity to overcome stereotyped relationships among cultures (Byram et al., 2002). Hence, Deardorff (2006) argued that a learner's deeper understanding of cultural knowledge or information directly translates to the improvement of intercultural skills, and vice versa. In that sense, the IELTS may be a good tool of assessment, as can be seen from the results of this study. When

comparing students who scored higher in their IELTS test and those who scored lower, it was found that their intercultural skills results were also correlated with their grades.

It is not possible to gauge what kind of teaching participants in this study engaged in before taking their exams. However, the literature shows that there are learning programs that may benefit students in their intercultural skill attainment. Tran and Duong (2018) argued that a successful teaching approach includes not only materials but also instructors that facilitate the improvement of the intercultural skills of their students. The authors argued that the IELTS test and the training that precedes it does not cover IS sufficiently. For example, they believed that IELTS courses fail to train learners to interpret documents and events from different cultural perspectives and then relate these to their own culture. Besides, IELTS is unsuccessful in providing learners with opportunities to acquire new knowledge of other cultures and cultural practices, and it does not help them apply their knowledge, attitudes, and skills to achieve an understanding of a new cultural environment and interact with those from different cultures. In fact, in a qualitative study, Baker and Fang (2019) noted that learners did not feel that IELTS offered them the chance to develop intercultural skills, although one of the participants argued that they did not think intercultural skills were necessary. However, this participant seemed to be an outlier. Xiao and Petraki (2007) found that Chinese students abroad wished to communicate with others across cultures. Further, the authors found that most Chinese students at an Australian university were actively engaged in intercultural communication; namely, more than 75% of their participants communicated with students from other countries very frequently, and 87.5% had at least one foreign friend. These figures imply that the Chinese cohort of learners recruited in this study demonstrated a strong willingness to interact with students from other countries.

In the present study, the group of learners who spent more than one year studying English abroad also had higher intercultural skills, indicating that participants in this study also engaged in intercultural communication that aided the improvement of this component. This does not indicate that the students did not face any difficulties, as the qualitative data of this study showed. This is also corroborated by the results of Xiao and Petraki (2007). In particular, the authors found that more than 81% of the Chinese students reported facing difficulties when interacting with students from other countries. Participants attributed most of their communication difficulties to cultural differences. In the study conducted by Xiao and Petraki (2007), students found that IELTS topics tended to be 'safe' topics of conversation (e.g. greetings, weather, studies, cooking, family, hobbies). In contrast, topics that were not included in the IELTS were those that the learners had either limited knowledge of or little interest in. This lack of knowledge or interest resulted in decreased motivation to engage in further interactions. The need to develop IS was further highlighted by Xiao and Petraki (2007). They stated that communication difficulties arose from culture shock, differences in politeness, or misunderstandings in nonverbal communication. Hence, the authors argued that intercultural skill training does not stop after an initial course but may continue when studying overseas. In other words, it would appear useful to expand IELTS topics so that students felt better prepared in additional areas.

### **Intercultural Knowledge**

Intercultural knowledge in the present study also demonstrated a high correlation with IELTS. These results were matched when examining those students who received higher scores: their intercultural knowledge scores were higher than the intercultural knowledge scores of those who received a low IELTS score. Further, this correlation appeared to be more substantial for

listening skills, although the other three are comparatively similar. Hence, there is a good correlation between the IELTS speaking score and Intercultural Knowledge. This would indicate that IELTS scores are an effective measure for participants' intercultural knowledge. Authors such as Zhang (2016) highlighted that intercultural knowledge is a crucial factor in affecting the social and academic success of Chinese students studying in other countries. A developed intercultural knowledge indicates that Chinese students abroad can recognise differences between their own culture and a foreign culture, and this allows them to conduct efficient communication with English speakers (Xiuwen & Razali, 2020). In turn, this intercultural knowledge ensures that Chinese students develop their language to guarantee high academic attainment (Hu, 2018). Other authors such as Tran and Pham (2016) added that intercultural knowledge helps international students participate in class activities while studying abroad because they feel less psychological-linguistic pressure.

A lack of intercultural knowledge may negatively impact students; hence, demonstrating that IELTS effectively gauges intercultural knowledge levels is paramount to ensuring that Chinese students have a successful study abroad experience. Tran and Pham (2016) noted that cultural barriers may negatively affect international students' self-perceived feelings. That is, cultural barriers may make students feel awkward, stressed, or anxious when engaging in communication, indicating that international students must master the basic intercultural knowledge of the target culture when studying in a different country. This will allow them to better adapt to a foreign environment.

Further, Tran and Pham (2016) concluded that students with higher intercultural knowledge understand the content of their courses better and possess the confidence to ask for help when required – not only in their academic life but also in daily life situations.

Consequently, this ability and willingness to ask for help derived from a higher intercultural knowledge indicates that students face reduced academic pressure and less cultural adaptation stress. Tran and Pham highlighted that this intercultural knowledge aids non-native English speakers in studying in an English-medium college. Students can adapt culturally and achieve higher marks. This is because they are more at ease when participating in academic activities, such as oral presentations, general class activities, and other forms of communication with lecturers and peers.

This is particularly relevant to Chinese students abroad: various authors have highlighted how cultural differences, language adjustments and the foreign country's educational system may appear to be the most difficult obstructions to navigate (Triana, 2015), indicating that it is essential that a test that permits Chinese students to study abroad measure their capacity to succeed via their intercultural knowledge. The results of this study indicate that IELTS appears to develop this intercultural knowledge. According to Tseng and Newton (2002), any course that improves intercultural knowledge helps students achieve the following characteristics: knowing themselves and others, building relationships, expanding their worldview, being able to ask for help, developing cultural and social contacts, establishing relationships with advisors and instructors, being able to let go of problems, and developing their overall English proficiency. These factors are crucial: studies such as those by Sun (2019) show that learning anxiety due to a lack of intercultural knowledge of other cultures affects the learning of Chinese students in countries such as Thailand. Hence, an exam that successfully evaluates students' intercultural knowledge is critical before these students move abroad.

### **Intercultural Awareness**

An additional component that demonstrated a robust correlation with the IELTS results of participants of this study was intercultural awareness. Those students who obtained higher grades in their exams performed better in intercultural awareness compared to the group that obtained lower grades. This component was significantly better for the listening part of the exam, whereas the other three components were at the same level. This indicates that the students were better at observing cultural differences when communicating with people from different cultures. The results of the present study aligned with those obtained by Lei (2021b), who identified intercultural awareness as one of the most highly scored components of ICC in preservice teachers in China. Lei argued that preservice English teachers in the study were not only moderately sensitive to different cultures, but they also took a critical attitude towards cultural differences. Additionally, both Gao (2014) and Hua (2019) concluded that intercultural awareness as well as attitude levels of Chinese students scored higher compared to their linguistic competence, suggesting that Chinese EFL students maintained a robust willingness and openness toward engaging in intercultural communication. In turn, they could use necessary strategies to converse with people of other cultures, even in cases where they did not have the necessary level of vocabulary and grammar. Participating in communicative activities during the IELTS preparation and exam helped students practice the language acquired.

An IELTS preparation course and its subsequent examination can be an effective promoter of intercultural awareness and a good way to assess whether this course exposes students to other cultures and compares these cultures to their own (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018). Moreover, as students contact students from other cultures, this intercultural awareness can be expanded further. However, Douglas and Rosvold (2018) noted that having greater self-knowledge of oneself as a cultural being seems to be a solid foundation to improve intercultural

awareness. For instance, Galante (2014) noted that students who were critically self-aware were more capable of thinking about relationships among people from different cultures, both inside and outside the classroom. The use of real-life scenarios and activities further enhances the possibility of students developing intercultural awareness. Thus, it is not surprising that IELTS is an effective assessment tool for this ICC component.

### **Intercultural Attitudes**

The last component to be reviewed in this thesis is intercultural attitudes. The results of the present study demonstrated a correlation with this ICC component and the IELTS results of the participants. Thus, showing still a relevant correlation between the IELTS speaking score and the participants' Intercultural attitudes. In particular, students with higher grades demonstrated a greater level of intercultural attitude. A stronger correlation existed with listening than with the other three components, which were all about the same level. In particular, intercultural attitude refers to the interest that students have in the lifestyle and values of different countries as well as to their willingness to communicate with people from different cultures. This affective layer is also important for the development of students' ICC (Wen, 1999, 2004). In Lei (2021b), intercultural attitudes were the highest scoring component of the ICC; although this was not the case in the current study, the values were still significantly high and demonstrated a link between IELTS results and intercultural attitudes. Byram (1997) highlighted the importance of teaching intercultural attitudes in the classroom to develop learners' curiosity, openness, and capacity to suspend their disbelief about other cultures and their own culture. It would appear from the results that IELTS preparation succeeds in doing that, and consequently, the exam becomes a successful tool to measure this ICC component. The importance of using an approach that focuses on intercultural knowledge was highlighted by authors such as Byram (1997) as well as

Tran and Duong (2018). Exploring culture entails that learners can construct knowledge from their own experiences and reflections as they explore not only their own culture but also others'. In turn, this raises their self-awareness and consequently allows learners to re-examine their attitudes towards other cultures. Hence, shaping the intercultural attitudes of students helps shape and enhance other ICC components. Subsequently, their overall target language competence improves, which is clearly demonstrated in their IELTS results.

### **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

ICC is crucial for language learners to develop the necessary skills to communicate with native speakers of the target language and speakers of other languages. ICC comprises not only the knowledge of the target culture, but also the learners' attitudes, including their curiosity, openness, and willingness to suspend their disbelief about other cultures and about their own. Similarly, learners should acquire the skills of interpreting and relating to other cultures not only to interpret communication methods and habits of other cultures but also to be able to relate them to their own culture's communication methods and habits. The skills to discover and interact with people from other cultures and to learn about their values, beliefs, and behaviours are vital. Finally, for learners to develop effective communication skills, they should be able to critically evaluate perspectives, practices, processes, and products of their own culture and others. The results of the present study align with the literature in that a strong relationship exists between students' IELTS speaking scores and their ICC. This study focused on the speaking part of Chinese students in particular, and even though some differences between the components of the ICC results and the different language skills of the students existed, a strong link between the speaking scores of the participants' IELTS results and the ICC components was found. This is

shown by the fact that those who received higher scores had stronger ICC results. Therefore, course preparation was successful in preparing the students for assessment, and in turn, this assessment proved an effective method to gauge the ICC of the students.

The results of this study also highlighted that linguistic competence is not necessarily the only key to a successful IELTS exam and an efficient intercultural communication exchange. That is, a sole focus on linguistic competence does not provide language learners with the opportunity to develop their language capacity to address a wide variety of speech situations. The fact that those who scored higher in their IELTS exam did not do better than the ones who scored lower in this component demonstrates that linguistic competence alone is not a sufficient measure of communication capacity. This indicates that language teaching should extend beyond a unique focus on linguistic competence to teaching the language in meaningful sociocultural contexts. Because more Chinese learners wish to pursue higher education overseas in international education institutions, it is important to enhance these students' ICC so that they can flourish in their careers. Data show that Chinese students do not always satisfy the requirements to accurately follow lectures in English, and IELTS data show that the overall score of Chinese students is 36 out of 40 when considering countries that most frequently take IELTS exams. These data also reveal that their speaking score is the lowest when compared to writing, listening, and reading.

Hence, the teaching received by these students must be improved, and a focus on ICC plays a big role in this improvement. After all, adapting to a new country with a different set of beliefs, cultural values, and educational systems may pose one of the biggest challenges for the study abroad experience of Chinese students. Thus, it is paramount for students taking the IELTS exam to study abroad to improve their ICC to succeed academically. This is not the sole

responsibility of the students but also of curriculum designers, instructors, and education institutions.

Preparation for the IELTS exam should include a model of learning that prioritises the significance of intercultural English language knowledge. To this end, it is necessary to first improve teachers' own ICC so they may pass on high-quality English intercultural communication knowledge to the students. Moreover, preparation schools or institutions should consider recruitment of English-speaking lecturers and volunteers to participate in the classroom to help students gain additional opportunities to expose themselves to real-life English communication contexts. This would allow students to practice with people from different cultures, offering them a new perspective.

Further, educational institutions should expand the English speaking time in the classroom to provide an opportunity for students to practice further. Further listening practice should also be promoted using real-life scenarios because it would help enhance students' ICC. That is, immersion in actual English communication situations is recommended both for speaking and listening practice. The addition of intercultural teaching methods in the English language classroom is necessary to provide learners with sufficient preparation to not only pass the IELTS exam but also to succeed in their studies and work abroad. Hence, educational institutions should enhance their teaching resources, reconsider their teaching methods, teach the background culture of vocabulary and idioms, use varied teaching approaches to improve students' cultural sensitivity, compare similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures, organise extracurricular English activities through the use of English media and strengthen the awareness of all foreign language teachers. The use of intercultural communication teaching has been widely advocated by a myriad of researchers, including Byram

et al. (2002) and Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018), because it provides students with a selection of appropriate communicative tasks that consider not only the cultural content limitations of teaching materials but also students' preferences. Teachers may then guide students to think interculturally by engaging in discussions wherein students compare their own culture and the target language culture. The results of the present study demonstrate that IELTS can be an excellent tool to assess students' ICC, their speaking skill, and the other skills assessed by the exam. At the same time, it is important to consider ways to improve students' scores and ICC. This will not only improve the communication skills of students but also may help in preventing frustration, stress, anxiety, social alienation, and interpersonal conflicts experienced by students in the target language culture.

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## Appendix A

### Intercultural Communicative Competence Self Report Scale

#### PART 1: General Information

The country you are studying / have studied: \_\_\_\_\_

Your academic degree: \_\_\_\_\_

IELTS Score : \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been studying abroad: \_\_\_\_\_

#### PART 2: Self-rating Questions

The following questions ask about your competence of communicating with people from different cultures. For each item below, please circle the number which best describes your opinions. 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= N/U; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree.

##### Discourse Competence

- (1) I can choose the right topic when communicating with people from different cultures.
- (2) I was able to continue the conversation smoothly when communicating with people from different cultures.
- (3) When communicating with people from different cultures, I was able to start and end conversations appropriately and naturally.

##### Linguistic Competence

- (4) The difficulty with my listening is that the other party speaks too fast and I can't react.
- (5) The difficulty with my listening is that the other party has an accent, and I can't understand them clearly.
- (6) The difficulty with my speaking is that I can't express myself changes in phonetic intonation.
- (7) The difficulty with my speaking is stuttering and poor coherence.
- (8) The difficulty with my speaking is that I only know the meaning of words, but there are obstacles in the organizing the words into sentences.

- (9) The difficulty with my speaking is that I will make a lot of grammatical errors.
- (10) The difficulty with my speaking is that I can only roughly describe or express my ideas, not in details.
- (11) The difficulty in speaking is that I will not use euphemisms to express some taboos.
- (12) The difficulty with my speaking is that I cannot explain things unique to China, such as local customs, to the people from other cultures.
- (13) The difficulty with my reading is that I cannot understand a difficult article even with a dictionary.
- (14) The difficulty with my writing is that there are many errors in my written articles.
- (15) The difficulty with my translation is that I mainly think in Chinese, therefore my translation is relatively poor

### **Sociolinguistic Competence**

- (16) I can adjust my ways of speaking according to different communication situations.
- (17) I can adjust my ways of speaking based on the age of the other party.
- (18) I can adjust my ways of speaking according to the gender of the other party.
- (19) I can adjust my ways of speaking based on the identity and status of the other party.
- (20) I can adjust my ways of speaking based on how close I am to the other party.

### **Strategic Competence**

- (21) I will keep silent when I encounter something I cannot express in English.
- (22) I will avoid the topic in which I am not able to express my ideas.
- (23) When I encounter words that I cannot remind, I will choose other words with similar meanings instead.
- (24) When I encounter something that cannot be expressed in a word, I will use a long sentence to explain it.
- (25) I even speak Chinese unconsciously sometimes when I encounter a meaning that I cannot express in English.
- (26) I will use conversation fillers such as “er” or “well” to win time for thinking.

**Intercultural Knowledge**

- (27) When communicating with people from different cultures, I don't know the lifestyle of the other culture.
- (28) When communicating with people from different cultures, I don't know the historical events and historical figures of the other culture.
- (29) When communicating with people from different cultures, I don't know the literature and important writers of the other culture.
- (30) When communicating with people from different cultures, I don't know the politics of the other's culture
- (31) When communicating with people from different cultures, I don't understand the taboos of the other culture.
- (32) I don't understand non-verbal communication including gestures and posture.
- (33) When communicating with people from different cultures, I understand the customs and habits of the other culture.
- (34) When communicating with people from different cultures, I understand the current important events and hot events in the other culture.
- (35) When communicating with people from different cultures, I understand the appropriate body distance in each other's culture.
- (36) When communicating with people from different cultures, I understand the time concept of the other culture.
- (37) When I talk to people from different cultures, I understand the geography of their culture.

**Intercultural Awareness**

- (38) When communicating with people from different cultures, I am good at observing cultural differences between each other.
- (39) When communicating with people from different cultures, I don't understand certain values of the other culture, and I won't accept them.

**Intercultural Attitudes**

(40) I am very interested in the lifestyle and values of different countries, and I am willing to communicate with people from different cultures.

(41) I like to actively communicate with people from different cultures.

(42) If people from different cultures take the initiative to communicate with me, I can respond positively.

(43) When communicating with people from different cultures, if the other person's point of view is different from mine, I can respect the other person's point of view

### **Intercultural Skills**

(44) When interacting with people from different cultures, I can get along well with each other.

(45) When communicating with people from different cultures, I find it difficult to cope with the conflicts caused by cultural differences.

(46) When communicating with people from different cultures, I find it difficult to flexibly adjust my communication behavior according to the cultural background of both parties.

(47) When communicating with people from different cultures, I do not actively explain the misunderstandings that occur.

(48) When communicating with people from different cultures, I can deal with various social situations and relationships.

## **Appendix B**

Five questions were prepared in advance to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between IELTS speaking and ICC. The interviews were conducted online and anonymous

- 1. Do you think IELTS speaking has helped you intercultural communicative competence in your studies abroad?**
- 2. Do you think there is a relationship between the overall IELTS score and intercultural communicative competence?**
- 3. What aspect of IELTS speaking do you find helpful at ICC.**
- 4. Which aspect of IELTS Speaking do you think is not helpful for you in ICC.**
- 5. What do you think is the most important skill in intercultural communication?**