

A study on the relationship between intercultural communication competence and life satisfaction of international students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the relationship between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and life satisfaction among international students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. Specifically, it investigated (1) the relationship between overall ICC and life satisfaction, (2) the relationships between the dimensions of ICC and overall life satisfaction, and (3) the relationships between ICC and the dimensions of life satisfaction.

A quantitative research design was adopted, and convenience sampling was employed to select 130 international students. The research instruments consisted of an Intercultural Communication Competence Scale comprising 22 items across four dimensions—linguistic communication competence, non-verbal communication competence, cultural awareness and tolerance, and conflict resolution competence—and a Life Satisfaction Scale comprising 20 items across four dimensions—academic life satisfaction, social life satisfaction, daily life service satisfaction, and psychological adaptation satisfaction. The content validity index (CVI) of the research instruments was 0.88. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the Intercultural Communication Competence Scale and the Life Satisfaction Scale were 0.918 and 0.902, respectively. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, hierarchical regression, and multiple regression.

The findings were summarized according to the research objectives. First, overall ICC was significantly and positively correlated with overall life satisfaction ($r = 0.642$, $p < 0.001$) and significantly predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.565$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 41.5% of the variance. Second, all dimensions of ICC were significantly and positively related to overall life satisfaction. Third, ICC was significantly and positively related to the dimensions of life satisfaction, with linguistic communication competence primarily predicting academic life satisfaction, non-verbal communication competence primarily predicting social life satisfaction, and cultural awareness and tolerance showing the strongest predictive effect on psychological adaptation satisfaction.

The findings suggest that intercultural communicative competence plays an important role in international students' life satisfaction and cross-cultural adaptation.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, life satisfaction, Vietnamese international students, cross-cultural adaptation.

Introduction

With the deepening of globalization and the internationalization of higher education, China continues to attract a growing number of international students, among whom students from Southeast Asia constitute a significant proportion. Owing to geographical proximity, cultural ties, and expanding educational cooperation, Vietnam has become one of China's key partner countries in higher education exchange. Guangxi, benefiting from its border location and multi-ethnic cultural context, has emerged as an important destination for Vietnamese students. Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, as an application-oriented institution specializing in language education, enrolls a considerable number of Vietnamese students (Fan Jingjing, 2024).

Despite certain linguistic and cultural similarities between China and Vietnam, Vietnamese students still face challenges in cross-cultural contexts, including contextual language adaptation, interpretation of non-verbal communication, depth of cultural understanding, and management of communicative conflicts. Research has shown that limitations in intercultural communicative competence (ICC) may reduce interaction effectiveness and hinder cultural adaptation (Liu and Cheng, 2022). Furthermore, local institutions may provide relatively limited systematic support for the development of ICC compared with universities in major metropolitan areas (Xu Qiuping, 2025; Chen Shuyou, 2025).

Life satisfaction, a core indicator of international students' subjective well-being and study-abroad experience, is influenced by academic support, social interaction, daily life services, and psychological adaptation (Gao and Ma, 2024; Bai Xue, 2025). Studies on Southeast Asian students indicate that social interaction quality and institutional support significantly affect life satisfaction (Fan Jingjing, 2024). For Vietnamese students in local universities, insufficient academic resources, limited personalized services, and incomplete cross-cultural support systems may negatively influence their overall satisfaction.

The relationship between ICC and life satisfaction can be supported by Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence Model, which emphasizes the importance of knowledge, attitudes, and intercultural communication skills in enabling individuals to communicate effectively across cultures (Byram, 1997). Berry's Acculturation Model further suggests that successful adaptation to a new cultural environment involves both psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Berry, 1997). Accordingly, stronger ICC may facilitate effective intercultural interaction and cultural adaptation, thereby contributing to higher life satisfaction.

Importantly, existing research confirms a positive relationship between intercultural communicative competence and life satisfaction, suggesting that improved ICC enhances adaptation quality, interaction effectiveness, and psychological well-being (Gao and Ma, 2024; Guo Rong, 2024). However, empirical research focusing specifically on Vietnamese students in Guangxi remains limited. In addition, the relationship between ICC and life satisfaction, particularly the relationships between the dimensions of ICC and the dimensions of life satisfaction, has not been systematically examined among Vietnamese students in local university contexts. This gap limits understanding of how ICC is associated with different aspects of life satisfaction in this specific population.

Therefore, investigating the relationship between intercultural communicative competence and life satisfaction among Vietnamese students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages is both theoretically meaningful and practically necessary. The findings can extend understanding of the relationship between ICC

and life satisfaction among Vietnamese international students and provide targeted evidence for improving cross-cultural education strategies and support services in local universities.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship between Vietnamese international students' intercultural communicative competence and their life satisfaction.
2. To investigate the relationship between the various dimensions of Vietnamese international students' intercultural communicative competence and their life satisfaction.
3. To investigate the relationship between Vietnamese international students' intercultural communicative competence and the various dimensions of their life satisfaction.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationships between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and life satisfaction, including the relationships between their respective dimensions. This design was consistent with the research objectives and the use of Pearson correlation and regression analyses.

1. Population, Sample, and Key Informants

1.1 Population The population comprised all 165 international students currently enrolled at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages in 2025. Only full-time students in regular academic programs were included. Short-term exchange students (less than 6 months), students on leave, and graduates were excluded to ensure that participants shared a consistent campus environment and support system.

1.2 Sample Using convenience sampling, 130 international students were selected, representing 78.79% of the total population. Convenience sampling was used because the study focused on currently enrolled international students who were accessible during the data-collection period and who voluntarily agreed to participate. The minimum required sample size calculated under a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$, $e = 0.05$, $p = 0.5$) was 58; therefore, the final sample size exceeded the minimum statistical requirement. However, because the sample was selected using a non-probability convenience sampling method, the findings should be generalized cautiously beyond the study participants and the specific institutional context.

1.3 Key Informants Key informants included faculty members and administrative staff from the International Education College, who provided population data, assisted in questionnaire distribution, and reviewed bilingual translations to ensure linguistic accuracy and contextual appropriateness.

2. Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire was employed, consisting of three parts:

2.1 Intercultural Communicative Competence Scale (22 items)

2.1.1 Four dimensions: linguistic competence, non-verbal competence, cultural cognition and tolerance, and conflict resolution competence.

2.1.2 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

2.2 Life Satisfaction Scale (20 items)

2.2.1 Four dimensions: academic life satisfaction, social life satisfaction, daily life service satisfaction, and psychological adaptation satisfaction.

2.2.2 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely dissatisfied to 5 = completely satisfied).

2.3 Basic Information Questionnaire

Gender, age, grade level, major category, Chinese proficiency (HSK level), and duration of study. The questionnaire was bilingual (Chinese–foreign language version) to prevent comprehension bias. The research instruments were reviewed by three experts for content validity using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method, yielding a content validity index (CVI) of 0.88. A pre-survey with 35 valid responses was conducted to assess item clarity and coherence. The reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.918 for the Intercultural Communicative Competence Scale and 0.902 for the Life Satisfaction Scale, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

3. Research Hypotheses

3.1 H1 Vietnamese international students' intercultural communicative competence is positively related to their life satisfaction.

3.2 H2 Each dimension of Vietnamese international students' intercultural communicative competence is positively related to their life satisfaction.

3.3 H3 Vietnamese international students' intercultural communicative competence is positively related to each dimension of their life satisfaction.

4. Data Collection

Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed through Wenjuanxing. The process consisted of two phases:

Phase 1: Pre-survey (June 1–10, 2025) Thirty-five valid responses were collected to assess item clarity, logical structure, and dimensional differentiation. Minor revisions were made to item wording.

Phase 2: Formal Survey (September 11, 2025) A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed, of which 163 were returned. After excluding invalid responses based on completion time of less than 60 seconds, patterned answers, or missing data, 130 valid responses remained, resulting in a valid response rate of 72.22%. Ethical procedures were strictly followed, including informed consent and anonymization of personal data.

5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in three main stages.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe categorical demographic variables, including gender, grade level, major category, and Chinese proficiency level. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) were calculated to describe the overall and dimensional scores of intercultural communicative competence and life satisfaction.

5.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between overall intercultural communicative competence and overall life satisfaction, as well as the relationships between the dimensions of intercultural communicative competence and the dimensions of life satisfaction. The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

5.3 Regression Analysis

5.3.1 Hierarchical Regression Demographic variables were entered as control variables in the first step, followed by overall intercultural communicative competence to examine its independent predictive effect on life satisfaction.

5.3.2 Multiple Linear Regression

The four dimensions of intercultural communicative competence were entered simultaneously to examine their predictive effects on overall life satisfaction and its sub-dimensions.

Before conducting the regression analyses, multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance values, and the normality of residuals was examined. The results indicated that the assumptions required for the regression analyses were adequately satisfied.

Research Framework



Figure 1 Research Content Framework Diagram

Results

This section presents the empirical findings based on the three research objectives. Descriptive statistics were first used to describe the levels of intercultural communicative competence and life satisfaction. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among variables, and hierarchical and multiple regression analyses were used to test predictive effects.

Objective 1 To investigate the relationship between Vietnamese international students' intercultural communicative competence and their life satisfaction.

Table 1 Pearson Correlation Between Overall Intercultural Communicative Competence and Overall Life Satisfaction (n = 130)

Variable	r	p
Intercultural Communicative Competence → Life Satisfaction	0.642	<0.001

The results show a strong positive correlation between overall intercultural communicative competence and overall life satisfaction ($r = 0.642$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher intercultural competence is significantly associated with higher life satisfaction, supporting Objective 1.

Objective 2 To investigate the relationship between the various dimensions of intercultural communicative competence and overall life satisfaction.

Table 2 Pearson Correlations Between Competence Dimensions and Overall Life Satisfaction

Independent Variable (Competence Dimensions)	r	p
Language communication competence	0.563	<0.001
Nonverbal communication competence	0.598	<0.001
Cultural awareness and tolerance	0.625	<0.001
Communication conflict resolution ability	0.508	<0.001

All four dimensions of intercultural communicative competence were significantly positively correlated with overall life satisfaction. Cultural awareness and tolerance showed the strongest relationship ($r = 0.625$), followed by nonverbal competence ($r = 0.598$), language competence ($r = 0.563$), and conflict resolution ability ($r = 0.508$). These findings support Objective 2.

Objective 3 To investigate the relationship between intercultural communicative competence and the various dimensions of life satisfaction.

Table 3 Pearson Correlations Between Overall Intercultural Competence and Life Satisfaction Dimensions

Dependent Variable (Life Satisfaction Dimensions)	r	p
Academic life satisfaction	0.583	<0.001
Social life satisfaction	0.632	<0.001
Daily life service satisfaction	0.505	<0.001
Psychological adaptation satisfaction	0.651	<0.001

Overall intercultural communicative competence was significantly positively correlated with all four dimensions of life satisfaction. The strongest relationship was observed with psychological adaptation satisfaction ($r = 0.651$), followed by social life satisfaction ($r = 0.632$), academic life satisfaction ($r = 0.583$), and daily life service satisfaction ($r = 0.505$). These results support Objective 3.

Regression Analysis Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to further examine the predictive effect of overall intercultural communicative competence on overall life satisfaction in relation to Objective 1. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effects of the dimensions of intercultural communicative competence on overall life satisfaction and its dimensions in relation to Objectives 2 and 3.

Table 4 Hierarchical Regression Predicting Overall Life Satisfaction

Model	R ²	ΔR^2	F	β	t	p
Model 1 (Control variables)	0.095	—	1.623	—	—	>0.05
Model 2 (+ Intercultural Competence)	0.415	0.320	35.789	0.565	8.125	<0.001

After controlling for demographic variables, intercultural communicative competence significantly predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.565$, $t = 8.125$, $p < 0.001$). The model explained 41.5% of the variance in life satisfaction, with intercultural competence contributing an additional 32.0% of explained variance. These findings further support Objective 1.

Table 5 Multiple Regression Analysis at the Dimensional Level

Dependent Variable	Predictor	β	R ²	p
Overall life satisfaction	Cultural awareness & tolerance	0.302	0.398	<0.001
	Nonverbal communication	0.231	—	<0.01
	Language communication	0.203	—	<0.05
Academic life satisfaction	Language communication	0.341	0.309	<0.001
Social life satisfaction	Nonverbal communication	0.324	0.347	<0.001
Psychological adaptation satisfaction	Cultural awareness & tolerance	0.353	0.368	<0.001
Daily life service satisfaction	Cultural awareness & tolerance	0.212	0.209	<0.05
	Language communication	0.191	—	<0.05

Note. All four dimensions of intercultural communicative competence were entered simultaneously into each multiple regression model. Only statistically significant predictors are shown in the table; predictors not shown were entered into the model but did not reach statistical significance.

Regression analysis revealed that cultural awareness and tolerance was the strongest predictor of overall life satisfaction. Language communication competence most strongly predicted academic life satisfaction, while nonverbal communication competence was the strongest predictor of social life satisfaction. Cultural awareness and tolerance had the strongest predictive effect on psychological adaptation satisfaction. These results further support the relationships examined in Objectives 2 and 3.

Discussion

1. The findings of Objective 1 demonstrated that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) was significantly and positively correlated with life satisfaction among Vietnamese international students, and ICC significantly predicted life satisfaction. This indicates that higher levels of intercultural communicative competence contribute directly to students' overall evaluation of their life in the host country. This may be because stronger ICC enables students to understand cultural differences, communicate more effectively, and manage unfamiliar intercultural situations with greater confidence. These abilities may reduce uncertainty and communication-related stress, thereby facilitating psychological adjustment and improving students'

overall evaluation of their lives in the host country. This result is consistent with the empirical findings of Gao Mengqi and Ma Yumei (2024), who found that stronger cross-cultural communication competence enhances international students' adaptation and overall well-being. Their study emphasized that effective intercultural interaction reduces environmental uncertainty and promotes smoother integration into academic and social contexts. In addition, Yang T et al. (2024) demonstrated that psychological stress perception significantly affects life satisfaction, and emotional adjustment mechanisms play a mediating role. This supports the present finding by suggesting that ICC may function as a protective psychological resource: students who can interpret cultural differences and respond effectively to intercultural situations may experience less stress and greater emotional stability in the host environment.

Together, these studies confirm that ICC is not merely a communication skill but an important adaptive resource influencing international students' overall well-being.

2. The results of Objective 2 revealed that all dimensions of intercultural communicative competence were significantly and positively correlated with overall life satisfaction, with cultural awareness and tolerance showing the strongest association. This may be because cultural awareness and tolerance help students understand and accept cultural differences, thereby reducing misunderstanding and enhancing psychological comfort. For Vietnamese students in Guangxi, geographical and cultural proximity with China may facilitate initial adaptation; however, subtle differences in communication styles, social expectations, and everyday practices may still create challenges. Therefore, recognizing and tolerating these differences may be particularly important for life satisfaction. This finding aligns with Fan Jingjing (2024), who emphasized that enhancing cross-cultural communication skills among Southeast Asian international students strengthens their confidence in intercultural interaction and improves their adjustment outcomes. Fan highlighted that intercultural awareness enables students to interpret cultural differences more positively, thereby reducing misunderstanding and enhancing psychological comfort. Similarly, Liu Xiangwen and Cheng Zhuo (2022) argued that linguistic competence and intercultural sensitivity are core components in cultivating ICC among international students. Their findings suggest that effective language use and cultural understanding facilitate social integration, which is closely associated with improved life evaluation. Therefore, the multidimensional relationship identified in the present study is supported by recent empirical research, confirming that both communicative skills and cultural awareness jointly contribute to students' life satisfaction.

3. The results of Objective 3 further revealed dimensional matching relationships between ICC and different aspects of life satisfaction. Linguistic communication ability was more strongly associated with academic life satisfaction, non-verbal communication ability was linked to social life satisfaction, and cultural awareness and tolerance were most strongly related to psychological adaptation satisfaction. This may be because different ICC dimensions support different forms of adjustment: linguistic communication facilitates academic interaction, non-verbal communication supports social interaction, and cultural awareness and tolerance help students interpret cultural differences and manage unfamiliar situations psychologically. This pattern is supported by Bai Xue (2025), who found that psychological security significantly predicts life satisfaction through resilience mechanisms. Cultural awareness and tolerance may enhance psychological security by reducing uncertainty and helping students respond more positively to intercultural experiences, thereby improving psychological adaptation satisfaction. In addition, Liu Zaihua et al. (2025) demonstrated that social support plays a significant role in enhancing life satisfaction. Non-verbal and linguistic

communication abilities likely facilitate the development of social networks and perceived support, which subsequently improve both social and academic satisfaction. Overall, these findings suggest that different dimensions of intercultural communicative competence function through distinct psychological and social mechanisms, thereby influencing specific domains of life satisfaction. This highlights the role of ICC as a multidimensional adaptive resource for international students in cross-cultural contexts.

Summary of research results

This study investigated the relationship between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and life satisfaction among Vietnamese international students in China. The findings revealed that ICC was significantly and positively correlated with overall life satisfaction and significantly predicted students' life satisfaction levels.

All dimensions of ICC—including linguistic communication ability, non-verbal communication ability, cultural awareness and tolerance, and conflict resolution ability—were positively associated with life satisfaction. Among them, cultural awareness and tolerance showed the strongest relationship.

Furthermore, different dimensions of ICC were linked to specific aspects of life satisfaction. Linguistic communication ability was more closely related to academic life satisfaction, non-verbal communication ability to social life satisfaction, and cultural awareness and tolerance to psychological adaptation satisfaction. Overall, the results indicate that intercultural communicative competence plays a crucial role in enhancing international students' well-being and successful adaptation in cross-cultural contexts.

Recommendation

1. Policy Recommendations

1.1 Strengthen Cross-Cultural Communication Competence Because ICC was positively related to life satisfaction and cultural awareness and tolerance showed the strongest relationship, institutions should provide tiered Chinese language instruction and intercultural communication training focusing on cultural differences, nonverbal communication, and conflict resolution through practical activities.

1.2 Enhance Academic and Social Support Because language communication was particularly related to academic satisfaction and nonverbal communication to social satisfaction, universities should strengthen bilingual academic support, academic writing assistance, and peer-support programs to promote academic and social integration.

1.3 Improve Living and Psychological Support Services Because cultural awareness and tolerance was strongly related to psychological adaptation satisfaction, institutions should provide cross-cultural counseling and stress-management support. Improved living services and service responsiveness should also be maintained to support students' well-being.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

2.1 Expand Sample Scope Future studies should include students from multiple universities and regions to improve generalizability and enable comparative analysis.

2.2 Adopt Longitudinal and Mixed Methods Future research should use longitudinal designs and combine quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to examine changes in ICC and life satisfaction over time.

2.3 Enrich the Theoretical Framework Future studies should examine mediating or moderating variables, such as cultural adaptation stress, social support, and psychological resilience, to better explain the relationship between ICC and life satisfaction.

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