

## Correlation Between Social Media Using Experience and the Users' Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

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### Abstract

Social media has embedded people's daily lives in the digital era, and its convenient nature for breaking geographical barriers has created an intercultural virtual environment. Tandem, a social media platform that emerged in 2015, enables users to find language partners online to improve their foreign language skills. Previous studies have rarely explored Tandem as a popular language learning tool worldwide. To investigate whether Tandem, as a social media platform, enhances users' intercultural communication competence (ICC), this study adopted a sequential Qual-quant mixed methodology, revealed that Tandem users who exhibit higher levels of English proficiency also demonstrate higher ICC scores. Additionally, there was a positive correlation between the affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains and users' ICC. The study participants expressed strong motivation in utilizing Tandem, as evidenced by their feedback. Therefore, future educators and multinational institutions can consider incorporating Tandem as a valuable tool to enhance learners' ICC.

Index Terms— Tandem, Mixed methodology, Byram's ICC model.

### I. INTRODUCTION

By the turn of the Millennium, globalization introduces a more intricate context where various factors such as demographics, technology, economy, and the need for peace contribute to a world where culture and cultural differences play a prominent role in human interactions [1]. As a result, interlocutors are more likely to be engaged in an intercultural context.

While social media can be an effective approach for promoting students' intercultural learning, there are certain considerations to keep in mind. Firstly, compared to other computer-mediated communication (CMC) learning activities, social media has shown comparable effectiveness. For example, Develotte and Leeds-Hurwitz have successfully facilitated intercultural dialogue between French and US students using desktop video conferencing tools with video and chat features, as well as platforms like MSN Messenger, Skype, and Adobe Connect [2].

Secondly, synchronous communication, as highlighted by Rustam Shadiev and Chuanwen Dang (2021), is one of the most common learning activities in computer mediated intercultural contexts [3]. This type of real-time communication can be beneficial for fostering intercultural understanding and engagement.

Thirdly, Shuter (2012) suggests that a combination of various new media platforms, including online platforms and video chat/conferencing, can enhance the potential for facilitating intercultural dialogue and the development of a third culture in virtual communities. Overall, while social media shows promise in supporting intercultural learning, it is important to consider the benefits and limitations of specific platforms and tools used, as well as the nature of communication (synchronous vs. asynchronous), to maximize the potential for intercultural competence development.

Take mobile users in China as an example, over the past decade, the number of internet users in China has grown rapidly. By December 2022, the total number of internet users in the country reached approximately 1,067 million, a significant increase from 772 million at the end of 2017. The growth in internet users is attributed not only to increased access to broadband connections but also to the widespread use of mobile internet. In fact, mobile internet usage has surpassed desktop usage, with about 99.6% of Chinese internet users accessing the web via

mobile phones. With a vast number of Chinese accessing the internet through smartphones, the speed of mobile internet is crucial. According to “How Web-Connected Is China?” [4], China's extensive 4G network provides coverage for approximately 1.1 billion subscribers, supporting reliable mobile internet connectivity.

In conclusion, this study aims to explore the correlation between social media Tandem site using experience, and the outcome of users' ICC.

The keywords are shown as below:

**ICC:** ICC will be defined as the ability to effectively engage in communication within an intercultural context. The assessment can explore users' demonstration of affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains, and with the goal of nurturing users into competent global citizens.

**Tandem:** Tandem is a language exchange application that allows users to chat with foreigners simultaneously and get to know different people using their targeted language. Members can use verbal and non-verbal language through video, audio, voice message, or text chat to communicate with others. Online communication makes it comparably easy for language learners to find a language partner, including native speakers, to practice their targeted language. Especially for English learners, Tandem can be treated as a virtual community for English as a Lingua Franca.

*Research questions:*

The following research questions will be investigated:

1. How are social media Tandem site users' ICC in general? Is there a significant difference between these two values?
2. What factors predicted their perceived ICC, if any?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will first explore the terms and definition of intercultural communication competence (ICC) and examine its selection over similar concepts for this study. Then, it will investigate the utilization of social media as a tool for developing users' ICC.

### 2.1 Define intercultural communication competence (ICC)

To establish a clear and operationalizable definition of ICC, it must align to certain practical objectives. Definition of ICC should be measurable, providing a clear target for the researcher to evaluate users' ICC proficiency and align with established scales.

Byram's (2021) definition of ICC echoes the earliest definitions: “ICC is the foundation for ‘intercultural citizenship’ (ICit)” [5]. It based on some of the earliest definitions. While Byram further explain that even without experiencing life as sojourners, learners will still come across individuals who are temporarily residing in their community and will need to comprehend their experiences and effectively communicate with them. This definition provides more people with a much more common usage scenarios than being abroad. It emphasized the significance of contextual factors among various communicating chances, which could include the cases that: “between people of different languages and countries where one is a native speaker of the language used, between people of different languages and countries where the language used is a lingua franca, and between people of the same country but different languages, one of whom is a native speaker of the language used.” Byram yielded the definition that was deemed most applicable to institutions' internationalization strategies [6].

However, when it comes to conduct a measurement, researchers have encountered challenges in capturing and implementing measures of “appropriateness”. The term “appropriateness” refers to behaviors that align with the cultural, situational, and relational context, while “effective” describes behaviors that bring about the intended results (Chen and Starosta, 1996, 1999). Therefore, “appropriate” behavior of communicators aligns with the situation's expectations and requirements. It concerns a specific culture, situation, and involves individuals' relationship [7].

Numerous studies have focused the factors constructing ICC. Within this, Byram's (1997) ICC model is widely recognized as one of the most influential and frequently references [8] [9]. Byram's (2021) framework renewed some elements based on the original one. It consists of education factor (political education and critical cultural awareness, mainly related to human right), as well as Knowledge of others; knowledge of self, interaction: individual and societal; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing oneself.

Byram has stressed ICC should encompass the social context and non-verbal dimensions of communication. When defining and assessing intercultural competence, several issues should be considered, including the balance between knowledge of cultures and cultural practices versus the skills of conscious analysis of intercultural interaction, the role of non-verbal communication, the breadth of the intercultural competence concept, the focus on psychological traits versus the capacity to act, and the influence of social and political factors on defining and assessing intercultural communicative competence [10]. In conclusion, those factors above still are used to assess Chinese users' ICC in this study.

In conclusion, ICC will be defined as the ability to effectively engage in communication within an intercultural context. The assessment can explore users' demonstration of affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains, and with the goal of nurturing users into competent global citizens.

## *2.2 Social media in developing ICC*

New media has already embedded people's daily life in a digital era. Compared to tradition media such as press, radio and TV, social media or Web 2.0 applications encompass various platforms making people communicate, including online chat forums, wikis, blogs, and social networking sites, with the form of pictures, texts, audio (e.g., voice message, podcasting using mobile technology) and video (video message, micro video, vodcasting, YouTube) (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014) [11].

Social networking sites have gained significant popularity as educational tools on college campuses worldwide. A growing number of educators setting are utilizing social media platforms to achieve various objectives. Shuter (2012) considers these digital networks can enable users develop the appropriate and effective communication methods in an intercultural context [12].

On one hand, social media provides a more flexible and affordable access to much needed intercultural context. Barrett et al. (2014) and Pedersen (2010) have proposed that possibly interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds is sufficient for individuals to develop ICC as such interactions can happen in inappropriate settings. On the other hand, it may not be possible for everyone to travel or reside overseas, while people of any age should attain intercultural proficiency through various forms of education, such as formal, non-formal, and informal education (Zhang & Zhou, 2019) [13].

Many studies have planned to identify the specific functions of new media in relation to "effectiveness" of ICC. Incorporating new media in intercultural communication instruction, users can surmount the obstacles of geography and enable intercultural contacts to occur while using new media even in their classrooms (Shearman & Eguchi, 2018) [14].

Secondly, there are numerous features of social media use that can mitigate users' affective factors in learning such as shyness and low confidence, by allowing the use of avatars, pseudonyms etc. which can hide the interlocutors' social status and transcend other barriers including psychological, linguistic and cultural differences [15].

Thirdly, collaborative approach seamlessly merges the sharing of content, communication channels, and collaboration tools, resulting in a unified user experience that enhances productivity to unprecedented levels. When users engage with language challenges within a case-based Web 2.0 environment, their motivation to collaborate increases, leading to successful communication.

Social media can serve as a compensation for the traditional Chinese pedagogy, which often places users in a passive position. Since the two-way flow of information facilitated by new media potentially enables a deeper

understanding. It can foster user engagement in genuinely authentic social and communicative behaviors, surpassing typical classroom experiences.

Firstly, meta-analysis of studies on Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory provides evidence that increased interactions with stereotyped individuals, including those from diverse racial backgrounds, when facilitated through the use of social media by users, have the potential to reduce feelings of threat towards these groups (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001, as cited in Bo-Yuen Ngai, 2019) [15]. Secondly, social media may create avenues for individuals to broaden their cultural perspectives, enhance intercultural interactions, and consequently enhance their potential for acculturation. Acculturation refers to the gradual transformation of values, attitudes, and behaviours that occur when individuals relocate to a different culture and engage in ongoing direct intercultural interactions. Thirdly, intercultural friendships, a very typical positive outcome of intercultural communication, hold significant potential in promoting international goodwill.

### *2.3 Tandem*

There are a few studies focusing on the effectiveness of social media for developing ICC. For example, Emrah Özdemir (2017) [16] finds Facebook has surfaced as a fresh avenue for language education, as indicated by research conducted by Aydın (2012), Blattner & Fiori (2009), and Kabilan et al. (2010). Nevertheless, Tandem site (lunched in 2015), which is an application for language partners making friends while improving intercultural exposure, hasn't been used as an instructional supporting tool to develop learners' ICC in any studies either. And it stands out among other social media platforms.

Firstly, compared to other synchronous social media such as Skype and Facebook, the language learning application Tandem may be clearer for motivating language learners with less social pressure. Secondly, it can be treated as a virtual community and can be beneficial for users' developing ICC, proved by many studies and theories. As a collaborative learning approach per se, there have been several studies that have found out the users gains intercultural competence through language learning.

### *2.4 Learning theories supporting the use of social media in developing ICC*

The theories that support the utilization of social media emphasize the "learning process" and can be classified into three categories: peer learning theory, rooted in Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory, which highlights knowledge construction through peer interactions and is supported by Sanford's Challenge and Support Theory (1962); Allport's Contact hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of exposure to intercultural contexts; and Kolb's experiential learning theory, which focuses on the learning process. These theories provide hypotheses that support the idea that social media can complement and enhance traditional classroom settings in intercultural education [19].

Firstly, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) stresses peer learning. Rustam Shadiev and Chuanwen Dang (2021) review the studies systematically between 2010 and 2021. They focus on the context of integrating technology-assisted intercultural learning. They find out that one of the most cited theories is Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory out of 21 theories and conclude that learning is a product of social and cultural interactions. Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory is frequently applied to integrate technology-assisted intercultural learning (cited in Shadiev & Dang, 2022) [20].

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory assumed that peer learning promotes deep learning approaches as opposed to surface learning. Thus, peer learning is more likely to facilitate higher-level learning skills, such as critical thinking. Vygotsky posited that learning occurs through social and cultural interactions when learners actively use and co-construct knowledge, since peer learning in a language community provides the balance of challenges and supports.

The second theory highlights the exposure in the different cultural environment, mainly about contact and intercultural context. According to Allport's Contact hypothesis [21], it suggests that prejudice towards individuals from different cultural groups could be diminished and intergroup relationships could be enhanced through increased intergroup contact, given specific conditions. His insightful and significant hypothesis posited that when

individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds interact and progressively intensify their interactions, they may cultivate more favourable attitudes towards each other and decrease negative perceptions.

The third theory pertains learning process. Kolb's experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is based on the notion that "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" [22]. Within the intercultural context, ELT has been employed to describe the process of intercultural experiential learning as a cyclical and iterative progression. It entails learners engaging in direct interactions with diverse cultures, observing cultural differences, reflecting on these observations to extract generalizations relevant to functioning effectively in intercultural settings [23].

Kolb's ELT has been utilized in the intercultural context to illustrate the iterative process of intercultural experiential learning. This process involves learners gaining concrete experience by interacting with different cultures, observing cultural differences, reflecting on their observations to identify generalizations for functioning well in intercultural settings, actively experimenting with newly acquired knowledge and rules, and improving their emotional, cognitive, and behavioural abilities for future intercultural situations[23]. Thus, derived from the theory above, instruction models should consider about the learning process which consists of transformation and experience, interpersonal contact and intercultural context.

#### *Summary*

This section has explored the use of social media in developing ICC. Notably, there is a gap in the existing studies regarding the investigation of Tandem site, a social media platform that possesses distinct features that could potentially enhance users' ICC.

Social media appears to be a more realistic and accessible option for many users. Byram's (1997) ICC model, along with Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory, Allport's Contact hypothesis, and Kolb's experiential learning theory, provides a solid theoretical foundation for incorporating social media tools like Tandem to enhance intercultural communication.

Therefore, in this study, the researcher has chosen Tandem site to investigate users' ICC. Byram's (1997) ICC framework will be used to constructing an assessing model that addresses the development of ICC among the users.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

To address the research questions, a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, comprising of both a qualitative phase and a quantitative phase [24], was employed. Data was collected from various sources, including a semi-structured interview, questionnaire [25]. The use of mixed methods was favored as it allows for data triangulation and cross-verification, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings [26]. While qualitative method was employed to validate the questionnaire, quantitative methods was primarily used to get a broad idea on learners' ICC levels. Prior to commencing the research, participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, significance, and methodology.

#### *3.1 Participants*

The participants were selected by convenience sampling. According to [27], The act of including individuals who are readily available at the moment is referred to as convenience sampling, also known as accidental sampling or careless sampling. In this research, the invitation was posted online through various platforms such as WeChat, Douban, and Tandem. Two users joined the chatting room "parties" and participated in a semi-structured interview, while 21 users completed the questionnaire. As a token of appreciation, participants received an electronic book.

#### *3.2 Data collection*

The initial investigation utilized a questionnaire that was adapted from Cots (2016) and Zhang (2015). The questionnaire was designed to assess three components of intercultural competence based on Byram's (1997) model: attitudes, knowledge, and behavior or skills. The attitudes section focused on attitudinal openness to other

cultures, ethnorelativism, tolerance, empathy, and tolerance for ambiguity. The knowledge section examined deep understanding/knowledge of culture, culture-specific information, cultural self-awareness, and sociolinguistic awareness. The behavior or skills section assessed behavioral openness, intercultural adaptation and communicative awareness, interpreting and relating, critical cultural awareness, and perspective taking.

To validate the questionnaire, qualitative data in this study was primarily obtained through questionnaire questions, which consisted of open-ended questions and Likert scale items. These questions were administered to the respondents. The researcher utilized the Tandem site, an open chat room, with the title "Investigation on Tandem Users," to engage with potential participants. Five users accessed the chat room, and two of them willingly shared their experiences by responding to the questions provided. The interviews were conducted in a single session lasting approximately 180 minutes.

The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale ranging from 1 (indicating complete disagreement) to 5 (indicating complete agreement). Respondents were provided with a range of response options and were asked to select their choice. The scores assigned to each response option were summed for each statement to calculate the individual's perception score. Thus, the overall scale functioned as a summated rating scale.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Based on the qualitative data gained from these Tandem users' experiences, the researcher validated the original questionnaire. Two types of validity, content-related validity and construct validity were established through the interview. According to Cohen et al. (1996) and Gall et al. (1996), these approaches are commonly used to determine the validity of a research study [28] [29].

All the qualitative data consists of semi-interview, open-end answers in the questionnaires and tests. Following the grounded theory data analysis strategy proposed by [30], the research process unfolded as follows: Firstly, open codes were created to identify key concepts or ideas from the text. Secondly, the text was segmented into different topics, and open codes were assigned to each unit of data, with the unit size being a sentence. Thirdly, themes were developed by grouping together similar open codes. Fourthly, the data were categorized and labeled with axial codes based on common themes and interrelationships. Finally, preliminary results were obtained in the form of higher-level themes.

Specifically, the researcher adopted the original questionnaires, and reduced the number of questions related to sojourner experiences and incorporated additional questions regarding the number of language partners and the respondents' using numbers of their second languages (e.g., How many languages do you speak). These modifications were made to better capture the specific dynamics and characteristics of using Tandem as a language learning platform.

All the quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS 20.0 software. ANOVA was carried out to obtain inferential statistical results. Correlation analysis was also performed between the data.

## IV. FINDINGS

This chapter shows the findings of this research. The research asked a total of 15 questions. These questions aimed to understand the variables that affect ICC levels. The question asked some particular demographic questions to understand the nature of the sample. For example, it tries to understand gender, nationality. Other questions are directly related to the research question. After collecting answers from 22 participants, this research constructs statistical analysis. For conducting statistical analysis, SPSS software has been used. The main advantage of the SPSS software is that it allows the analysis of large volumes of information within a small amount of time. Another advantage of using SPSS software is that do not face the risk probability of human-related error. In other words, results obtained from the SPSS can be considered error-free hence, reliable. The findings have been shown in the following section:

### 1. How are social media users' ICC in general? Is there a significant difference between these two values?

The first question tries to understand the factors which help social media users to be competent in terms of

intercultural communication. For findings answer to this question, regression analysis has been drawn. The regression analysis tries to understand the relationship between dependent and independent variables. In this regression analysis, the English language is the dependent variable.

In table 1, the R Square value is 0.401. This indicates that more than 40% of the variability observed can be explained by the regression model. This also indicates that 60% of the variability observed cannot be expressed. The R square value is in a moderate range, which is between 40% to 60%. From this, it can be said that the model is acceptable.

In table 2, the analysis has been conducted with a 95% Confidence interval. In this scenario, the significance level is 0.002, hence the result is significant. The F ratio highlights the improvement in the prediction of the variable by considering the model after including the inaccuracy present. The F value greater than 1 represents that the model is efficient. In the analysis, the F value is 13.406. This highlights that the model is efficient.

The coefficient table helps to identify the strength and the significance level of the variables in the context of the model. In the table 3, it can be seen that the significance level of the dependent variable, that is English conversation skill is 0.002. The significance level is below 0.05, indicating that the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that for Tandem users' English language is important for ICC.

## *2. What factors predicted their perceived ICC, if any?*

To examine the relationship between participants' predictions and their intercultural competence (ICC), a total of six factors are hypothesized to be correlated with ICC. These factors encompass the affective domain, cognitive domain, and behavioral domain. In this regression analysis, the ICC score is the dependent variable.

strong relationship. This finding suggests that confidence on conversational skills have a significant impact on ICC, and these two factors can effectively influence each other.

In table 4, the first factor examined is participants' perception of their English conversational skills. The correlation between this factor and ICC is 0.808, indicating a

In table 5, the second factor analyzed is participants' perception of their English pronunciation. The correlation between this factor and ICC score is 0.845, indicating a strong relationship. This finding suggests that their confidence on English pronunciation has a significant impact on ICC, and there is a strong association between the two.

In table 6, the third factor examined is the number of language partners, and its correlation with the ICC score was found to be -0.039. This indicates an insignificant and inverse relationship between the two variables. In other words, the number of language partners does not appear to have a noticeable impact on the ICC score.

However, the analysis of the data reveals that the number of countries of language partners does not have a consistent impact on ICC scores. Although more than half of the users have 2-3 countries of language partners, there is no clear pattern indicating that having a higher number of countries of language partners leads to higher or lower ICC scores. The highest and lowest ICC scores were observed for users with only 1 country of language partner. Therefore, it can be concluded that the number of countries of language partners does not necessarily determine the ICC scores of the participants in this study.

In table 7, the fourth factor examined is motivation, and its correlation with the ICC score was found to be -0.119. This suggests that motivation does not have a significant relationship with the ICC score. In other words, time or frequency in the investigated range does not appear to impact the participants' ICC score.

In table 8, The hypothesis that confidence of expressing oneself has an effect on the ICC score was examined in this study. The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of 0.387 between confidence and ICC score, which was not found to be statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that confidence does not have a significant effect on the ICC score.

More than half of the respondents reported that they have experienced improvement in their ability to explain

themselves through the use of Tandem. Among them, 80% of the respondents believe that this improvement is primarily due to “communication”.

Furthermore, some respondents expressed that they attributed their improvement in explaining themselves to the generosity and hospitality of their language partners. They believed that the supportive and welcoming nature of the tandem interactions contributed to their increased comfort in communication. One respondent mentioned, “This is because tandem use is not only about learning the language, but also about understanding other humans and the interactions behind them. Overall, I now feel more comfortable meeting with people for language communication.”

Model		1
R		.633 <sup>a</sup>
R Square		0.401
Adjusted R Square		0.371
Std. Error of the Estimate		0.68
Change Statistics	R Square Change	0.401
	F Change	13.406
	df1	1
	df2	20
	Sig. F Change	0.002

Model	1		
	Regression	Residual	Total
Sum of Squares	6.202	9.252	15.455
df	1	20	21
Mean Square	6.202	0.463	
F	13.406		
Sig.	.002 <sup>b</sup>		

Model		1	
		(Constant)	15 , I have strong English conversational skills.
Unstandardized Coefficients	B	1.387	0.669
	Std. Error	0.607	0.183
Standardized Coefficients	Beta		0.633
t		2.284	3.661
Sig.		0.033	0.002



**Table 4: Correlation between ICC Total score and perceived ENGLISH conversational skill**

		ICC total score
ICC total score	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	22
15. I have strong English conversational skills	Pearson Correlation	.808**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	22

**Table 5: Correlation between ICC Total score and perceived ENGLISH pronunciation**

		ICC total score
ICC total score	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	22
14. My pronouciation is	Pearson Correlation	.845**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0
	N	22

**Table 6: Correlation between ICC Total score and Language partner numbers**

		ICC total score
ICC total score	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	22
13. Do you have more than language partners	Pearson Correlation	-.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.862
	N	22

**Table 7: Correlation between ICC Total score and using frequency on Tandem**

		ICC total score
ICC total score	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	22
11. How many days per week did you chat with your virtual conversation partners (more than 1 hour per time chatting) on social media A in 2023?	Pearson Correlation	-0.119
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.599
	N	22

<b>Behaviour domain</b>		
<b>17. Do you think you are better at explaining yourself to your language partners comparing to the first time when you use social media? If so, what facilitated this change?</b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>1</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	<b>22</b>
<b>ICC total score</b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>0.387</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>0.075</b>
	N	<b>22</b>

## V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The regression analysis conducted in this study emphasizes the importance of English language proficiency and confidence in English language mastery, as well as cognitive domain, affective domain and behaviour domain as factors influencing ICC scores among social media users.

This sequential mixed-methods study aimed to examine the correlation between virtual conversations through Tandem and users' ICC. By adopting the questionnaire developed by Zhang (2015) and Cots et al. (2016), the researcher investigated the perception of Tandem users and their ICC. The study included a total of 22 participants. In this chapter, the researcher will integrate the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data analyses and discuss their implications on Tandem site for developing users' ICC. Additionally, the researcher will address the limitations of the study and provide suggestions for future research and practical implications.

### 5.1 Discussion

#### 5.1.1 English proficiency and its correlation with ICC

A significant finding of the study is that users who scored higher on the ICC scale demonstrated a greater emphasis on the importance of English language proficiency and confidence in mastering the language. According to the open-end questions, the participants' motivations for using Tandem can be categorized into three main groups.

The first group is driven by a curiosity to explore different cultures. They expressed their desire to communicate fluently, learn about diverse cultures, acquire useful knowledge, and broaden their horizons.

The second group is motivated by future opportunities, particularly among English major students, who aimed to improve their language proficiency. They mentioned aspirations such as becoming Chinese teachers and teaching foreigners Chinese, studying abroad, and interacting with people from different countries.

The third group mentioned specific goals. One participant, who was an Arabic teacher focusing on history, expressed their goal of publishing historical articles in Scopus magazines. Other participants highlighted the role of English in their future prospects and social status, aligning with Claire Kramersch's perspective. They emphasized that English is considered a global language essential for securing good jobs and leading a successful life.

#### 5.1.2 Three domains correlate to participants' ICC score

Respondents with the lowest ICC scores exhibit a lack of intention to travel to English-speaking countries in the future and a limited motivation to engage with English-speaking cultures through media and literature. This observation validates the questionnaire design, as it highlights the disinterest or reluctance of individuals with lower ICC scores towards immersing themselves in English-speaking contexts.

On the other hand, some participants mentioned their motivation to engage with cultural materials. According to the approaches they mentioned, cost (including money, time and energy) would be the key issue. Approximately 60% of the participants expressed their intention to consume mass media such as music, films, documentaries, and books, as well as social media platforms like Hello Talk, Tandem, Facebook, and WhatsApp. They acknowledged that prior to using Tandem, they relied on movies and songs to learn about different cultures.

Furthermore, a few participants expressed their desire to explore the cultures of their language partners in person.

They emphasized the importance of traveling and gaining further education abroad, recognizing that experiencing the local lifestyle is essential. Some participants mentioned their offline friendships with individuals from specific cultures, which provided them with insights into those cultures. They also expressed their plans to travel to other countries to learn and immerse themselves in diverse cultures.

These findings demonstrate that while individuals with lower ICC scores may lack motivation for cultural immersion, others are actively seeking opportunities to engage with different cultures through various means such as media consumption and personal travel experiences.

### *5.2 Implication*

Tandem site may be an ideal virtual intercultural context that can contribute to the development of learners' ICC due to its friendly environment. Some interviewees mentioned that they attribute their progress in ICC to the generosity and hospitality of their language partners. They expressed that the supportive and welcoming nature of the tandem interactions played a significant role in increasing their comfort level in communication. This observation highlights the positive impact of a supportive learning environment in fostering ICC development.

Based on these experiences, educational practitioners, multinational organizations, and institutions can consider providing advice and assistance to learners who are aiming to develop their ICC. By emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment, these entities can contribute to learners' overall intercultural competence.

Furthermore, some empirical studies suggest that it is crucial to integrate teaching and learning approaches that foster ICC development. Ogan et al.'s (2009) experiment proved instructors' roll as well. They used narrative video to improve students' intercultural competence, with the help of instructional method of pause-predict-ponder. They finally guided students in acquiring cultural knowledge and significantly increased students' ability to reason from an intercultural perspective. It stressed the importance of using an instructional method to guide students to acquire cultural knowledge and strengthens students' intercultural perspective [31].

### *5.3 Imitation*

This study acknowledges certain limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the use of convenience sampling restricts the generalizability of the results to the entire population of tandem users. The participants in this study may not be representative of all tandem users, and their experiences and perspectives may vary from those who did not participate.

Secondly, the sample size of this study was limited to only 22 participants. While valuable insights were gathered from these participants, a larger sample size would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Tandem use and ICC. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings beyond the participants in this study.

Thirdly, future investigations can benefit from incorporating qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of participants. By conducting in-depth interviews or case studies, researchers can explore the factors that contribute to the highest and lowest ICC scores, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of the relationship between Tandem use and ICC.

In conclusion, while this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between Tandem use and ICC based on the experiences of the 22 participants, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of convenience sampling, the small sample size, and the potential for further qualitative exploration in future investigations.

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