

Intercultural Communication in the Temple: Challenges and Strategies for Thai Monks Using English to Share Buddhist Teachings

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Abstract

This study examines the intercultural communication challenges and strategies employed by Thai Buddhist monks when engaging with international visitors in English. Guided by Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model, the research identifies cognitive, behavioral, affective, and developmental challenges faced by monks in conveying complex Buddhist teachings across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, 30 monks participated in surveys, and a subset of 10 monks engaged in semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that cognitive challenges, particularly the translation of culturally specific Buddhist concepts, present significant obstacles. Behavioral and affective challenges, such as adapting non-verbal cues and managing emotional responses, further influence monks' intercultural interactions. Additionally, developmental challenges highlight the gradual enhancement of intercultural competence through practice, reflection, and experience. To address these challenges, monks employ strategies closely aligned with Byram's ICC model, including the use of simplified language, culturally relevant examples, empathy, and critical cultural accommodations. These strategies raise inclusivity, mutual respect, and effective intercultural dialogue. The study underscores the importance of intercultural competence training within religious contexts, advocating for skill development in adaptability, empathy, and culturally sensitive communication. By providing a detailed understanding of intercultural competence within religious education, this research highlights the dynamic and ongoing process of growth and adaptation in cross-cultural spiritual engagement.

Keywords: intercultural communication, challenges, strategies, Buddhist monks, Buddhist teaching

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale of the Study

In today's interconnected world, English has become the dominant language of intercultural communication, allowing individuals to engage across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Kachru, 1985; Rose et al., 2020). As a lingua franca, English is essential in fields such as education, business, tourism, and religion, where diverse groups seek common ground for meaningful exchanges. In Thailand, where English proficiency remains relatively low, the language plays a critical role in cross-cultural interactions, particularly in religious tourism.

As a predominantly Buddhist country, Thailand attracts millions of foreign visitors annually, many of whom seek to learn about Buddhist teachings, philosophy, and monastic life. Buddhist temples, especially in cultural hubs like Chiang Mai and Bangkok, serve as spaces of spiritual inquiry and cross-cultural dialogue (Schedneck, 2021). Within these spaces, Thai Buddhist monks take on the role of intercultural communicators, bridging the gap between Thai Buddhist traditions and international audiences (Leve, 2014). Beyond their traditional monastic responsibilities, monks increasingly act as teachers, cultural mediators, and guides, sharing Buddhist wisdom with diverse visitors.

However, these intercultural interactions present significant linguistic and cultural challenges. One of the primary difficulties monks face is linguistic; Buddhist concepts such as karma (cause and effect), anatta (non-self), and nirvana (spiritual liberation) are deeply philosophical and culturally embedded, often lacking direct equivalents in English. As a result, monks must not only translate these teachings linguistically but also contextualize them in a way that makes them comprehensible and meaningful to international visitors.

Additionally, cultural differences further complicate communication. Thai Buddhist monks operate within a high-context culture, where meaning is often conveyed implicitly through shared norms and non-verbal cues, whereas many of the international visitors whom monks interact with come from low-context cultures that prioritize explicit, direct communication (Hall, 1976). This divergence in communication styles can lead to misunderstandings, requiring monks to adjust their verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to ensure effective dialogue (Chaiyasit, 2018).

Furthermore, limited formal English training among monks presents another barrier. While some monks have basic English proficiency, many struggle to express abstract religious concepts fluently. Linguistic anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and concerns about unintentionally misrepresenting Buddhist teachings further hinder their ability to communicate effectively (Jhayanuntana & Nomnian,

2020; Vivatananukul, 2016;).

Despite the growing significance of English in religious communication, limited research has explored the intercultural experiences of Thai Buddhist monks. Previous studies have examined broader English language challenges in Thailand (Kirkpatrick, 2010) and the role of English in religious tourism (Leve, 2014), but few have specifically investigated the unique barriers encountered by monks in their interactions with foreign visitors.

To address this gap, the current study investigates the intercultural communication challenges and strategies of Thai Buddhist monks when engaging with foreign audiences. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Identify the challenges monks frequently face when using English to convey Buddhist teachings and;
- Examine the strategies they employ to overcome these barriers.

This research addresses the following questions:

- What intercultural communication challenges do Thai Buddhist monks frequently encounter when communicating in English while spreading Buddhist teachings to foreigners?
- What intercultural communication strategies do Thai Buddhist monks employ to overcome intercultural communication challenges while spreading Buddhist teachings to foreigners?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Intercultural Communication (IC) and Religious Contexts

Intercultural communication (IC) is the exchange of information across cultural and linguistic boundaries, requiring not only language proficiency but also cultural awareness and adaptability (Samovar et al., 2017). Unlike general communication, IC involves managing differences in values, worldviews, and social norms, making it an essential skill for effective engagement in multicultural settings (Gudykunst, 2003). This is particularly relevant in Buddhist monastic settings, where abstract spiritual concepts and ritual practices must be conveyed across cultural and linguistic divides. Intercultural communication (IC) plays a crucial role as monks frequently engage with international visitors seeking to learn about Buddhism, requiring them to act as cultural interpreters and facilitators of religious knowledge. However, these interactions are often fraught with challenges, including linguistic limitations, differing cultural interpretations of Buddhist teachings, and unfamiliarity with monastic etiquette and rituals. Overcoming these barriers requires monks to develop adaptive communication strategies that ensure clarity while preserving the authenticity of Buddhist principles (Schedneck, 2021).

Cultural differences in communication styles significantly impact IC effectiveness. Thailand is a high-context culture, where much of the meaning in communication is derived from indirect cues, shared understanding, and non-verbal elements (Hall, 1976). In contrast, many of the foreign visitors monks interact with come from low-context cultures, where direct and explicit communication is the norm. This cultural contrast can lead to misunderstandings; for example, Western visitors may expect monks to provide clear, structured explanations of Buddhist principles, while Thai monks may rely on implicit meanings and symbolic expressions. Additionally, religious IC presents unique challenges beyond typical cross-cultural exchanges because it involves conveying philosophically complex teachings that may not have direct linguistic equivalents. Concepts such as anatta (non-self), karma (cause and effect), and nirvana (spiritual liberation) require careful adaptation to be understandable to individuals unfamiliar with Buddhist philosophy (Leve, 2014).

Another major challenge is intercultural communication anxiety, which occurs when individuals feel uncertainty or apprehension in cross-cultural exchanges (Gudykunst, 2005). Many Thai Buddhist monks, particularly those with limited formal English training, experience communication anxiety when explaining Buddhist teachings to foreign visitors (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). This often stems from a fear of misrepresenting sacred teachings, struggling with unfamiliar vocabulary, or feeling unprepared for spontaneous theological questions. The need for Thai monks to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is thus critical, allowing them to manage these challenges more effectively while ensuring meaningful engagement with international audiences.

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Its Application to Thai Buddhist Monks

Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model provides a useful framework for understanding the skills necessary for effective intercultural communication. ICC extends beyond linguistic ability to include cultural adaptability, the capacity to interpret cultural norms, and the ability to raise mutual understanding. The model consists of five key competencies that contribute to successful cross-cultural interactions.

The first competency, Attitudes, refers to openness, curiosity, and a willingness to engage with unfamiliar cultural perspectives. Developing this mindset helps individuals approach intercultural interactions without preconceived biases, allowing for greater understanding and mutual respect. The second competency, Knowledge, involves understanding different cultural practices, worldviews, and communication styles. This includes awareness of both one's own cultural norms and those of others, which is essential for recognizing and respecting differences in traditions and expectations.

The third competency, Skills of Interpreting and Relating, focuses on the ability to adapt messages for different cultural audiences. This skill enables individuals to clarify cultural meanings and reframe ideas in ways that resonate with diverse groups, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation. The fourth competency, Skills of Discovery and Interaction, emphasizes the ability to learn about new cultural contexts and adjust one's communication style in real-time. This flexibility is particularly valuable in dynamic intercultural exchanges, where

individuals must respond to unfamiliar situations with adaptability and sensitivity. Finally, Critical Cultural Awareness is the ability to reflect on one’s own cultural biases and assumptions. This competency encourages individuals to evaluate cultural differences critically and to adopt a more inclusive worldview, enhancing empathy and deeper intercultural understanding. Together, as seen figure 1 below, these five competencies provide a comprehensive foundation for developing intercultural communicative competence and managing cross-cultural interactions effectively.

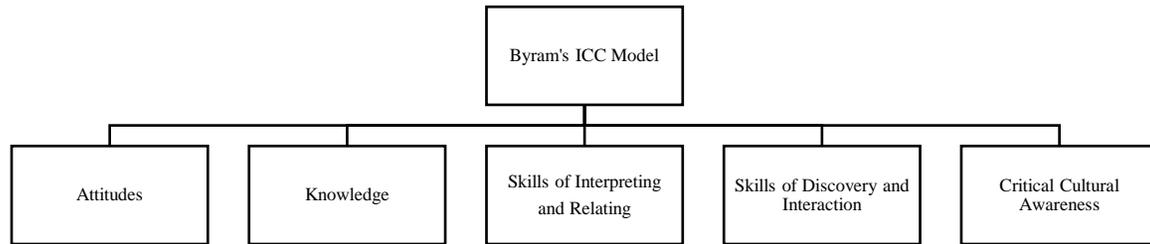


Figure 1. Byram’s (1997) ICC model

Applying Byram’s ICC model to Thai Buddhist monks’ interactions with international visitors provides valuable insights into how monks manage their role as cross-cultural communicators. The competency of Attitudes is fundamental; a monk’s openness to different worldviews and willingness to patiently explain Buddhist teachings raises a welcoming learning environment for foreign visitors. Many visitors, particularly those with little or no prior exposure to Buddhism, may have misconceptions or expectations that differ from Thai norms, making an open-minded and non-judgmental approach essential.

The competency of Knowledge is also critical in these interactions. Understanding differences in cultural communication styles enables monks to anticipate potential misunderstandings. For example, monks must recognize that Western visitors may ask analytical or direct questions about Buddhist teachings, whereas Thai laypeople typically adopt a more passive listening approach, showing deference to monastic authority (Leve, 2014). Awareness of such differences allows monks to adjust their responses accordingly, ensuring their explanations remain accessible and engaging. Skills of Interpreting and Relating play a crucial role in bridging linguistic and conceptual gaps. Because Buddhist philosophy is highly abstract, monks often use metaphors, storytelling, and real-world analogies to make teachings relatable. For instance, rather than explaining karma in doctrinal terms, a monk may say, “Karma is like planting seeds; your actions today determine your future outcomes” (Tarone, 1980). Finally, Critical Cultural Awareness enables monks to reflect on their own cultural assumptions and adjust their communication style accordingly. For instance, Thai monks may expect visitors to show deference in temples by dressing modestly or avoiding direct physical contact, but many foreign visitors may be unaware of such expectations. Rather than perceiving this as disrespect, monks who cultivate cultural awareness recognize these differences as contrasts in social norms rather than deliberate breaches of etiquette, allowing them to approach these interactions with patience and a willingness to educate.

2.3 Intercultural Communication Strategies Aligned with Byram’s ICC Model

Interdisciplinary research in intercultural communication highlights various strategies that help bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. Scholars such as Tarone (1980), Seidlhofer (2001, 2004), and Cogo and Dewey (2012) emphasize the importance of adaptability, mutual understanding, and cultural awareness as critical components of effective communication. These principles closely align with Byram’s (1997) ICC model, which identifies five key competencies essential for successful intercultural engagement: Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills of Interpreting and Relating, Skills of Discovery and Interaction, and Critical Cultural Awareness. Together, these competencies offer a comprehensive framework for promoting cultural sensitivity, flexibility, and mutual respect, particularly in contexts that involve significant linguistic and cultural differences, such as Thai Buddhist monks’ interactions with international audiences.

The first competency, Attitudes, focuses on openness, curiosity, and respect for other cultures as foundational elements of meaningful and respectful dialogue. These qualities encourage communicators to engage with unfamiliar cultures without prejudice, creating an environment where cultural differences are acknowledged and valued. Cogo and Dewey (2012) emphasize the importance of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity in promoting successful intercultural exchanges. One effective strategy is inclusive communication, which ensures clarity and reduces misunderstandings. For instance, a monk might ask, “Is this clear to you?” after explaining a concept, raising a sense of collaboration and mutual understanding. Additionally, curiosity plays a key role in effective IC by encouraging communicators and audiences alike to engage in mutual learning. By facilitating a two-way exchange, monks can strengthen trust and engagement, aligning with Dearsdorff’s (2009) argument that intercultural competence is a dynamic, collaborative process.

The second competency, Knowledge, involves understanding cultural and linguistic frameworks that shape communication. Effective IC requires not only linguistic fluency but also an awareness of cultural values, norms, and expectations (Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004). One strategy for overcoming linguistic barriers is the use of simplified vocabulary to enhance comprehension. For example, replacing abstract or technical terms like karma with the phrase “the effects of actions” can make Buddhist concepts more accessible to international visitors unfamiliar with Buddhist philosophy. Another strategy, borrowing culturally significant terms while providing contextual explanations,

helps maintain cultural authenticity in communication. Monks, for instance, might explain Dhamma as “teachings on wisdom”, linking the gap between unfamiliar religious terminology and comprehensible ideas (Tarone, 1980). Additionally, using contextual examples drawn from audiences’ own cultures allows monks to make abstract or philosophical ideas more relatable, ultimately enhancing cross-cultural comprehension.

The third competency, Skills of Interpreting and Relating, focuses on reframing ideas and adapting messages to facilitate comprehension across cultures. One effective strategy is paraphrasing, which simplifies complex concepts while preserving their core meaning (Tarone, 1980). For example, instead of defining anatta (non-self) in purely doctrinal terms, monks might say, “We are all constantly changing, without a fixed identity.” This approach retains the essence of Buddhist teachings while making them accessible to audiences unfamiliar with Buddhist philosophy. Additionally, non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in IC. Gestures, facial expressions, and visual aids, such as demonstrating meditation postures or using temple murals to illustrate Buddhist stories, can transcend language barriers and reinforce verbal explanations. Furthermore, raising empathy enhances trust and engagement in intercultural dialogue. By actively listening and acknowledging their audience’s perspectives, monks create a more inclusive learning environment (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

The fourth competency, Skills of Discovery and Interaction, emphasizes adaptability and real-time adjustment to audience needs. One key strategy is pragmatic fluency, which prioritizes message clarity over strict grammatical accuracy (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). For instance, a monk might say, “Meditation bring peace” rather than striving for perfect grammar, focusing instead on communicating the core idea effectively. Similarly, flexible grammar, as described by Seidlhofer (2001), simplifies sentence structures to enhance comprehension. Using phrases like “Buddhist teaching help people find peace” ensures that messages remain easily understood by diverse audiences. Another important strategy is adapted explanations, which align the level of detail and complexity with the audience’s familiarity with Buddhism. For instance, when explaining mindfulness, monks may emphasize stress reduction for Western audiences while focusing on spiritual development for Buddhist practitioners, tailoring their communication to fit cultural expectations.

The final competency, Critical Cultural Awareness, highlights the need to identify and address cultural assumptions to promote inclusivity and mutual respect. This competency encourages communicators to reflect on their own cultural biases and adjust their approaches to align with their audience’s expectations. One effective strategy is cultural accommodation, which involves adapting examples to suit different cultural backgrounds (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). For instance, when speaking with Christian visitors, monks may draw parallels between Buddhist compassion and Christian values of kindness and love, helping audiences relate unfamiliar concepts to familiar religious principles. Cross-cultural comparisons further aid understanding by highlighting both similarities and differences across traditions, ultimately reducing ethnocentric biases and promoting cultural appreciation. Finally, encouraging open-mindedness is crucial for building a collaborative, respectful environment where visitors feel comfortable engaging in dialogue. By inviting international guests to share their own perspectives, monks create opportunities for mutual learning and deeper intercultural connections.

By integrating these strategies, Byram’s ICC model provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the complexities of intercultural communication. Its emphasis on adaptability, empathy, and cultural sensitivity offers valuable insights into how Thai Buddhist monks manage linguistic and cultural barriers while conveying Buddhist teachings to international audiences. These competencies enable monks to build meaningful connections, ensuring that their messages remain accessible, authentic, and impactful across diverse cultural contexts, as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Intercultural communication strategies aligned with Byram’s ICC model

Byram’s Competency	Strategy Source	Strategy Type	Definition	Examples
Attitudes	Cogo & Dewey (2012)	Inclusive Communication	Engages audience feedback for clarity	“I ask, ‘Is this clear?’ to check understanding.”
		Cultural Sensitivity	Adapts content to suit cultural context	“I simplify explanations to respect different backgrounds.”
	Seidlhofer (2001)	Encouraging Curiosity	Promotes openness by inviting audience perspectives	“I ask about their perspective on Buddhism to encourage dialogue.”
Knowledge	Seidlhofer (2001, 2004)	Simplified Vocabulary	Uses simple words for better understanding	“I use ‘effects of actions’ instead of ‘karma’.”
	Tarone (1980, 1983)	Borrowing	Retains original terms with explanations	“I explain ‘Dhamma’ as ‘teachings on wisdom.’”
	Cogo & Dewey (2012)	Contextual Examples	Uses culturally relevant examples	“I explain concepts using familiar Thai cultural references.”
Skills of Interpreting and Relating	Tarone (1980, 1983)	Paraphrasing	Restates ideas in simpler terms	“I explain anatta as ‘we are all connected.’”
		Mime & Non-verbal Cues	Uses gestures to illustrate ideas	“I use gestures to clarify Buddhist concepts.”
	Cogo & Dewey (2012)	Empathy in Communication	Responds by acknowledging audience perspectives	“I listen carefully to understand their views before responding.”

Skills of Discovery and Interaction	Cogo & Dewey (2012)	Pragmatic Fluency & Explicit Communication	Prioritizes message clarity over grammar	"I say 'Meditation brings peace' for simplicity."
	Seidlhofer (2001)	Flexible Grammar	Uses basic grammar to improve clarity	"I use simple grammar like 'teaching help peace.'"
	Cogo & Dewey (2012)	Adapted Explanation	Adjusts explanations to match comprehension level	"I adjust explanations based on audience comprehension."
Critical Cultural Awareness	Cogo & Dewey (2012)	Cultural Accommodation	Adapts examples to align with audience culture	"I compare mindfulness to Western relaxation."
		Cross-Cultural Comparisons	Highlights similarities and differences across cultures	"I discuss how Buddhist compassion is similar to kindness in other cultures."
		Encouraging Open-Mindedness	Promotes openness to different cultural practices	"I encourage visitors to share their customs to promote mutual understanding."

2.4 Intercultural Communication Challenges

Intercultural communication challenges often arise from cultural differences in perceptions, expectations, and attitudes toward language and behavior. These differences shape how individuals interpret and respond to messages, influencing their ability to engage effectively across cultures (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). In particular, Thai Buddhist monks face significant intercultural communication challenges when conveying Buddhist teachings to international audiences with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Unlike general cross-cultural communication, religious discourse requires monks to manage philosophically abstract concepts, unfamiliar cultural assumptions, and distinct communication styles, making their role as cultural mediators particularly complex.

To better understand these challenges, the frameworks of Vivatananukul (2016) and Barna (1994) provide valuable insights. Vivatananukul (2016) categorizes intercultural communication challenges into three types: Cognitive, Behavioral, and Affective, each addressing different dimensions of cross-cultural interactions. Barna's (1994) framework complements this structure by outlining specific intercultural barriers, including the Assumption of Similarities, Language Differences, Nonverbal Misinterpretations, Preconceptions and Stereotypes, the Tendency to Evaluate, and High Anxiety. These models offer a comprehensive lens for examining the detailed barriers that monks face when engaging with foreign visitors.

2.4.1 Cognitive Challenges

Cognitive challenges arise from differences in language, knowledge, and cultural interpretation, which often lead to miscommunication. Vivatananukul (2016) identifies these challenges as the most significant in intercultural religious discourse, as monks must translate complex Buddhist teachings in ways that foreign audiences can understand. Concepts such as *anatta* (non-self), *karma* (cause and effect), and *nirvana* (spiritual liberation) are deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy and often lack direct linguistic equivalents in English. Consequently, monks frequently struggle to simplify these doctrines without distorting their meaning.

Barna's (1994) Assumption of Similarities further complicates intercultural interactions. Monks may expect foreign visitors to intuitively understand Buddhist customs, assuming shared cultural values, while international visitors may approach Buddhist teachings from Western philosophical or Judeo-Christian perspectives, leading to misinterpretations. For example, a monk explaining *karma* may assume that visitors understand its cyclical nature in Buddhism, whereas many Western visitors may interpret it as a cause-and-effect system of moral retribution. Similarly, the Language Differences category highlights the lack of equivalent vocabulary and the difficulty of translating idiomatic expressions or ritualistic terminologies.

2.4.2 Behavioral Challenges

Behavioral challenges refer to non-verbal misinterpretations and difficulties adapting to different cultural expectations. Thai culture is high-context, meaning that communication often relies on implicit meanings, indirect cues, and shared norms (Hall, 1976). In contrast, many foreign visitors, particularly from Western cultures, come from low-context communication backgrounds, where explicit and direct communication is preferred. As a result, monks may struggle to adjust their verbal and non-verbal communication styles, leading to misunderstandings.

Barna (1994) identifies Nonverbal Misinterpretations as a major barrier in cross-cultural communication. Gestures, facial expressions, and body language hold different meanings across cultures, and actions that are acceptable in one culture may be perceived as offensive in another. For instance, many foreign visitors unknowingly point their feet at a Buddha statue or fail to perform the *Wai* (a traditional Thai greeting), which monks may initially perceive as disrespectful. Similarly, eye contact norms vary across cultures; while Western visitors may expect direct eye contact as a sign of confidence and attentiveness, Thai monks, accustomed to avoiding prolonged direct eye contact as a sign of respect, may find this uncomfortable or inappropriate.

Additionally, communication apprehension, a key component of Barna's (1994) High Anxiety category, is a common challenge among monks. Many monks experience anxiety when speaking English, fearing that their limited proficiency or incorrect phrasing may cause confusion or offend foreign visitors. This is particularly challenging when visitors ask theologically complex or controversial questions, such as those related to Buddhism's perspective on the afterlife or comparisons with other religions.

2.4.3 Affective Challenges

Affective challenges involve emotional and psychological barriers that hinder effective intercultural engagement. These challenges stem from feelings of discomfort, frustration, or resistance to unfamiliar cultural norms (Vivattananukul, 2016). Thai Buddhist monks, raised in a collectivist and hierarchical society, may find it difficult to manage interactions with foreign visitors who come from more individualistic and egalitarian cultures. This difference in cultural orientation often results in unintentional breaches of expectations, leading to emotional discomfort for both monks and visitors.

Barna’s (1994) Preconceptions and Stereotypes category highlights how both monks and visitors may bring cultural biases into their interactions. Monks may assume that foreign visitors have limited knowledge of Buddhism, which can affect how they frame their explanations. Conversely, international visitors may perceive Buddhist monks as mystical or detached from worldly concerns, expecting interactions to be strictly philosophical rather than conversational. These assumptions may lead to frustration when expectations are not met, creating emotional barriers in communication. Another major issue is the Tendency to Evaluate, where individuals unconsciously judge unfamiliar cultural behaviors through the lens of their own culture. For example, Thai monks may perceive casual dress, informal speech, or relaxed body language in temples as disrespectful, while foreign visitors may find formal Buddhist rituals too rigid or inaccessible. Such misunderstandings require monks to exercise cultural empathy and flexibility, recognizing differences in customs without interpreting them as a lack of respect.

The integration of Vivattananukul’s (2016) and Barna’s (1994) frameworks provides a structured understanding of the multifaceted intercultural communication challenges faced by Thai Buddhist monks. Cognitive challenges involve language barriers and misinterpretations of cultural concepts, behavioral challenges stem from non-verbal misinterpretations and communication anxiety, and affective challenges highlight emotional and attitudinal difficulties in cross-cultural exchanges. Together, as summarized in Table 2, these categories underscore the complex nature of intercultural interactions, emphasizing the need for targeted communication strategies to bridge linguistic, cultural, and emotional gaps.

Table 2. Intercultural communication challenges based on Vivattananukul’s and Barna’s categories

Vivattananukul’s Challenges	Barna’s Challenges	Subtypes	Definitions	Examples
Cognitive Challenges	Assumption of Similarities,	Misunderstanding of Cultural Context	Assuming others share similar beliefs, leading to misunderstandings.	“I assume foreign visitors understand Buddhist terms as Thais do.”
		Generalization of Shared Values	Believing that foreign visitors value Buddhist principles as much as Thais.	“I expect foreigners to show similar respect for Buddhist symbols.”
		Lack of Equivalent Vocabulary	Difficulty translating specific concepts due to a lack of direct English equivalents.	“I struggle to translate ‘anatta’ accurately.”
		Detailed Meanings and Idioms	Difficulty conveying idioms and expressions that don’t translate well.	“Thai idioms often lose meaning in English.”
Behavioral Challenges	Nonverbal Misinterpretations	Gestures and Body Language	Variations in gestures or expressions that differ across cultures, leading to misunderstandings.	“I sometimes use gestures that may mean something different to foreigners.”
		Eye Contact	Uncertainty about eye contact norms, causing discomfort or misinterpretation.	“I feel unsure about maintaining eye contact.”
	High Anxiety	Communication Apprehension	Nervousness about unintentionally offending others due to cultural differences.	“I worry about offending foreigners unintentionally.”
		Space and Proximity	Uncertainty about appropriate distance to maintain during interactions.	“I am unsure about the physical distance to keep with foreigners.”
Affective Challenges	Preconceptions and Stereotypes,	Assumptions about Foreign Understanding	Assuming foreigners grasp complex Buddhist teachings.	“I tend to assume foreigners don’t fully understand Buddhist teachings.”
		Judging Based on Thai Norms	Assessing foreigners’ actions based on Thai cultural norms.	“I sometimes judge foreigners by Thai standards, which may not apply to them.”
	Tendency to Evaluate	Discomfort with Cultural Differences	Feeling uneasy with foreign customs different from Thai norms.	“I feel uneasy when foreigners do not follow Thai greetings or customs.”
		Open-Mindedness Resistance	Difficulty accepting viewpoints or beliefs that contradict Buddhist teachings.	“I find it challenging to accept views that differ from Buddhist teachings.”

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the intercultural communication challenges and strategies of Thai Buddhist monks when communicating in English with foreign audiences. A mixed-methods approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to capture the complexity of monks' experiences and the various contextual factors influencing their communication.

For the quantitative component, data was collected using a structured questionnaire divided into three sections. The first section gathered demographic information, including age, educational background, years of monastic experience, and English proficiency level. The second section assessed intercultural communication challenges, drawing on the frameworks of Vivatananukul (2016) and Barna (1994) to identify the specific barriers monks face in their interactions. This section utilized Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure monks' perceptions of these challenges. The third section focused on intercultural communication strategies, structured around Byram's (1997) ICC model. Strategies were categorized into five key competencies: Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills of Interpreting and Relating, Skills of Discovery and Interaction, and Critical Cultural Awareness, allowing for a systematic analysis of the methods monks employ to overcome intercultural communication barriers.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 monks who had substantial experience interacting with foreign visitors. These interviews aimed to expand on the monks' communication experiences, challenges, and strategies, offering deeper insights that extended beyond the questionnaire data. Interview questions covered key themes, such as monks' experiences of communication difficulties while teaching Buddhist concepts, their approaches to overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers, and their perceptions of both their own and foreigners' communication behaviors. Each interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes and was conducted in a private, comfortable setting within the temple grounds to ensure that monks felt at ease. Audio recordings were made with participants' consent, and verbatim transcriptions were produced for in-depth analysis.

Data collection was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, structured questionnaires were distributed to all 30 monks. To maintain a high response rate, monks were given detailed instructions and a clear explanation of the study's purpose before responding. All completed questionnaires were collected within one week. In the second phase, follow-up interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 monks, selected based on variations in age, experience, and frequency of interaction with foreign visitors. This purposive sampling approach ensured that the study captured a diverse range of intercultural communication experiences, reflecting different perspectives on challenges and strategies.

3.2 Research Participants

The participants in this study represented a diverse group of Thai Buddhist monks, carefully selected to capture a broad spectrum of intercultural communication challenges and strategies. The 30 monks initially recruited came from five prominent temples in Chiang Mai: Wat Suan Dok, Wat Chedi Luang, Wat Ram Poeng, Wat Umong, and Wat Srisuphan. These temples were chosen due to their high level of interaction with international visitors, as they frequently host English-speaking programs, cultural exchange sessions, and guided meditation practices for foreigners. This ensured that participating monks had meaningful experience in intercultural communication, making them well-suited to provide relevant insights for the study.

Among the 10 monks selected for in-depth interviews, participants displayed a significant diversity in age, monastic experience, education, and roles within their respective temples. Their ages ranged from 20 to 41 years old, and their monastic experience varied from 1 to 20 years. Educational backgrounds also differed widely, with some monks having completed only Grade 12 (Mattayom 6), while others held advanced degrees, including Master's and PhDs in Linguistics, Philosophy, and Buddhism.

Additionally, monks played different roles in their temples. Some served as meditation instructors, guiding foreign visitors through Buddhist teachings and mindfulness practices, while others worked as information officers, providing explanations about temple customs and religious traditions. This diversity ensured that the study captured a broad spectrum of communication challenges and adaptive strategies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of monks' intercultural engagement. The background information of the participants can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Background information of the monk participants participated in the semi-structured interview

Participant Code	Age (Years)	Years as a Monk	Educational Background	Experience with Foreign Visitors	Temple Affiliation
P1	28	8	Bachelor's Humanity in English (EP)	Meditation Instructor	Wat Suan Dok
P2	33	12	MA. Linguistic	Meditation Instructor	Wat Suan Dok
P3	29	8	Bachelor's Humanity in English (EP)	Meditation Instructor	Wat Ram Poeng
P4	26	5	Bachelor's in Teaching English	Meditation Instructor	Wat Ram Poeng
P5	25	5	Bachelor's in Teaching English	Meditation Instructor	Wat Chedi Luang
P6	36	15	PhD. Philosophy and Buddhism	Meditation Instructor	Wat Chedi Luang
P7	25	4	Bachelor's in English	Meditation Instructor	Wat Srisuphan
P8	28	8	Bachelor's Humanity in English (EP)	Meditation Instructor	Wat Srisuphan
P9	41	20	PhD. Linguistics	Meditation Instructor	Wat Umong
P10	20	1	Mattayom 6 (Grade 12)	Information Instructor	Wat Umong

3.3 Data Analysis

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods to ensure a well-rounded interpretation of the findings. For the quantitative data, responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS software to perform descriptive statistical analyses. The mean and standard deviation were calculated to summarize monks' responses regarding intercultural communication challenges and strategies. Additionally, frequency analysis was conducted to determine the prevalence of specific communication barriers and strategies, allowing patterns to emerge from the data.

For the qualitative data, Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) was conducted following Schreier's (2012) methodology, which provides a structured approach to categorizing and interpreting textual data. The analysis followed a five-step process. First, data selection was carried out by identifying relevant excerpts from interview transcripts that aligned with the study's research objectives. Second, a holistic review of each transcript was conducted to develop a deeper understanding of the context of monks' experiences. Third, a coding framework was developed, categorizing data into communication challenges (cognitive, behavioral, and affective) and communication strategies, using Byram's (1997) ICC model as a guiding framework. Fourth, a thematic coding process was applied, systematically identifying recurring patterns and key themes. Finally, an interpretation of themes was conducted, organizing the emerging patterns related to monks' intercultural communication challenges and strategies.

By combining statistical analysis with in-depth thematic coding, this study ensured that both numerical trends and rich qualitative insights were captured, strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings.

4. Results

4.1 Result Analysis of Intercultural Communication Challenges

The intercultural communication challenges faced by Thai Buddhist monks are categorized into four main themes: Cognitive Challenges, Behavioral Challenges, Affective Challenges, and Developmental Challenges. The quantitative results (Table 4) provide an overview of these challenges, which are further explored through qualitative insights.

Table 4. Intercultural communication challenges faced by Thai Buddhist monks

Challenge Type	Challenge	Mean (\bar{x})	S.D.	Interpretation
Cognitive	Misunderstanding of Cultural Context	3.27	0.98	Agree
	Generalization of Shared Values	3.63	1.10	Agree
	Lack of Equivalent Vocabulary	3.80	1.03	Agree
	Detailed Meanings and Idioms	3.70	0.95	Agree
	Overall Cognitive Score	3.60	0.76	Agree
Behavioral	Gestures and Body Language	3.40	0.89	Agree
	Eye Contact	3.20	1.03	Not Sure
	Communication Apprehension	3.30	0.95	Agree
	Space and Proximity	3.27	0.94	Agree
	Overall Behavioral Score	3.29	0.75	Agree
Affective	Assumptions about Foreign Understanding	3.77	0.86	Agree
	Judging Based on Thai Norms	3.03	0.93	Not Sure
	Discomfort with Cultural Differences	2.60	1.22	Not Sure
	Open-Mindedness Resistance	2.93	0.98	Not Sure
	Overall Affective Score	3.08	0.76	Not Sure
Total Mean score	Overall Challenge Score	3.39	0.76	Agree

4.1.1 Cognitive Challenges

Cognitive challenges were the most significant, with an overall mean score of 3.60 (Agree). The greatest difficulty lay in translating Buddhist concepts into English, particularly those with no direct equivalent in Western languages. For example, P6 noted that terms such as the five strengths (พลังห้า) and the five faculties (อินทรีย์ห้า) often required extensive explanation to convey their full meaning. Another key cognitive barrier was unfamiliar accents and pronunciation differences, making it difficult for monks to understand foreign visitors. P3 mentioned that accents from different English-speaking countries sometimes caused misunderstandings.

Excerpt 1 (P6):

Some Buddhist concepts don't have direct English translations, like the five strengths (พลังห้า) and the five faculties (อินทรีย์ห้า). I often struggle to explain them clearly.

Excerpt 2 (P3):

The main challenge is accents because English is used in many countries, making accents very different.

4.1.2 Behavioral Challenges

Behavioral challenges had a mean score of 3.29 (Agree) and primarily arose from non-verbal communication issues, such as gestures, body language, and spatial norms. Misunderstandings often occurred when foreign visitors unintentionally violated Thai customs, leading to discomfort during interactions. For example, P1 described being taken aback when foreign visitors displayed public affection, a

behavior considered inappropriate in Thai religious spaces. Similarly, P3 recounted how foreign visitors unintentionally offended cultural norms by pointing their feet at a Buddha statue, requiring monks to explain Thai customs with sensitivity.

Excerpt 3 (P1):

Once, I was conversing with a foreign visitor, and suddenly they started kissing in front of me. It's considered inappropriate in our place, so I felt taken aback.

Excerpt 4 (P3):

Foreigners sometimes sit with their feet pointed at the Buddha statue, which can be shocking for us because they don't understand our cultural significance. We have to explain the Thai customs to them, so they realize why this is sensitive.

Monks also experienced discomfort with direct eye contact, as Thai cultural norms dictate that monks should avoid prolonged eye contact as a sign of respect.

4.1.3 Affective Challenges

Affective challenges had the lowest mean score of 3.08 (Not Sure), reflecting mixed perceptions among participants. Some monks were open to engaging with foreigners, while others faced emotional barriers, such as assumptions about foreigners' understanding and discomfort with cultural differences. For example, P2 noted the importance of providing foundational explanations to foreign visitors who may not share the same Buddhist background. Meanwhile, P7 emphasized the need for patience and non-judgment when encountering different cultural perspectives

Excerpt 5 (P2):

When speaking to foreigners, we need to lay a foundation first, as they don't share the same mindset as Thais. For instance, we must explain what Thai people believe and how they were taught.

Excerpt 6 (P7):

I see cultural differences as something that must be respected. We must carefully listen to what the other person is communicating, without judgment, whether we agree or not.

4.1.4 Developmental Challenges (Emergent Theme)

An emergent theme in the study was Developmental Challenges, highlighting the gradual improvement of monks' intercultural communication skills through experience and practice. Unlike immediate cognitive or behavioral challenges, these difficulties diminished over time as monks became more confident in communicating with foreigners. P2 noted that repeated interactions helped him refine his responses, even when initially struggling. Similarly, P10 observed that older monks developed more effective communication strategies due to their greater experience.

Excerpt 7 (P2):

Experience is essential; with more practice, I can respond better even if I don't have an immediate answer.

Excerpt 8 (P10):

Older monks have better strategies for engaging with foreigners due to greater experience, which makes it easier to communicate.

In summary, these findings highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of intercultural communication challenges faced by Thai Buddhist monks. Cognitive challenges were the most significant due to linguistic and conceptual barriers, while behavioral challenges required adjustments in non-verbal communication. Affective challenges involved emotional and attitudinal adaptation, and developmental challenges demonstrated the evolving nature of monks' intercultural competence over time.

4.2 Result Analysis of Intercultural Communication Strategies

To address intercultural communication challenges, Thai Buddhist monks employed various strategies aligned with Byram's ICC model (1997). These strategies were used to effectively convey Buddhist teachings across cultural and linguistic boundaries. The findings categorize these strategies into five key areas: Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills of Interpreting and Relating, Skills of Discovery and Interaction, and Critical Cultural Awareness. Table 5 presents the mean scores and standard deviations, highlighting the frequency and effectiveness of each strategy.

Table 5. Intercultural communication strategies employed by Thai Buddhist monks

Strategy Type	Strategy	Mean (\bar{x})	S.D.	Interpretation
Attitudes	Inclusive Communication	3.67	0.84	Agree
	Cultural Sensitivity	3.70	0.70	Agree
	Encouraging Curiosity	3.80	0.89	Agree
	Mean Score	3.72	0.59	Agree
Knowledge	Simplified Vocabulary	3.70	0.95	Agree
	Borrowing	3.80	0.85	Agree
	Contextual Examples	3.73	0.74	Agree

	Mean Score	3.74	0.68	Agree
Skills of Interpreting and Relating	Paraphrasing	3.43	0.73	Agree
	Mime & Non-verbal Cues	3.77	0.97	Agree
	Empathy in Communication	4.17	0.83	Strongly Agree
	Mean Score	3.79	0.68	Agree
Skills of Discovery and Interaction	Pragmatic Fluency & Explicit Communication	3.97	0.93	Agree
	Flexible Grammar	3.87	0.94	Agree
	Adapted Explanation	3.73	0.64	Agree
	Mean Score	3.86	0.71	Agree
Critical Cultural Awareness	Cultural Accommodation	3.73	0.83	Agree
	Cross-Cultural Comparisons	3.47	0.82	Agree
	Encouraging Open-Mindedness	4.13	0.82	Strongly Agree
	Mean Score	4.13	0.82	Strongly Agree
Total Mean score	Overall Mean Score	3.85	0.70	Agree

4.2.1 Attitudinal Strategies

Attitudinal strategies achieved a mean score of 3.72 (SD = 0.59), highlighting the monks' efforts to raise inclusivity, respect for cultural diversity, and curiosity to bridge cultural gaps. These strategies included Inclusive Communication (3.67), Cultural Sensitivity (3.70), and Encouraging Curiosity (3.80). Monks created welcoming environments by sharing Thai culture and engaging foreign visitors with curiosity and mutual respect. For example, P3 emphasized the importance of sharing Thai customs while encouraging visitors to share their own perspectives to build mutual understanding. Similarly, P8 described how he starts by identifying the audience's interests, making them feel more engaged and included.

Excerpt 9 (P3):

I share Thai culture and explain how we do things, then ask for their views to build mutual understanding.

Excerpt 10 (P8):

When teaching Buddhism, I start by finding out their interests, whether it's doctrine or Thai customs, so they feel engaged and understood.

4.2.2 Knowledge-Based Strategies

Knowledge-related strategies achieved a mean score of 3.74 (SD = 0.68), emphasizing simplification, borrowing terms, and using relatable examples to make Buddhist teachings more accessible. For example, P2 noted how avoiding technical terms sometimes required additional explanations, while P4 highlighted the importance of paraphrasing to enhance clarity. Similarly, P1 described using relatable examples to help foreign audiences understand complex Buddhist principles.

Excerpt 11 (P2):

It affects the way I teach. I try to avoid specific or technical terms, replacing them with simpler words and adding explanations. However, this sometimes makes the meaning less precise.

Excerpt 12 (P4):

One way I manage is by asking them to clarify, then rephrasing complex sentences into simpler ones. I try to explain using easier words to make the concept clearer.

Excerpt 13 (P1):

I adjust my teaching based on their knowledge of Buddhism. If they don't know much, I simplify and use examples to help them understand.

4.2.3 Skills of Interpreting and Relating

This category achieved a mean score of 3.79 (SD = 0.68), emphasizing paraphrasing, non-verbal cues, and empathy. For instance, P9 described how listening attentively to individuals from different religious backgrounds allowed him to explain Buddhist perspectives in a respectful way. Similarly, P5 emphasized the use of gestures and body language to overcome language barriers..

Excerpt 14 (P9):

For example, when individuals from different religions come and assert that their beliefs are superior or their practices are better, I allow them to express their views and listen attentively. If there is an opportunity, I provide explanations or expand on the Buddhist perspective to help them understand. However, if the discussion becomes too challenging or unproductive, I choose to simply listen, express appreciation, and thank them for sharing their perspectives.

Excerpt 15 (P5):

I often rely on body language (gestures) to help communicate effectively.

4.2.4 Skills of Discovery and Interaction

This category achieved a mean score of 3.86 (SD = 0.71), reflecting monks' adaptability in tailoring explanations and dynamically adjusting communication. For example, P5 shared how code-switching between Thai and English helped make Buddhist teachings more relatable. P3 described clarifying concepts through direct questioning, and P6 highlighted the use of digital tools and visual aids to enhance understanding.

Excerpt 16 (P5):

I use code-switching, combining Thai and English in explanations. For instance, when teaching about the Thai practice of 'Wai' (bowing), I explain it in both languages to make it easier to understand.

Excerpt 17 (P3):

I ask directly if they understand or if they have any additional questions. It helps me clarify what I might need to explain further.

Excerpt 18 (P6):

I use Google to find words or explanations, and sometimes I incorporate graphics to help clarify teachings.

4.2.5 Critical Cultural Awareness

This strategy received the highest mean score (4.13, SD = 0.82), highlighting monks' efforts to bridge cultural divides through accommodation, cross-cultural comparisons, and open-mindedness.

Excerpt 19 (P3):

I explain the significance of Thai practices while inviting them to share their own customs.

Excerpt 20 (P2):

For me, it's about recognizing that different perspectives and beliefs are natural. People are raised differently and practice religion differently. Over time, I've learned to accept these differences without opposition, understanding them as part of reality.

In summary, Thai Buddhist monks employed a range of strategies to manage intercultural communication challenges, effectively aligning with Byram's ICC model. By promoting inclusivity, respecting diverse perspectives, and encouraging open dialogue, monks created welcoming environments that encouraged intercultural exchange. Simplifying complex Buddhist terms and concepts enabled monks to make teachings accessible to audiences unfamiliar with these ideas, while their adaptability allowed them to adjust explanations and respond effectively to varying levels of understanding. Furthermore, monks utilized empathy and non-verbal cues, such as gestures and active listening, to build meaningful connections and bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. By embracing cultural sensitivity and boosting open-mindedness, they facilitated mutual respect and successfully connected Buddhist principles with universal values. These strategies not only enhanced communication but also strengthened intercultural understanding and engagement, showcasing the monks' ability to cross complex cultural dynamics with skill and compassion.

5. Discussion

This study sheds light on the intercultural communication challenges and strategies employed by Thai Buddhist monks, emphasizing their efforts to manage complex cultural and linguistic dynamics. Drawing on Byram's ICC model (1997) and other key intercultural theories, the findings demonstrate how monks address these challenges through strategies rooted in empathy, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity.

To begin with, cognitive challenges emerged as the most significant intercultural barrier, reflecting the linguistic and conceptual difficulties monks face in translating abstract Buddhist teachings into English. Terms such as karma (action and consequence) and anatta (non-self) often lack direct equivalents, requiring extensive explanation. These findings align with Wierzbicka's (1997) concept of cultural scripts, which highlights the difficulty of conveying culturally specific meanings across languages. To address these challenges, monks relied on strategies such as simplified vocabulary, contextual examples, and borrowing culturally significant terms, aligning with Byram's Knowledge competency. By tailoring their language to their audience's level of understanding, monks successfully bridged linguistic gaps and made complex teachings accessible to diverse listeners. This approach aligns with previous research by Seidlhofer (2004) and Tarone (1980), which emphasize simplification as a key strategy in intercultural communication.

In addition to cognitive barriers, behavioral challenges primarily stemmed from differences in non-verbal communication styles, such as gestures, body language, and spatial norms. These challenges reflect the high- and low-context cultural expectations described by Hall (1976). For instance, misunderstandings often occurred when foreign visitors unintentionally violated Thai customs, such as pointing their feet at sacred objects or engaging in public displays of affection within temple grounds. In response, monks employed skills of interpreting and relating, including the use of mime, gestures, and adaptive body language to clarify meaning. These strategies align with Byram's ICC model and resonate with Gudykunst's (2005) Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory, which emphasizes adjusting communicative behaviors to minimize misunderstandings and reduce cultural anxiety. By mirroring cultural expectations and managing their audience's comfort through non-verbal adaptation, monks enhanced clarity and facilitated smoother interactions.

Furthermore, while affective challenges were rated as the least significant, they underscore the emotional difficulties monks faced when engaging with unfamiliar cultural norms. Emotional barriers, such as assumptions about foreigners' understanding or discomfort with contrasting practices, highlight the importance of intercultural sensitivity. To address these issues, monks employed strategies such as

encouraging open-mindedness and raising empathy, aligning with Bennett's (2012) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). This model describes how individuals progress from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, gradually becoming more accepting of cultural differences. By demonstrating respect for differing worldviews, monks not only reduced emotional barriers but also embodied Byram's Attitudes competency, promoting curiosity and intercultural respect.

Moreover, an emergent theme, developmental challenges, highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of intercultural competence. Monks reported that repeated interactions with foreign visitors helped them refine their communication strategies, build confidence, and anticipate questions more effectively over time. This finding supports Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence, which views intercultural adaptability as a progressive skill developed through practice and reflection. For example, experienced monks described their ability to modify their teaching approaches and engage more effectively with diverse audiences, reflecting Byram's Skills of Discovery and Interaction. The monks' developmental trajectory underscores the importance of experiential learning in intercultural competence and highlights how familiarity with diverse cultural perspectives strengthens communicative effectiveness over time.

Equally significant, critical cultural awareness emerged as the highest-rated competency, demonstrating monks' ability to bridge cultural divides through accommodation, cross-cultural comparisons, and open-mindedness. By drawing parallels between Buddhist teachings and familiar Western concepts, such as mindfulness and relaxation techniques, monks enhanced mutual understanding and reduced cultural anxiety, supporting Gudykunst's (2005) AUM theory. Their approach also reflects Deardorff's (2006) emphasis on adaptability and reciprocal understanding as key components of intercultural competence. Furthermore, by creating opportunities for dialogue and cultural exchange, monks enhanced deeper engagement and mutual respect, effectively aligning with Byram's Critical Cultural Awareness competency.

In summary, these findings underscore the unique intercultural challenges monks face in religious contexts, where conveying abstract spiritual principles requires both linguistic precision and cultural sensitivity. The monks' ability to adapt their communication while maintaining the integrity of Buddhist teachings highlights the practical application of Byram's ICC model in spiritual and educational settings. Furthermore, the developmental nature of their intercultural competence reinforces the idea that such skills are cultivated over time through practice and reflection, as emphasized by Deardorff (2006).

6. Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of 30 Thai Buddhist monks from five temples in Chiang Mai. While this sample provided valuable insights into intercultural communication practices in a monastic setting, it may not fully represent the experiences of monks in other regions of Thailand or in different Buddhist traditions. Future studies could expand the sample to include monks from various provinces or international Buddhist communities to enhance generalizability.

Second, the study was conducted in temple settings where monks regularly interact with foreign visitors. This context may have influenced the findings, as monks in more isolated or traditional temples might have different experiences with intercultural communication. Additionally, since the data collection relied on self-reported experiences through questionnaires and interviews, there is the possibility of response bias, where participants may have provided socially desirable answers rather than fully candid reflections.

Finally, while the qualitative content analysis provided rich insights into the monks' communication strategies, the interpretation of interview data remains inherently subjective. Although efforts were made to ensure reliability through systematic coding and thematic analysis, the findings may still be influenced by researcher bias. Future research could incorporate additional methods, such as direct observation of monk-visitor interactions or experimental studies, to triangulate data and strengthen the validity of results.

7. Implications for Further Studies

The findings of this study have significant implications for intercultural communication, religious education, and training programs for Buddhist monks. First, the study highlights the importance of structured intercultural communication training for monks, particularly in developing strategies for explaining Buddhist concepts in accessible ways. Religious institutions and educational programs could incorporate training on paraphrasing, culturally sensitive non-verbal communication, and simplified vocabulary to improve monks' engagement with international visitors.

Second, the study underscores the need for adaptive and culturally inclusive teaching methods in religious contexts. Monks who interact with international audiences would benefit from workshops that enhance intercultural awareness and linguistic adaptability, ensuring that Buddhist teachings are conveyed effectively across cultural boundaries. This aligns with broader intercultural communication efforts in global religious and educational exchanges.

Lastly, the study's insights contribute to policy discussions on the role of Buddhist institutions in promoting global engagement. Given the increasing number of international visitors to Thai temples, policymakers may consider initiatives to support monks in developing intercultural competencies, such as offering language training or cross-cultural immersion programs. These initiatives could enhance both the effectiveness of religious tourism and the monks' ability to serve as cultural ambassadors for Thai Buddhism.

By acknowledging the limitations above and drawing clear connections to practical implications, this study provides a foundation for future research and policy initiatives aimed at strengthening intercultural communication in religious settings.

8. Conclusion

This study explored the intercultural communication challenges and strategies of Thai Buddhist monks when engaging with foreign audiences, applying Byram's ICC model as a theoretical framework. The findings revealed four key challenges: Cognitive, Behavioral, Affective, and Developmental challenges. Cognitive challenges, particularly difficulties in translating complex Buddhist concepts into English, were the most significant, highlighting the need for linguistic and cultural adaptation. Behavioral challenges stemmed from differences in non-verbal communication styles, while affective challenges involved emotional and attitudinal barriers in cross-cultural interactions. The emergent theme of Developmental challenges underscored the gradual improvement of monks' intercultural competence through experience and practice.

To overcome these challenges, monks employed strategies aligned with Byram's ICC model, including simplifying technical terminology, using culturally relevant examples, and embracing critical cultural awareness. By raising open-mindedness, empathy, and adaptability, monks effectively bridged linguistic and cultural gaps, making Buddhist teachings more accessible to international audiences. These strategies not only facilitated meaningful intercultural dialogue but also demonstrated monks' ability to function as cultural mediators, helping visitors engage with Buddhist principles in a relatable way.

The study's findings have broader implications for religious education, intercultural training, and global religious engagement. Training programs for monks should integrate structured intercultural communication techniques, including paraphrasing, non-verbal communication strategies, and audience-centered teaching methods. Additionally, Buddhist institutions could benefit from language training programs and peer knowledge-sharing initiatives to further strengthen monks' communication skills. Given the increasing number of foreign visitors to Thai temples, this study also suggests that policymakers support intercultural competence development to enhance Thailand's religious tourism and international engagement.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of intercultural competence in religious contexts, demonstrating that effective communication extends beyond language proficiency to include cultural awareness, adaptability, and mutual respect. By examining the unique experiences of Thai Buddhist monks, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on intercultural communication in religious and educational settings. Future research could expand on these findings by incorporating larger sample sizes, observational methods, and cross-cultural comparisons to deepen the understanding of how religious figures manage intercultural communication worldwide.

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Authors' contributions

Surakiart Boonmatun was responsible for the study design, data collection, and drafting of the manuscript. **Rutthaphak Huttayavilaiphon** revised the manuscript and provided critical feedback on the analysis and interpretation of the findings. Both authors contributed to the final version of the manuscript, read, and approved it. There are no special agreements regarding authorship, and contributions were made in accordance with standard academic authorship criteria.

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Obtained.

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No additional data are available.

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