

International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 583-603, January 2026
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.25.1.28>
Received Oct 10, 2025; Revised Dec 3, 2025; Accepted Dec 20, 2025

Language, Power, and Dialogue: International Chinese Language Education and Civilisation Interplay between China and Thailand

Ling Ding^{ID}, Wannaporn Siripala^{ID},
Premsuree Chaumthong^{ID} and Yudhi Arifani*^{ID}
ISIC Rajamangala University of technology Krungthep
Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract. Studies on the role of language in shaping civilisation suggest a need for more cross-cultural communication. This mixed-method study (quantitative survey and qualitative interview) explored the perceptions, roles, and strategies of International Chinese Language Education (ICLE) in fostering civilisational dialogue and mutual understanding between Thai and Chinese societies. The survey participants were 414 students, 86 teachers, and 122 policymakers from various ICLE programmes in Bangkok. In turn, the interviewed participants were 10 ICLE teachers. The survey and qualitative interview results were analysed using the Mann-Whitney U test and the ICLE framework; the analysis considered predetermined themes identified in the literature review. The findings indicate three primary levels in the perceptions of the three groups of participants (ICLE students, teachers, and policy makers) regarding the impacts of ICLE programmes on cultural, social, political, and educational aspects. The most significant effect of the ICLE programme is on cultural, social, and academic aspects. The three groups of participants perceived that ICLE programmes played a significant role in enhancing cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, personal growth, cultural dialogue, and programme effectiveness. Hands-on field trips and arts-based collaborative learning activities were considered effective strategies to promote mutual understanding and civilisational dialogue in the ICLE programme. Because the findings of this study are drawn from participants' perspectives, future research should examine the effectiveness of various instructional strategies for promoting ICLE programmes.

Keywords: ICLE; civilisation interplay; language; power; dialogue

*Corresponding author: Yudhi Arifani; yudhi.a@mail.rmutk.ac.th

1. Introduction

The focus of research on international Chinese language education (ICLE) often highlights the significant roles of language and culture in promoting civilisational dialogue and mutual partnerships between different communities, specifically in the settings of relations between Thai and Chinese communities. Research initiated by Xiao and Wang (2024) suggests that the ICLE programme could facilitate mutual cultural exchange and reduce issues relating to stereotypes by enabling students to immerse themselves in Chinese culture programmes. Through Chinese language acquisition, Thai students develop a deeper appreciation of the historical and philosophical dimensions of Chinese culture and civilisation, which is vital for strengthening intercultural communication. A study by Xu (2022) focused on the role of ICLE programmes in Thailand's education institutions, as a crucial instrument for supporting bilateral cultural understanding and communication.

The research findings of Xu (2022) suggest that language education can serve as a channel for broadening ties in sociocultural interactions and for enhancing Thai students' cultural ability to engage more effectively with Chinese counterparts; this interaction could contribute to a nuanced appreciation of Chinese cultural traditions and values and strengthen a mutual partnership that transcends mere linguistic and cultural competencies (Lee, 2024; Mouboua et al., 2024). Other factors that affect the impact of language education and cultural understanding are reported by Alam et al. (2023) and Xu (2022), who explored the integration of cultural aspects in the educational curriculum. Xu (2022) highlights the importance of incorporating cultural education in ICLE to ensure that Thai learners acquire what we call linguistic competence, which enhances a deeper understanding of Chinese societal values (Chen et al., 2024).

Research on ICLE reveals substantial gaps that warrant deeper scholarly attention, particularly regarding its capacity to cultivate meaningful cultural understanding and civilisational dialogue among diverse communities. Although several studies highlight the general benefits of intercultural education, far less attention has been devoted to examining how ICLE fosters profound cultural awareness, identity negotiation, and mutual understanding across sociocultural groups (Lee, 2024; Wang, 2024). Much of the literature focuses on observable, short-term interactions, consequently failing to provide comprehensive insight into the long-term developmental effects of ICLE on cultural integration, value transmission, and sustained intercultural engagement (Chen et al., 2024).

Furthermore, comprehensive analyses of the underlying pedagogical and sociocultural mechanisms by which ICLE promotes civilisational dialogue are scarce. Instead, the literature reports on programme outcomes without critically examining the instructional strategies, dialogic practices and intercultural processes that enable the outcomes (Mouboua et al., 2024; Sun, 2023). As a result, crucial elements required to design ICLE initiatives that effectively facilitate dialogue between civilisations remain under-examined.

To address these deficiencies, comparative, cross-cultural investigations are needed to understand how ICLE operates across varying cultural ecologies and how its frameworks can be adapted to different societal contexts. Research could provide a more holistic understanding of the effectiveness of the programme and strengthen its potential to foster global cultural literacy and harmonious civilisational exchange. This study aimed to explore the perceptions, roles, and strategies of ICLE in fostering civilisational dialogue and mutual understanding between Thai and Chinese societies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 ICLE Trends, Objectives, and the Increasing Influence of ICLE Globally and in Thailand

The main objective of the ICLE programme is to foster mutual understanding, reciprocal collaboration and cultural exchange programmes between China and other countries. By promoting Mandarin as a global language of communication, China aims to build stronger economic and diplomatic relations (Iqbal & Masroor, 2023; Min, 2023). This educational programme initiative is part of a broader soft-power strategy to enhance China's global image and promote positive international collaborations.

Another purpose of ICLE is to equip individuals with the cultural competence and linguistic abilities required to engage in global economic relations. Proficiency in Chinese is increasingly viewed as a valuable asset for promoting international business, trade, services, tourism, and diplomacy. As China's global economic influence expands, the need for Chinese-speaking professionals with proficiency in Chinese is increasing, thereby making Chinese language skills a strategic asset for many developing countries (Chen et al., 2024; Ou & Gu, 2021).

In Thailand, the Chinese language education programme has experienced remarkable development, and it reflects the economic and cultural ties of the two countries (Rosyidi & Utomo, 2022; Zeng, 2024). The Thai government and policymakers actively promote the teaching of Mandarin at all levels, from primary school through to university, thereby acknowledging its significance for future economic development. Many Thai students consider the Chinese language programme to be a pathway to job prospects, careers and business ventures with Chinese organisations.

Well-established Chinese-language education institutions, such as Confucius Institutes in Thailand, play a crucial role in expanding the use of Chinese and its cultural traditions, by offering professional language courses, academic exchanges, cultural events and education scholarships for Thai students to pursue studies in China. The exponential increase in tourism, trade, business and Thai-Chinese joint ventures fuels demand for Mandarin language skills by the Thai job market further.

The incorporation of the Chinese language education programme in the Thai education and national curriculum has become one of the strategic moves to foster mutual partnerships and provide a qualified workforce for a future in which

China plays a central role in the development of the regional economy (Iqbal & Masroor, 2023). Several Thai educational institutions have established mutual collaborations with Chinese organisations and institutions to offer joint and dual-degree programmes and provide student-exchange opportunities, thereby promoting academic partnerships.

Additionally, Chinese language education programmes in Thailand are not limited to higher education but also extend to lower levels of education (Min, 2023; Zeng, 2024). Education at the levels of primary and secondary schools includes Mandarin language instruction, thereby making it one of the most widely taught foreign languages in many Thai schools. This atmosphere helps build a strong foundation for Thai students to achieve higher levels of Chinese language proficiency as they progress in their formal education.

While the rapid growth of Chinese-language education programmes in Thailand offers numerous benefits, it also poses several challenges. One significant obstacle is the need for qualified professional teachers of both Chinese and Thai (bilingual teachers) who can effectively address linguistic proficiency and cultural gaps (Mouboua et al., 2024; Sun, 2023). Another challenge is ensuring that Chinese language education programmes are openly accessible to diverse students from various socioeconomic backgrounds in Thailand. Despite these barriers, the opportunities for forging mutual bilateral collaborations, economic partnerships, and cultural exchange programmes through Chinese language education remain massive (Wang, 2024).

Thailand's strategic location in Southeast Asia and its strong commitment to strengthening language proficiency position it as a leading actor in the regional and national dissemination of Mandarin education in Thailand. The prospects of Chinese language education programmes in Thailand in the future are promising, and are driven by continued investments in education, job markets, infrastructure and resources. China's global influence is growing rapidly, and the role of Mandarin as a global language is likely to increase concurrently (Chen, 2024; Lee, 2024). Leveraging Mandarin through sustained educational initiatives is important for preparing its millennial citizens to obtain jobs in the future with employers that consider Chinese language and cultural competence to be crucial assets in international mutual partnerships.

2.2 Relevant Studies

Research on ICLE in relation to civilisational dialogue in the Thai educational context remains markedly underexplored. Scholarship has predominantly examined the global expansion and strategic use of Chinese language education, and limited attention has been given to the way ICLE programmes foster civilisational dialogue between China and Thailand.

A study by Sablina et al. (2018) explored the expectations, academic experiences, and long-term plans of Chinese international students in a joint Sino-Russian university programme. By employing a qualitative case study design, the research relied on in-depth semi-structured interviews and institutional document analysis

to illuminate how participants navigated academic challenges, adjusted their aspirations, and interpreted the value of a dual-degree pathway. The findings reveal that students generally entered the programme with high academic expectations and strong professional ambitions; however, many also expressed uncertainty regarding post-graduation trajectories, which reflect the structural and cultural complexities of pursuing careers across two national contexts (Ma & Zhao, 2018).

While a study by Sablina et al. (2018) offers important insights into cross-border higher education and student mobility, its focus was primarily individual and developmental, and centred on academic decision-making, career planning, and institutional programme management. Critically, it does not address the broader sociopolitical dynamics of language, power and civilisational dialogue, nor did it examine how international education programmes function as instruments of cultural diplomacy. It marks a significant departure from the concerns of the present study, which investigated how ICLE programmes shape civilisational interplay between China and Thailand, including the ideological, cultural and discursive processes embedded in language education. Whereas the work of Sablina et al. situates learning in students' micro-level experiences, the current research foregrounds the macro-level implications of ICLE, specifically, how language education contributes to negotiating power relations, fostering intercultural dialogue and advancing China's civilisational engagement strategies in the Thai context.

Mouboua et al. (2024) and Ou and Gu (2021) underscore the centrality of language as a catalyst for intercultural understanding and identity negotiation in increasingly globalised educational spaces. Mouboua et al. demonstrate that multilingual approaches in global citizenship education strengthen learners' intercultural competence by fostering empathy, tolerance and mutual recognition across cultural boundaries. Ou and Gu reveal how Chinese students in a transnational university context constructed hybrid identities through language socialisation processes that mediate belonging, cultural adjustment and communicative agency. Together, these studies show that language learning functions not merely as a communicative tool but as a transformative medium through which individuals navigate power, identity and cultural meaning.

However, despite their valuable insights, both studies primarily address *individual-level* intercultural experiences rather than examining *civilisational-level* dialogue shaped by state-led educational programmes. Moreover, they did not explore how ICLE operates as an instrument of cultural diplomacy or soft power in specific bilateral relationships. In contrast, the present study moves beyond interpersonal and identity-focused perspectives by analysing how ICLE shapes the broader civilisational interplay between China and Thailand. By foregrounding the nexus of language, power and civilisational dialogue, this study fills a conceptual and contextual gap left by previous research. It contributes to a macro-level understanding of the cultural and geopolitical significance of ICLE.

In an attempt to understand how geopolitical shifts shape perceptions of Chinese language learners in the British educational context, which, in turn, influences language policy and instructional practices, Lee (2024) conducted a qualitative inquiry into how geopolitical changes shape classroom practices. By drawing on interviews with teachers and policymakers, policy document analysis, curriculum review and media discourse, Lee demonstrates that geopolitical reconfigurations elevated the status of and interest and institutional investment in Chinese language education in Britain (Xie, 2023; Mok et al., 2024). The thematic analysis identified changing language hierarchies, the impact of geopolitical tensions on policy formation, and their implications for classroom practice (Suryanti et al., 2020; Wang, 2024). However, while Lee's study offers valuable insights into the intersection of geopolitics and language policy, its focus on the British context limits its applicability to Asian regions that have different historical, cultural and geopolitical dynamics.

Lee's study did not examine how ICLE operates as a vehicle for *civilisational dialogue*, nor does it address how power, identity and intercultural reciprocity unfold between China and other culturally embedded societies. This gap underscores the need for research, such as the current study, to explore ICLE in Thailand's culturally interconnected and historically layered context. By shifting the analytical lens from geopolitical influence to *civilisational interplay*, the present study contributes a more nuanced understanding of how language education mediates mutual cultural recognition, soft-power negotiation and dialogic engagement between China and Thailand (Hou, 2024).

2.3 Research Questions

From the gaps identified above, the research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of Thai students, educators and policymakers regarding the way participation in ICLE influences cultural, social and political outcomes?
2. What are the perceptions of Thai students, educators and policymakers regarding the role of ICLE in fostering civilisational dialogue and mutual understanding between Thai and Chinese societies?
3. What strategies can be applied to optimise ICLE programmes and to enhance their role in promoting mutual understanding and civilisational dialogue in Thailand?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to comprehensively explore how ICLE fosters civilisational dialogue and mutual understanding between Thai and Chinese communities. This design involved two distinct and interconnected phases: an initial quantitative survey, followed by qualitative interviews; the findings from the first phase guided the development of the interviews. The structure aligns with the model proposed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2023), who explain that this approach is suitable when researchers

seek to explain relationships revealed in quantitative data through in-depth qualitative exploration.

The rationale for selecting this design lies in the complex, layered nature of the research topic, which is the intersection of language education, cultural exchange, soft-power diplomacy and civilisational identity. The quantitative method alone was insufficient to capture the nuances of human experience, while qualitative methods alone may limit generalisability. By starting with a broad survey of Thai students' perceptions, the study established general patterns regarding ICLE's cultural and educational impact. These results then informed and refined the qualitative phase, which involved semi-structured interviews with Thai educators, policymakers and selected students to explore in depth the mechanisms and strategies underlying ICLE implementation.

3.2 Research Sample

Because of logistical limitations and institutional scheduling constraints, not all 16 universities in Thailand that were enrolled with the ICLE programme were available or willing to participate in the study. Therefore, purposive sampling was used to select institutions located in Bangkok. The institutions were chosen for reasons of accessibility and availability. This approach aligns with the qualitative design of the study and resource limitations. The sample involved 414 Thai students (40% of the total population 1 035 students) from Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Dhurakij Pundit University, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University and Phranakhon Rajabhat University, 198 teachers, and 122 policymakers. For the qualitative component (Research Question 3), 10 ICLE teachers and 10 policymakers were interviewed. They were selected according to their seniority (at least 10 years of ICLE teaching experience) and availability.

3.3 Instrument

This study was designed to address the three main research objectives (see Section 3). In line with these purposes, the research employed a mixed-method approach that used structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview protocols to gather data.

Two structured questionnaires were developed and administered to Thai students, teachers and policymakers. The first questionnaire aimed to assess the role of ICLE in fostering civilisational dialogue and mutual understanding. It consisted of 18 Likert-scale items organised into six dimensions: cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, stereotypes and prejudice, cultural dialogue, personal growth, and programme effectiveness. The second questionnaire focused on evaluating the broader impact of ICLE across cultural, social, political and educational domains. This instrument contained 20 Likert-scale items organised into four dimensions: cultural, social, political, and educational impacts (Zhang et al., 2022).

To complement the quantitative data, two semi-structured interview protocols were used for the qualitative phase. The interview protocol focused on the optimisation strategies of ICLE programmes. It included themes such as

integrating Thai local wisdom, fostering inclusivity, strengthening institutional partnerships, and the role of digital technology in facilitating intercultural dialogue. A sample question is: How can ICLE programmes integrate Thai cultural values to enrich civilisational dialogue with Chinese communities? These instruments were carefully designed to align with the study objectives and to facilitate triangulation between quantitative patterns and qualitative insights (Zhang et al., 2022).

4. Data Collection

The data collection involved two stages: a quantitative survey and qualitative data collection. Quantitative survey data were collected through questionnaires that related to the first and second research questions and investigated study participants' perceptions of the impacts of the ICLE programme on balancing ICLE with cultural understanding and on cultural, social and political impacts.

First, an email informed five universities in Thailand that were enrolled in the ICLE programme about the intention to undertake this study. After obtaining approval from the research centres at each university, the researcher sent online questionnaires via university email. The 414 students and 198 teachers in the ICLE programme, and 122 policymakers completed the questionnaire. The respondents completed the survey study voluntarily; they remained anonymous and the questionnaire results were kept confidential and would not influence their academic performance. All questions were translated into the Thai language to avoid biased interpretation and to improve understandability.

To collect data via interviews, in response to the third research question, the researcher visited five universities and interviewed 10 ICLE teachers and 10 policymakers on the impact of ICLE and its optimisation efforts. The interviewed participants were selected on the basis of teaching experience, familiarity with ICLE and engagement in Chinese cultural programmes, both in and out of university. In this case, the researcher visited each university and interviewed two ICLE teachers and policymakers at each university. The interviews lasted 30–60 minutes per participant. Participants' identities were kept confidential and data were used solely for research purposes.

4.1 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were collected to answer the first and second research questions, which explored perceptions of Thai students, teachers and policymakers regarding the roles and impacts of ICLE programmes. The analysis employed descriptive statistical techniques, including the measures of mean and standard deviation, to summarise participants' responses across different dimensions of the questionnaires. In addition, a Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare perception differences across participant groups (students, teachers, and policymakers) from various educational institutions. This non-parametric test was selected because of the ordinal nature of Likert-scale data and the potential non-normality of the distribution, thereby ensuring a more accurate assessment of intergroup differences.

Qualitative data were used to answer the third research question, which explored strategies to optimise the role of ICLE in civilisational dialogue. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed with thematic analysis according to the six-phase model (Creswell & Creswell, 2018): 1) Becoming familiar with the data; 2) Generating initial codes; 3) Searching for themes; 4) Reviewing themes; 5) Defining and naming themes; and 6) Producing the report. This thematic analysis approach ensured a systematic and rigorous interpretation of the textual data by allowing themes to emerge inductively from participants' narratives.

In addition, the qualitative data analysis incorporated coding procedures drawn from grounded theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), particularly in the form of open coding, axial coding and selective coding, to deepen conceptual understanding: These combined coding strategies allowed the researcher to abstract participants' experiences into broader themes: 1) ICLE programme priorities and values; 2) Incorporation of local Thai wisdom; 3) The role of local cultural communities; and 4) Effective strategies for civilisational dialogue.

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of Thai students, educators and policymakers regarding the way participation in ICLE influences cultural, social and political outcomes?

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test are presented in Table 1 for a straightforward interpretation of the analysis. The number of students taking the ICLE course at the 16 universities was 414, there were 198 teachers, and 122 policymakers. The present study applied the following criteria to the data: a mean score above 4.00 was classified as the highest level of perception; mean scores of 3.50 to 3.99 were classified as moderate, and scores below 3.49 were categorised as low levels of perception. The questionnaires for the three groups of participants were essentially the same and derived from the same theoretical framework. The results of the survey analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Relevance of objectives of teaching subjects at the university

Category	ICLE participants	N	M	SD	Mann-Whitney U test	P
Cultural impacts						
The ICLE programme has influenced appreciation for Chinese culture and the education of Chinese culture	Students	414	4.97	0.91	2 652.0	0.215
	Teachers	198	4.95	0.89		
	Policymakers	122	4.92	0.68		
The ICLE programme has contributed to preserving and promoting Thai cultural identity alongside Chinese cultural education	Students	414	4.96	0.89	1 556.0	0.350
	Teachers	198	4.96	0.89		
	Policymakers	122	4.70	0.66		
The ICLE programme has developed stronger intercultural competence	Students	414	4.95	0.91	2 473.0	0.216
	Teachers	198	4.95	0.91		
	Policymakers	122	4.72	0.68		
The ICLE programme has provided sufficient opportunities for cultural exchanges between Thai and Chinese students	Students	414	4.88	0.90	3 244.5	0.176
	Teachers	198	4.78	0.78		
	Policymakers	122	4.70	0.62		
The ICLE programme has supported cultural content and understanding	Students	414	4.80	0.90	3 230.0	0.194
	Teachers	198	4.79	0.78		
	Policymakers	122	4.79	0.77		
Social impacts						
The ICLE programme has strengthened the engagement between the Thai and Chinese communities	Students	414	4.80	0.72	2 282.0	0.321
	Teachers	198	4.83	0.88		
	Policymakers	122	4.70	0.61		
The ICLE programme has fostered mutual respect between Thai and Chinese societies	Students	414	4.75	1.91	2 461.0	0.211
	Teachers	198	4.70	0.84		
	Policymakers	122	4.71	1.61		
The ICLE programme has improved social skills through interaction with Chinese society	Students	414	4.77	0.81	2 169.0	0.905
	Teachers	198	4.70	0.84		
	Policymakers	122	4.70	0.84		
The ICLE programme has supported networking opportunities with Chinese counterparts	Students	414	4.78	0.80	1 364.0	0.512
	Teachers	198	4.72	0.78		
	Policymakers	122	4.72	0.86		
The ICLE programme has positively influenced local communities' and families' perceptions of Chinese culture	Students	414	4.78	0.80	3 350.0	0.909
	Teachers	198	4.72	0.78		
	Policymakers	122	4.72	0.86		

Category	ICLE participants	N	M	SD	Mann-Whitney U test	P
Political impacts						
The ICLE programme has significantly influenced Thai educational policy concerning language and cultural education	Students	414	2.45	1.20	2 672.0	0.215
	Teachers	198	2.24	1.39		
	Policymakers	122	2.14	0.67		
The ICLE programme has strengthened diplomatic and political relations between Thailand and China	Students	414	2.50	1.17	2 551.0	0.326
	Teachers	198	2.24	1.39		
	Policymakers	122	2.14	0.67		
The ICLE programme has increased Thai students' engagement in political and civic matters connected to China	Students	414	2.10	1.82	3 415.0	0.809
	Teachers	198	2.17	1.52		
	Policymakers	122	2.14	0.67		
The ICLE programme has obtained positive support from both Thai policymakers and government institutions	Students	414	2.10	1.82	3 436.5	0.524
	Teachers	198	2.17	1.52		
	Policymakers	122	2.14	0.67		
The visions of the ICLE programme already align with the broader Thai educational and cultural policies	Students	414	2.45	1.20	2 605.0	0.507
	Teachers	198	2.24	1.39		
	Policymakers	122	2.14	0.67		
Educational impacts						
The ICLE programme has significantly improved Thai students' proficiency in Chinese	Students	414	4.90	0.87	2 010.0	0.901
	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		
	Policymakers	122	4.87	0.87		
The ICLE programme has facilitated professional development for Thai teachers teaching the Chinese language and culture	Students	414	4.90	0.81	2 469.0	0.605
	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		
	Policymakers	122	4.89	0.81		
The ICLE curriculum is well incorporated into the Thai educational system	Students	414	4.88	0.81	1 767.0	0.312
	Teachers	198	4.86	0.81		
	Policymakers	122	4.86	0.81		
The ICLE programme has motivated Thai students to learn about the Chinese language and culture	Students	414	4.66	0.53	1 381.0	0.341
	Teachers	198	4.87	0.70		
	Policymakers	122	4.86	0.81		
	Students	414	4.66	0.53	2 451.0	0.411
	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		

Category	ICLE participants	N	M	SD	Mann-Whitney U test	P
The ICLE programme has improved the overall Thai educational outcomes	Policymakers	122	4.66	0.53		

The analysis indicates three levels of perception of the three groups of participants (ICLE students, teachers, and policymakers) regarding the impacts of ICLE programmes on four aspects (cultural, social, political and educational). From the four determined aspects, three categories belonged to the highest level of perceptions. The three groups of participants perceived that ICLE programmes had a high level of impact on cultural, social, and educational aspects. Those three categories had mean scores above 4.75, which indicate a high level of perception.

5.2 Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of Thai students, educators and policymakers regarding the role of ICLE in fostering civilisational dialogue and mutual understanding between Thai and Chinese societies?

The results of the survey analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The role of ICLE in fostering civilisational dialogue and mutual understanding between Thai and Chinese societies

Category	ICLE participants	N	M	SD	Mann-Whitney U test	P
Cultural awareness						
The ICLE programme has enhanced my understanding of the cultural similarities and differences between Thai and Chinese cultures	Students	414	4.95	0.91	2 451.0	0.215
	Teachers	198	4.97	0.89		
	Policymakers	122	4.95	0.68		
The ICLE programme has improved my understanding of Chinese culture, its similarities and differences from the Thai culture	Students	414	4.92	0.69	1 432.0	0.650
	Teachers	198	4.97	0.79		
	Policymakers	122	4.90	0.76		
The ICLE programme has fostered my awareness of the historical and shared heritage connections between Thai and Chinese civilisations	Students	414	4.92	0.90	2 354.0	0.316
	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		
	Policymakers	122	4.72	0.68		
Cross-cultural communication						
The ICLE programme has enhanced my communicative competence with Chinese people and people from different cultures	Students	414	4.88	0.90	5 141.0	0.376
	Teachers	198	4.78	0.78		
	Policymakers	122	4.70	0.62		
	Students	414	4.90	0.88	1 324.0	0.394

Category	ICLE participants	N	M	SD	Mann-Whitney U test	P
The ICLE programme has improved my Chinese language proficiency	Teachers	198	4.89	0.85		
	Policymakers	122	4.89	0.85		
The ICLE programme has increased my understanding of non-verbal communication cues in Chinese and Thai contexts.	Students	414	4.80	0.90	3 230.0	0.194
	Teachers	198	4.79	0.78		
	Policymakers	122	4.79	0.77		
Stereotypes and prejudices						
The ICLE programme has helped me challenge and change stereotypical views about Chinese culture	Students	414	2.10	1.82	3 415.0	0.809
	Teachers	198	2.17	1.52		
	Policymakers	122	2.14	0.67		
The ICLE programme has increased awareness of Chinese cultural biases	Students	414	2.50	1.17	3 465.0	0.611
	Teachers	198	2.24	1.39		
	Policymakers	122	2.14	0.67		
Cultural dialogues						
The ICLE programme encouraged me to engage in cultural dialogues with Chinese people and others from diverse cultural backgrounds	Students	414	4.75	0.90	2 557.0	0.512
	Teachers	198	4.74	0.89		
	Policymakers	122	4.74	0.89		
The ICLE programme makes me comfortable discussing cultural differences between Chinese and Thai cultures	Students	414	4.90	0.87	2 380.0	0.241
	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		
	Policymakers	122	4.87	0.87		
The ICLE programme has equipped me with the skills and abilities to engage in conversations about intercultural topics	Students	414	4.90	0.81	2 451.0	0.411
	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		
	Policymakers	122	4.89	0.81		
Personal growth						
The ICLE programme has positively contributed to my personal and professional development	Students	414	4.66	0.53	2 466.0	0.324
	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		
	Policymakers	122	4.66	0.53		
The ICLE programme makes me open-minded towards other cultures	Students	414	4.75	0.90	4 705.0	0.507
	Teachers	198	4.74	0.89		
	Policymakers	122	4.74	0.89		
The ICLE programme has prompted me to reflect on my cultural identity	Students	414	4.90	0.87	2 010.0	0.901
	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		
	Policy makers	122	4.87	0.87		
	Students	414	4.90	0.81	2 469.0	0.605

Category	ICLE participants	N	M	SD	Mann-Whitney U test	P
The ICLE programme has broadened my global horizon and perspective on culture	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		
	Policymakers	122	4.89	0.81		
Programme effectiveness						
The ICLE programme has significantly influenced the incorporation of Thai and Chinese cultural elements in daily and academic interactions	Students	414	4.88	0.81	1 767.0	0.312
	Teachers	198	4.86	0.81		
	Policymakers	122	4.86	0.81		
The ICLE programme has fostered a strong sensitivity to mutual and collaborative respect between Thai and Chinese perspectives	Students	414	4.66	0.53	1 381.0	0.341
	Teachers	198	4.87	0.70		
	Policymakers	122	4.86	0.81		
The ICLE programme has provided effective opportunities for meaningful dialogue between Thai and Chinese cultures, beliefs, values and traditions	Students	414	4.66	0.53	2 451.0	0.411
	Teachers	198	4.90	0.87		
	Policymakers	122	4.66	0.53		

The analysis indicates that, regarding the roles of ICLE programmes in enhancing civilisational dialogue and mutual understanding between Thai and Chinese societies, the perceptions for five of the six categories (cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, personal growth, cultural dialogue, and programme effectiveness) were at the highest level for the three groups of participants (ICLE students, teachers, and policymakers). However, the three groups of participants perceived that the implementation of ICLE had little effect on reducing stereotypes and prejudices.

5.3 Research Question 3): What strategies can be applied to optimise ICLE programmes and to enhance their role in promoting mutual understanding and civilisational dialogue in Thailand?

Regarding the optimisation of the ICLE programme, responses to the first interview question indicate that the programme in Thailand could effectively integrate local wisdom to foster civilisational dialogue with Chinese communities by building on the shared cultural traditions and historical values of both countries. One way to implement this optimisation strategy could be to highlight reciprocal philosophical influences, such as the integration of Buddhist philosophy, which plays a significant role in Thai and Chinese communities.

The course programmes could focus on shared principles such as mindfulness, compassion and harmony, thereby scaffolding students' appreciation of the philosophical bridges between the two cultures. Additionally, respect for elders and their traditions and values, which is deeply embedded in both Thai and Chinese languages and customs, could serve as a foundation for elaborating on

how cultural values and traditions shape interpersonal communication in mutual relationships. The following quotes indicate participants' perspectives:

"To facilitate civilisational dialogue, ICLE programmes need a curriculum that goes beyond linguistic skills and integrate comparative cultural modules that help Thai students understand how different civilisations interpret shared values (Thai Language Teacher)."

"Students need more opportunities to practice critical dialogue – how to ask questions, negotiate meaning, and respond to cultural issues. ICLE can optimise its role by embedding these dialogic competencies into classroom learning activities (Intercultural Communication Lecturer)."

"The implementation of ICLE programmes should involve with local cultural institutions and policymakers. When students engage with museums, embassies and cultural centres, they develop a deeper understanding of civilisational narratives that textbooks alone cannot provide (University ICLE Coordinator)."

"I feel the programme would be more meaningful if we had more real interactions with international students. Experiential exchanges help us understand cultural differences in a respectful way, not just memorise them (Undergraduate ICLE Student)."

"I feel unhappy with limited cultural activities because we only use English. If ICLE programmes included multilingual materials, it would show how civilisations express ideas differently and help us communicate more openly (International Programme Student)."

"For ICLE programmes to really support civilisational dialogue, we need a safe space where we can have field trips and collaborative programmes to learn real understanding (Thai ICLE Student)."

Hands-on activities, field trips and collaborative programmes, such as culinary practices and artistic exchanges, could offer engaging ways to incorporate local traditions and wisdom. Cooking lessons could involve students in preparing Thai and Chinese dishes simultaneously; the activity could emphasise shared ingredients such as Thai rice and Chinese tea while exploring the cultural importance of these staples. Art models of workshops might combine Thai silk weaving with traditional mural painting, or Chinese calligraphy or paper-cutting, to showcase the creative expressions of both traditions.

These activities could enhance a deeper appreciation and understanding of the artistry and craftsmanship inherent in the two countries' traditions. The use of technology and multimedia can enrich ICLE programmes further by showcasing diverse cultural perspectives. For instance, digital storytelling projects that task students with creating videos or digital presentations that compare cultural practices, such as Chinese calligraphy and Thai traditional painting, have been widely successful. By integrating technology, these programmes encourage students to explore and present their cultural identities while learning about others, thereby making the learning process more interactive and engaging.

6. Discussion

The first discussion dealt with the highest-level perceptions participants had regarding the impacts of the ICLE programme on cultural aspects that promoted Chinese cultural values, traditions and heritage (Ribeiro, 2016). Teachers reported that the ICLE programme integrated a wide range of cultural traditions, including Chinese festivals, calligraphy, traditional music and culinary arts, thereby making it an effective gateway to understanding Chinese culture. By integrating these crucial aspects into the language education curriculum, the programme extended beyond language instruction, to provide an immersive cultural experience that resonated deeply with participants (Humairoh, 2023; Zhan, 2024).

From the students' perspectives, the Chinese language education programme naturally opened doors to a deeper understanding of Chinese culture. Many students reported that their competence in interacting with the media, Chinese literature and social practices enhanced their appreciation of the nuances of the Chinese community (Chen et al., 2024). Exposure to cultural practices through cultural exchange programmes, festivals, cultural workshops and classroom instruction promoted a sense of mutual understanding of Chinese traditions. This hands-on engagement activity made cultural elements more concrete and impactful for students, and solidified the impact of the ICLE programme on cultural communication (Chen et al., 2024; Suryanti et al., 2020; Zheng & Liu, 2024).

According to the perspectives of policymakers, the ICLE programme offered an important tool for enhancing cultural awareness, diplomacy and mutual understanding between the two communities. They pointed out that, by showcasing the rich values of Chinese traditional culture, the programme strengthened cultural bonds and created a linkage between China and other nations. The programme of cultural exchange not only boosted global awareness of Chinese cultural traditions but also promoted a sense of mutual respect and cultural appreciation for the two countries. Consequently, the policymakers viewed the ICLE programme as a highly effective tool for advancing cultural objectives, thereby making it the most influential initiative in terms of impact on cross-cultural understanding and collaboration (Hou, 2024; Mok et al., 2024; Ou & Gu, 2021).

The ICLE programme fostered civilisational dialogue and mutual understanding between Thai and Chinese societies. The perceptions of the three groups of participants regarding the roles of the ICLE programme in enhancing communicative competence with Chinese and other people of different cultures, Chinese language proficiency, and understanding of non-verbal communication cues of Chinese and Thai contexts, were at a high level. The findings indicate that the three groups of participants perceived their ideas as being at the lowest level of perception. Conversely, regarding perceptions of the three groups of participants that were at low levels, they perceived that the ICLE programme had little influence on reducing stereotypical views about Chinese culture and on reducing cultural biases relating to Chinese culture (Sablina et al., 2018; Xiao & Tian, 2024).

Beyond language acquisition, the curriculum integrated cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions and context-specific communication styles, thereby enabling participants to navigate cultural differences effectively and fostering mutual understanding (Hou, 2024; Mok et al., 2024; Ou & Gu, 2021). Students emphasised that learning Chinese through the programme enabled them to access and appreciate the subtleties of Chinese culture, which is crucial for authentic cross-cultural interactions. Many students shared experiences of engaging in conversations, debates, and cultural exchanges with Chinese peers, and gaining insights into different perspectives and ways of thinking. These interactions not only enhanced their language skills but also encouraged open-mindedness and empathy – key components of effective cross-cultural communication (Jiang, 2024; Zhan, 2024).

Participants – teachers, students, and policymakers – perceived the ICLE programme as having the most significant impact on personal growth, because of its ability to build essential skills and broaden individual perspectives. Teachers observed that learning Chinese fostered discipline, perseverance and cognitive development in students. The complexity of the language, including its tones, characters and grammar, challenges learners to think critically and develop problem-solving abilities, to the benefit of their personal and academic growth (Xiao & Tian, 2024). However, teachers reported that the programme focus on showcasing traditional Chinese culture often emphasised an idealised or limited view of China, which may lead participants to form one-dimensional perceptions. This selective presentation of culture, while intended to promote appreciation, can, unintentionally, perpetuate stereotypes by failing to adequately address the diversity and complexities of modern Chinese society (Sun, 2023).

Teachers and policymakers explained that integrating Thai cultural values, traditions and societal norms into the ICLE curriculum could create a sense of harmony and mutual appreciation between the two parties. The example of linking Chinese cultural festivals and traditions with similar Thai practices could foster more profound awareness of shared cultural traditions. Students expressed a strong preference for discussing lessons that compare Chinese and Thai traditional cultural elements, and this model could encourage students to reflect on their own cultural heritage while learning about Chinese cultural traditions (Zhan, 2024).

The use of digital platforms can enhance ICLE programmes by supporting virtual cultural exchanges among Thai and Chinese students. Teachers asserted that implementing virtual exchange programmes, virtual forums and collaborative projects could enable students from the two countries to engage in real-time discussions about their respective cultures. This approach would underscore the value of language in connecting civilisations. Philosophical traditions, such as Confucianism and Buddhism, have historical connections between China and Thailand (Zheng & Liu, 2024). Policymakers recommended incorporating lessons that explore shared philosophical values, such as harmony, respect and compassion, to deepen participants' appreciation for the ethical and spiritual dimensions of both cultures, thereby fostering a sense of unity.

The findings on the importance of regular feedback by students and teachers to guide improvements to the ICLE programme align with other research that emphasises the critical role of stakeholder input in enhancing educational outcomes. Studies highlight that incorporating feedback from students and educators ensures that programmes remain responsive to participants' needs and adapt to diverse cultural, linguistic and pedagogical contexts (Xiao & Tian, 2024). By validating the role of feedback in maintaining relevance and effectiveness, these findings reinforce the body of research that advocates for participatory, iterative programme development in international education. This approach ensures that ICLE programmes remain adaptable and aligned with evolving education and cultural demands (Li et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2024).

Finally, elevating Thailand's multicultural identity as an essential foundation for the ICLE programmes can enhance the effectiveness of the programme. Thailand's historical journey of coexistence between various ethnic and cultural groups serves as a model for enhancing civilisational dialogue. By aligning the ICLE programme initiative with Thailand's cultural tradition of multicultural balance, the programme can have a long-term impact. Studies have demonstrated that culturally diverse contexts and environments promote the need for exposure to new cultural experiences and involve students drawing on their own experiences with cultural variation to engage in cross-cultural exchanges (Budianto et al., 2023; Wang, 2024; Xiao & Tian, 2024).

Thailand's multicultural heritage often promotes this effective strategy by empowering ICLE programmes to incorporate Thai cultural traditions, such as mutual respect and harmony, while fostering meaningful relations with Chinese culture. This path of new research findings alongside established research underscores the potential of Thailand's multicultural identity to serve as a different model for implementing context-sensitive programmes for ICLE (Li et al., 2024; Zhang, 2020).

7. Conclusion

The findings indicate that the perceptions of the three groups of participants (ICLE students, teachers, and policy makers) regarding the impacts of ICLE programmes on cultural, social, political, and educational aspects fell on three primary levels. The most significant impact of the ICLE programme was on cultural, social, and educational aspects, while their perception was that it had the least impact the political aspect. The three groups of participants relied heavily on language proficiency and cultural competencies to navigate complex intercultural interactions, to ensure effective communication and mutual understanding.

For five of the six of the determined categories - enhancing cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, personal growth, cultural dialogue, and programme effectiveness - perceptions of the three groups of participants regarding effectiveness were at the highest level. Optimising the ICLE programmes in Thailand to enhance civilisational dialogue requires a comprehensive strategy that emphasises inclusivity, mutual partnership and cultural awareness. By addressing the challenges identified in the findings

reported in the literature and using suggested strategies, the ICLE programmes can serve as valuable tools for fostering reciprocal understanding and strengthening connections between civilisations.

8. Conflict of Interest

The authors report no potential conflicts of interest related to this article's research, authorship, or publication.

9. References

- Alam, M. J., Ahsan, A. H. M., & Ogawa, K. (2023). Cultural influence in curriculum remodeling of early childhood education in Bangladesh: an empirical study. *Discover Education*, 2(1), 2–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-023-00063-w>
- Budianto, L., Arifani, Y., Wardhono, A., & Poedjiastutie, D. (2023). The TPACK level of in-service EFL teacher online professional training: The perspectives of teachers, students, and trainers. *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, 39(2), 87–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21532974.2023.2167024>
- Chen, Z., Hassan, A., & Ghazali, S. S. (2024). The role of community education in China in the transmission of traditional culture: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences*, 14(9). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v14-i9/22601>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2023). Revisiting mixed methods research designs twenty years later. In C. N. Poth (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of mixed methods research design* (pp. 21–36). SAGE Publications.
- Hou, M. (2024). Navigating Chinese international graduate students' experiences and mobility during US-China geopolitical tensions. *International Journal of Chinese Education*, 13(1), Article 2212585X231213453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X231213453>
- Humairoh, M. F. N. (2023). Building undergraduate students' cultural identity through digital storytelling. *Communication Teacher*, 37(3), 235–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2022.2127820>
- Iqbal, J., & Masroor, F. (2023). Projecting the Chinese language as a powerful tool in the discourse on the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 17(4), 363–380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2023.2204295>
- Jiang, L. (2024). Research on the path to enhance the cultural communication literacy of Thai international Chinese language teachers. *Environment & Social Psychology*, 9(6). <https://doi.org/10.54517/esp.v9i6.2409>
- Lee, K. C. (2024). Promoting a positive shared future through transnational Chinese in Thailand: a case study of a self-styled Sino–Thai folk diplomat. *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, 20(2), 209–230. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17932548-12341516>
- Li, C., Raman, M., & Xiong, J. (2024). Systematic review of Chinese language motivation, course engagement, and Chinese vocabulary acquisition among students in the Confucius Institute in Thailand. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 9(54), 131–143. <https://doi.org/10.35631/ijepc.954011>
- Ma, J., & Zhao, K. (2018). International student education in China: Characteristics, challenges, and future trends. *Higher Education*, 76, 735–751. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0235-4>
- Min, M. (2023). Research on the application of new media technology in the Chinese cultural education of overseas students. *The 2023 2nd International Conference on*

- Science Education, Culture and Social Development (ICSECS D 2023)*, 7(1).
<https://doi.org/10.56028/aehtsr.7.1.212.2023>
- Mok, K. H., Shen, W., & Gu, F. (2024). The impact of geopolitics on international student mobility: The Chinese students' perspective. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 78(4), Article e12509. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12509>
- Mouboua, P. D., Atobatele, F. A., & Akintayo, O. T. (2024). Language as a tool for intercultural understanding: Multilingual approaches in global citizenship education. *Magna Scientia Advanced Research and Reviews*, 11(1), 19–30. <https://doi.org/10.30574/msarr.2024.11.1.0071>
- Ou, W. A., & Gu, M. M. (2021). Language socialization and identity in intercultural communication: Experience of Chinese students in a transnational university in China. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 24(3), 419–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1472207>
- Ribeiro, S. P. M. (2016). Developing intercultural awareness using digital storytelling. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 16(1), 69–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2015.1113752>
- Rosyidi, M. H., & Utomo, A. B. (2022). The implementation of policy and practice of Chinese diplomacy through the Confucius Institute (CI) in Thailand. *Politico (Jember)*, 12(2), 112–131. <https://doi.org/10.32528/politico.v21i2.5883>
- Sablina, S., Soong, H., & Pechurina, A. (2018). Exploring expectations, experiences, and long-term plans of Chinese international students studying in the joint Sino-Russian degree. *Higher Education*, 76(6), 973–988. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0256-z>
- Sun, S.-C. (2023). Confucius Institutes: China's cultural soft power strategy. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 6(1), 52–68. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2023.4>
- Suryanti, S., Arifani, Y., & Sutaji, D. (2020, August). Augmented reality for integer learning: Investigating its potential on students' critical thinking. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1613(1), Article 012041. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1613/1/012041>
- Wang, X. (2024). Socioeconomic status, cosmopolitanism, and educational aspirations: A study of China's middle-class students pursuing higher education in the US amidst geopolitical tensions. *International Journal of Chinese Education*, 13(2), Article 2212585X241253914. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X241253914>
- Xiao, D., & Tian, C. (2024). Chinese language education under the integration of Chinese and Thai languages and cultures. *International Journal of Sociologies and Anthropologies Science Reviews*, 4(3), 65–70. <https://doi.org/10.60027/ijrsar.2024.4011>
- Xiao, Y., Xu, M., & Wang, Y. (2024). Challenges, opportunities, and recommendations for Sino-Thai cross-border cultural tourism cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 51(1), 160–166. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/51/20240975>
- Xie, W. (2023). Unwitting agents: Representations of Chinese international students in US-China geopolitics. *East Asia*, 40(4), 391–409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-023-09409-5>
- Xu, C. L. (2022). Portraying the 'Chinese international students': A review of English-language and Chinese-language literature on Chinese international students (2015–2020). *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 23(1), 151–167. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-021-09731-8>
- Zeng, L. M. (2024). *Research on Chinese language education policy and Chinese language education development in Thailand* [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University]. <https://doi.org/10.58837/chula.is.2023.5>

- Zhan, H. (2024). Teaching model of international Chinese education from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. *Journal of Educational Research and Policies*, 6(9), 75–80. [https://doi.org/10.53469/jerp.2024.06\(09\).16](https://doi.org/10.53469/jerp.2024.06(09).16)
- Zhang, L. (2020). Developing students' intercultural competence through authentic video in language education. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 49(4), 330–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2020.1785528>
- Zhang, D., Chen, J., & Zhang, M. (2022). Practical exploration on the deep integration of ideological and political education and curriculum teaching: Taking modern educational technology as an example. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 10, 44–54. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2022.1013005>
- Zheng, D., & Liu, Y. (2024). China-Thai cultural diplomacy through the Buddhist Wat: A case study of the Thai Wat in Chaozhou Kaiyuan si, Guangdong. *Religions*, 15(11), Article 1365. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111365>