

Intercultural Communication Competence and Its Importance in the Teaching and Learning of Arabic for Specific Purposes

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ABSTRACT

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KEYWORDS:

Intercultural Communication
Competence
Arabic Language
Arabic for Specific Purposes

CITATION:

Fariz Azzuan, A. S., Muhammad Syaffiq, M. R.,
Mohd Fahimi, Z., Husna, A. A., Abdul Azim, M.
I., & Fitri Nurul'ain, N. (2026). Intercultural
Communication Competence and Its
Importance in the Teaching and Learning of
Arabic for Specific Purposes. *Malaysian
Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
(MJSSH)*, 11(7), e004131.
<https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v11i7.4131>

The focus of teaching and mastering Arabic language has shifted to particular objectives in preparing students for the work market. Even though it has received a lot of attention and interest in higher education, there is one important issue that needs to be addressed: intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among students of Arabic as a foreign language to ensure their ability to communicate professionally with diverse people from different cultures. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the level of ICC among Arabic language students as well as to explore their perceptions towards the importance of ICC in Arabic for specific purposes. The study is quantitative research that involved 41 students from UiTM Shah Alam's Bachelor of Arabic for Professional Communication program. The results were obtained utilizing a questionnaire. The data were examined with SPSS software. The findings revealed that students have a high level of intercultural communication competency, with nearly all of them emphasizing the importance of ICC in Arabic teaching and learning for specific purposes. The report also provided suggestions and recommendations for in the context of Arabic specific purposes.

Contribution/Originality: The paper's primary contribution is finding to the field of Arabic for Specific Purposes by enhancing understanding of the role of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in language teaching and learning. It also provides practical guidance for lecturers on integrating ICC elements into Arabic language instruction, particularly within the context of UiTM Shah Alam.

1. Introduction

The Arabic language in Malaysia is experiencing continuous growth as its necessity becomes increasingly significant in fulfilling students' needs to master terminologies and language patterns suited to specific fields. Arabic for specific purposes is garnering more attention, and it is currently studied not only for general contexts but also for specialized objectives.

When acquiring a foreign language, a learner must attain a high level of proficiency. This is because language plays a vital role in communication and in establishing mutual understanding between two parties. Furthermore, it serves as an essential instrument for interacting and exchanging ideas and opinions between speakers and listeners, as well as between writers and readers. Nunan (1995) emphasizes that an individual's conversational capability is a primary element in the acquisition of a foreign language. The communication process shares a significant relationship with culture. This is because culture functions as one of the key elements that impacts human development when interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Every culture is a human construct; it comprises every aspect of society, including traditions, laws, ways of living and thinking, as well as communication modes that reflect a person's language use (Ortega Islas, 2018). Therefore, this form of communication can be understood as a process of information exchange between two or more individuals possessing distinct cultural backgrounds (Phithakphongphan, 2020).

Intercultural communication is also defined as an interaction involving the sharing of thoughts and behaviors to achieve a point of mutual understanding or consensus. This process aims to elucidate the relationship between culture and communication, as culture inherently influences communication styles, language use, non-verbal characteristics, and other related aspects (Samovar, 1991). Consequently, intercultural communication plays a critical role in establishing successful relationships by enabling individuals to interact with one another despite practicing differing cultural norms (Ortega Islas, 2018).

Stemming from this discussion, there is a necessity to explore issues pertaining to intercultural communication and the instruction of Arabic for specific purposes. Thus, this study focuses on identifying the mastery level of ICC among students studying Arabic for specific purposes and on analyzing the perceptions of Arabic language students regarding intercultural communication in the teaching of Arabic for specific purposes.

1.1. Problem Statement

The teaching of the Arabic language has experienced significant development, especially as its instructional core has shifted from general Arabic language education to Arabic for specific purposes. Furthermore, the demand for teaching and learning Arabic for specific purposes is escalating, which is evident from the multitude of conducted studies discussing critical issues related to the subject (Ghani et al., 2019).

Among the primary issues frequently discussed is the integration of intercultural communication into the teaching of Arabic for specific purposes. ICC is an essential element that must be integrated into Arabic language learning due to its highly significant role in multicultural contexts (Shoman, 2021; Kustina et al., 2024). Moreover,

many students assume that mastery of the Arabic language is indispensable, particularly when communicating with native and non-native speakers in professional scenarios. Additionally, intercultural communication assists students in understanding nuanced communication patterns with one another, even when originating from divergent cultures (Zainudin, 2010).

However, there is a lack of research regarding the teaching and learning of Arabic for specific purposes; in fact, there is an exceedingly small number of studies linking Arabic studies to intercultural communication, despite the urgent need to discuss this to ensure the effectiveness of learning Arabic for specific purposes (Saleh, 2022). In light of this, researchers consider the integration of intercultural communication into the teaching and learning of Arabic necessary to fulfil the objectives of utilizing the language in specific situations (Rehman, 2014).

From this perspective, the researcher observes a need to scrutinize the importance of intercultural communication in teaching Arabic for specific purposes. Through this study, the researcher aims to identify the level of ICC among students and to analyze the importance of intercultural communication from the perspective of Bachelor of Professional Communication Arabic Language students alongside Arabic language lecturers at UiTM Shah Alam.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To identify the level of ICC among Bachelor of Professional Communication Arabic Language students?
- ii. To identify the level of ICC according to knowledge, skills and attitudes among Bachelor of Professional Communication Arabic Language students?
- iii. To explore the perception of Bachelor of Professional Communication Arabic Language students regarding the importance of intercultural communication in the teaching and learning process of Arabic for specific purposes?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culture and Language

Culture is inherently complex; it is broadly interpreted as an encompassing aspect of human life, including the behaviors, lifestyles, and thought processes of a group of people, as well as their history, religion, traditions, norms, and arts (Çakir, 2006). Therefore, the perception of a culture and the utilization of spoken language serve as vital elements of life on local, regional, and global scales (Mikolič, 2020).

The correlation between language and culture is widely recognized as mutually interconnected. Nevertheless, the comprehension of culture within the context of second or foreign language acquisition has currently evolved, expanding its focus beyond merely the culture of the target language to encompass diverse cultures worldwide (Cheng et al., 2009; Cuartas-Álvarez, 2020). This shift mandates that foreign language instruction should not exclusively concentrate on the language itself, but must also account for the various cultures that contextualize the use of the language (Byram & Morgan, 1994; Toscu & Erten, 2020).

The Council of Europe explains the relationship between language and communication through three dimensions: communicative competence, cultural competence, and intercultural communicative competence. Communicative competence is interpreted as an individual's capability to behave appropriately in linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic terms when utilizing a foreign language. Linguistic competence is categorized into lexical and phonological knowledge, alongside syntactic skills. Meanwhile, sociolinguistic competence refers to the norms governing behavior and politeness; these norms further explicate the relationships among generations, genders, caste classes, and social groups (specifically, the sociocultural circumstances embedded in language use) (CEFR, 2021, 2020). Language is not only viewed as an instrument for communication but is also regarded as a cultural mediator; a tool to comprehend social realities that shape thoughts and perceptions.

Therefore, it is imperative for a student to appropriately adapt to the cultural backgrounds of other individuals, accommodating their respective skills, communication traits, and needs, as well as their speech rate, intonation, facial expressions, and overall capabilities, in order to enhance communication efficiency (Liu, 2022). This is because when an individual communicates with parties from a different culture, they simultaneously engage with distinct cultural perspectives, subsequently being exposed to values, beliefs, meanings, and expectations that diverge from their own (Csillik, 2019).

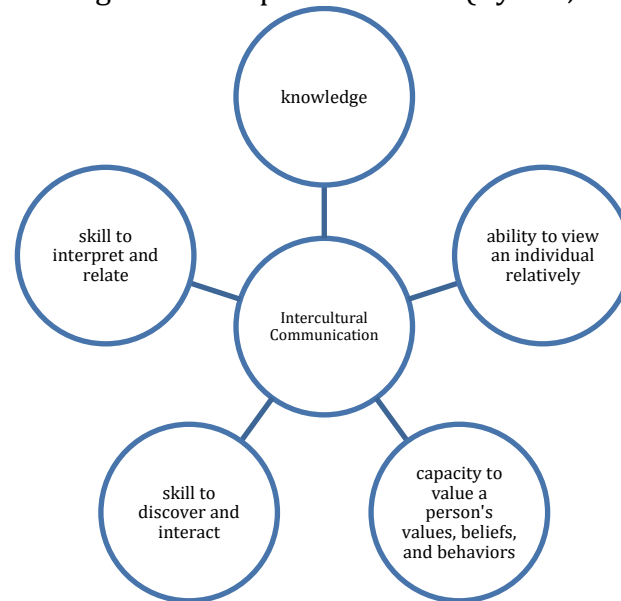
2.2. Intercultural Communication

The Council of Europe delineates the relationship between language and communication into three distinct components: communicative competence, cultural competence, and intercultural communicative competence. Communicative competence is defined as a person's ability to behave appropriately in linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic contexts when utilizing a foreign language. Linguistic competence encompasses lexical and phonological knowledge, along with syntactic skills. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the behavioral norms and politeness conventions, which also clarify interpersonal relationships across generations, genders, social classes, and social groups (namely, the sociocultural conditions surrounding language use) (CEFR, 2021, 2020). Thus, when an individual communicates with someone from a different cultural background, they interact with alternative cultural viewpoints and are subsequently exposed to values, beliefs, meanings, and expectations that differ from their own (Csillik, 2019).

The term "Intercultural communication" emerged in the early 1970s, and its fundamental research initially focused on communication failures and their repercussions in cross-cultural communication scenarios; it ultimately evolved to encompass translation theory, foreign language instruction, comparative cultural studies, and other related fields (Salakhova & Shamsitdinova, 2020). Within the domain of language teaching, Byram (1997) pioneered the ICC model, which is widely considered the most influential framework connecting language learning to culture (Young & Sachdev, 2011). He interpreted ICC as the knowledge of others; self-knowledge; the skill to interpret and relate; the skill to discover and interact; the capacity to value a person's values, beliefs, and behaviors; and the ability to view an individual relatively as illustrated in Figure 1 (Tamimi, 2014). From an alternative perspective, ICC denotes the capacity to function effectively across cultures, paired with the ability to think and act appropriately (Leung et al., 2014). Furthermore, teaching non-verbal intercultural communication is an essential facet of foreign language

education and acts as a method to elevate students' communication proficiency (Liu, 2022).

Figure 1: Components of ICC (Byram, 1997)



Byram (1997) defined intercultural competence as a person's capability to converse in their own language with individuals originating from different countries and cultures; he further elaborated on this by highlighting a person's ability to interpret translated documents originating from other cultures. In the context of foreign language acquisition, ICC signifies an individual's ability to speak in a foreign language with individuals from distinct nations and cultures. Consequently, knowledge of "other cultures" is tied to two core competencies: firstly, language competence through the ability to utilize language proficiently from a sociolinguistic standpoint, and secondly, discourse competence, which involves the awareness of specific meanings, values, and connotations embedded within a given language.

Naturally, intercultural communication has evolved into an essential component of foreign and second language (L2) education (Karakas, 2023). However, students often display a lack of awareness regarding the importance of intercultural communication, and their comprehension of the subject remains rather limited; they struggle to deeply understand the behavioral patterns and communication styles inherent in diverse cultural backgrounds, which consequently hinders effective communication and collaboration (Mao, 2024).

2.3. The Level of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Semivel-Sahin (2020) discovered in their study that the majority of students possess a high level of intercultural communicative competence; however, final-year students exhibit a notably higher mastery level compared to their first-year counterparts. Moreover, students encounter difficulties regarding the knowledge and behavioral aspects of intercultural communication elements. A study by Vu et al. (2025) concerning the level of intercultural communicative competence, based on Byram's (1997) model concluded that Vietnamese undergraduate students maintain positive perceptions toward the intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills acquired through an English-Medium Instruction (EMI) program. Conversely, research by Vu and Dinh (2022) argued

that Vietnamese students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) perceive their skills in the Interpreting and Relating aspects, as well as Knowledge of Self and Other Cultures, to be limited.

In an independent study, Park (2021) investigated the relationship between ICC levels and student motivation. The findings demonstrated that students possess a moderate level of competence, which aligns with their moderate level of motivation in learning foreign languages. Therefore, preparing foreign language students for meaningful communication outside their native cultural environments must be heavily emphasized to cultivate their internal awareness as active intermediaries between language and culture.

In a separate investigation, Lei (2020) examined the mastery level of ICC among pre-service teachers, discovering that they achieved a high level of competence in the areas of behavior, strategy, and awareness, though only a small fraction mastered the aspects of knowledge, linguistic competence, and discourse. Additionally, female teachers recorded superior competence mastery compared to their male counterparts. The research findings of Mostafa Alaei and Nosrati (2018) indicated that, overall, Iranian EFL teachers possess a high level of ICC. The study's conclusions further revealed that these teachers exhibit a high level of competence within the awareness, skills, and attitude components. Nonetheless, the teachers' competence in the knowledge aspect remains at a moderate level.

2.4. Arabic for Specific Purposes in Malaysia

The concept of teaching languages for specific purposes was significantly influenced by the emergence of English for Specific Purposes in the 1960s (Jaffar et al., 2013). It can be defined as a language teaching methodology wherein the content, teaching approaches, learning materials, and assessments are designed based on the students' requirements regarding the application of the specific foreign language (Ghani et al., 2019). Arabic is among the foreign languages extensively studied by students in Malaysia, and its expansion is apparent through the introduction of Arabic courses tailored for specific purposes across several critical disciplines; these include Arabic for economic purposes (Hashim, 2009), Arabic for nursing purposes (Zainudin, 2010), Arabic for agro-technological purposes (Daud, 2016).

2.5. Intercultural Communication and Arabic for Specific Purposes

Ghani et al. (2019) asserted in their study that Arabic language materials intended for specific purposes stimulate students to practice their communication skills; this practice is vital in specialized fields such as tourism, presenting a clear need to expose students to distinct Arab cultures, particularly the diverse Arabic dialects. Rehman (2014) observed that students were in agreement regarding their awareness of the benefits of integrating Arabic language learning with culture, and they actively enjoyed culture-related activities throughout their educational journey. Sinkus and Ozola (2023) corroborated this by noting that students favor cultural integrations in foreign language learning for specific purposes, as it aids in the holistic development of their knowledge, skills, and behaviors.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This research adopted a quantitative descriptive approach. To fulfil the objectives of this study, the researchers administered questionnaires to determine the levels of ICC and the perception of the importance of ICC among the students. The study then presented descriptive analysis to present the data.

3.2. Research Sample

The participants in this study were 41 students of Arabic language for Professional Communication at UiTM Shah Alam. The selection of students in this program was because the students were exposed to Arabic for specific purposes and they were involved in exploring Arabic culture throughout their courses. Purposive sampling was conducted to identify critical, relevant, and required skills in intercultural communication.

3.3. Research Instruments

3.3.1. Intercultural Communicative Competence Questionnaire

In answering research question one, the researchers adapted ICC questionnaire to measure the ability and competency of Arabic students in intercultural communicative settings. This questionnaire was originally designed by Mirzaei and Foruzandeh (2013) comprises 22 items with 3 main components of ICC including knowledge, skills, attitudes. This questionnaire also employs a 5-point Likert scale. The classification of items according to the main components as presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Components of ICC

Components	Items
Intercultural Knowledge	1-12
Intercultural Skills	13-17
Intercultural Attitudes	18-22

Then, the researchers referred to the classification of ICC from Saricoban & Oz (2014) in determining the level of IC among students in three levels; high, moderate, and low. The classification as detailed in Tables 2:

Table 2: Level of ICC

Level of ICC	Range
High	3.50 - 5.00
Moderate	2.50 - 3.49
Low	1.00 - 2.49

3.3.2. Importance Of Intercultural Communication

In answering research question two, the researchers adapted a questionnaire from Siriphanich (2018) to explore the importance of IC among Arabic students as well as their opinion on the most required ICC skills and dispositions. This questionnaire

features 15 items and utilizes a 4-point Likert scale ranging ranging from 1) most required, 2) required, 3) not required, and 4) not required at all. It consist of 3 main dimensions; attitudinal dimension, knowledge dimension, and skill dimension, the details of each dimension as presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Dimension of ICC

Attitudinal Dimension	Knowledge Dimension	Skill Dimension
Flexibility	Self-confidence	Ability to interpret
Ability to adapt to new situations	Acknowledgement of the identity of others	Knowledge discovery
Curiosity	Understanding of others' world views, values, norms, and ways of life	Problem-solving skills
Tolerance of ambiguity	Knowledge about other countries and cultures	Ability to evaluate
Empathy	Knowledge about intercultural communication	Ability to negotiate

The questionnaire originally discover the importance of IC in English for tourism, Therefore, the researchers made necessary adjustments in the questionnaire to suit the context of current research.

3.3.3. Data Collection Procedure

This research used the ICC questionnaire and Importance of ICC questionnaire to achieve the research objectives. The researchers first transferred the scale into e-forms using "Google Form" to easily manage and store the responses and data. The links to the scales were then sent to the respondents via the Telegram and WhatsApp apps. The respondents had a week to complete the scales and send them to the researchers.

3.3.4. Data Analysis

After the data and responses were collected from the respondents, the researchers then analysed the data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29 software to answer research questions one and two.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic of Respondents

Table 4 & 5 present the demographic distribution of the respondents who participated in this study. A total of 41 students completed the questionnaire. Of these, 21 respondents were male, representing 51.2% of the sample, while 20 respondents were female, accounting for 48.8%. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were between 21 and 25 years old, comprising 95.1% of the sample. Only two respondents, representing 4.9%, were aged 26 years and above.

Table 4: Gender

Gender		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	21	51.2
	Female	20	48.8
	Total	41	100.0

Table 5: Age
Age

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	21-25	39	95.1
	Over 26	2	4.9
	Total	41	100.0

4.2. Objective 1: level of ICC

In achieving research objective 1, the researcher handed out the questionnaire of ICC to measure students' level of ICC by using the overall mean from all items. Then, the level of ICC was determined by the classification from Saricoban & Oz (2014).

Table 6: Means for ICC Level

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
OVERALLMEANS	41	2.50	5.00	3.7217	.63467
Valid N (listwise)	41				

Table 6 illustrates the mean of ICC among Arabic for Professional students. The mean value was 3.72, and the standard deviation was 0.635 for the sample size of 41. The range of the mean value was between 2.50 and 5.00.

Therefore, based on Saricoban & Oz (2014) classification of ICC, students of Arabic for professional communication have high level of ICC. This is because the students were explored with Arabic language and its cultural through their courses.

4.3. Objective 2: level of intercultural communicative competence

Using the same data from ICC questionnaire, the researchers then exploring the level of ICC according to the three components of ICC which are knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Table 7: Means of ICC for Knowledge Components

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
When I am uncertain about cultural differences, I take a tolerant attitude.	41	4.05	.835
I believe that intercultural experiences can add some information to my previous knowledge.	41	4.17	.738
I am eager to read articles on foreign cultures.	41	3.90	.664

I cannot easily deal with ambiguities during the communication in L2.	41	3.63	.829
I do not make an effort to discover the norms of the L2 culture that I am communicating with.	41	3.49	.840
The right of people from other cultures to have different values from my own is respectable.	41	3.85	.792
I try to encounter well with the different dress customs of people in other countries.	41	3.73	.837
When I meet foreign adolescents, I cannot open a conversation in a culturally appropriate manner.	41	3.54	.897
I rarely accept the others' values and norms during the communication in L2.	41	3.78	.791
I can cope well with spoken language and body language of people from different cultures.	41	3.76	.767
I can take part in any L2 conversation dealing with daily life issues.	41	3.76	.799
Most of the time when I am communicating in L2, I try to learn through discovery during actual experience.	41	3.95	.740
Valid N (listwise)	41		

Table 7 presents the mean scores for the knowledge component of the ICC questionnaire, which consists of 12 items. The highest mean score was recorded for Item 2 ($M = 4.17$), indicating that students perceived intercultural experiences as beneficial in helping them acquire additional information related to foreign language learning. This was followed by Item 1 ($M = 4.05$), suggesting that students believed they would become more tolerant when encountering cultural differences during interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Item 12 also obtained a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.95$), reflecting students' eagerness to learn through discovery when engaging in real-life experiences while communicating in the L2.

In contrast, the lowest mean score was recorded for Item 5 ($M = 3.49$), indicating that most students disagreed with the statement that they made no effort to explore the culture of the language they were learning. Similarly, Item 8 obtained a low mean score ($M = 3.54$), showing that students generally disagreed that they were unable to initiate conversations with foreign adolescents in a culturally appropriate manner. This was followed by Item 6 ($M = 3.63$), suggesting that only a small number of students believed they could not easily manage ambiguities during communication in the L2.

Table 8 presents the mean scores for the skills component of the ICC questionnaire, which comprises five items. The highest mean score was recorded for Item 14 ($M = 3.88$), indicating that students were often motivated by curiosity to expand their knowledge of their own culture. This was followed by Item 17 ($M = 3.76$), suggesting that students believed an individual's decision-making process is influenced by their social system. Item 15 also recorded a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.68$), showing that most students preferred watching national news rather than international news.

In contrast, Item 16 ($M = 3.34$) and Item 13 ($M = 3.12$) recorded the lowest mean scores. These findings suggest that most students disagreed with the statement that they were unaware of differences in foreign cultures. Similarly, students generally disagreed with the view that marriage between individuals from different cultural backgrounds is inappropriate.

Table 8: Means of ICC for Skills Components

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I believe that marriage between different cultures is wrong.	41	3.12	1.187
I am often motivated by curiosity to develop my knowledge of my own culture as perceived by others.	41	3.88	.781
I watch more national news than international news on TV.	41	3.68	.960
I am not always aware of differences of the foreign cultures.	41	3.34	1.039
I believe the social system of where the person is from has effect on the decision-making process.	41	3.76	.799
Valid N (listwise)	41		

Table 9: Means of ICC for Attitude Components

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am able to deal tactfully with the ethical problems while communicating in L2.	41	3.59	.805
I take pleasure in listening to music from another culture.	41	3.88	.954
Religious arrangements in different cultures are not fascinating for me.	41	3.39	.919
When I am reading a story book written in L2, I always try to analyze, interpret, and relate concepts to each other.	41	3.83	.834
I think we are responsible for people of other races as our people.	41	3.80	.928
Valid N (listwise)	41		

Table 9 presents the mean scores for the skills component of the ICC questionnaire, which consists of five items. The highest mean score was recorded for Item 19 ($M = 3.88$), indicating that students expressed a strong interest in listening to music from different cultures. This was followed by Item 21 ($M = 3.83$), suggesting that students tended to analyse, interpret, and relate concepts to one another when reading in the L2. Item 22 also obtained a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.80$), reflecting students' belief that they share responsibility for individuals from different racial backgrounds.

In contrast, the lowest mean score was recorded for Item 20 ($M = 3.39$), indicating that students showed a relatively lower level of fascination with religious practices across different cultures. Item 18 also obtained a comparatively low mean score ($M = 3.59$), suggesting that students were less confident in dealing tactfully with ethical issues that may arise during communication in the L2.

4.4. Objective 3: The importance of ICC

In achieving research objective 3, the researchers spread the questionnaire related to find out the perception of Arabic students on the importance of ICC in learning Arabic for specific purpose.

Table 10 presents the respondents' perceptions of the importance of ICC in Arabic for Specific Purposes. Based on the responses from 41 students, the majority perceived ICC as important in Arabic language learning, particularly within the context of Arabic for Specific Purposes. Specifically, 15 respondents, representing 36.6% of the sample,

considered ICC to be very important, while 25 respondents, equivalent to 61.0%, regarded it as important.

Table 10: Importance of ICC

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, it is very important	15	36.6
Yes, it is important	25	61.0
I'm not sure	1	2.4
Total	41	100.0

Only one respondent, representing 2.4% of the total sample, indicated uncertainty regarding the importance of ICC. This response may be attributed to a limited understanding of the concept of intercultural communication.

4.4.1. Most required ICC skills and dispositions for the undergraduate students from the students'

Table 11: Means of ICC Skills and Dispositions

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
MEANICA	41	3.2634	.51272
MEANICK	41	3.2878	.50803
MEANICS	41	3.2732	.51333
Valid N (listwise)	41		

The table 11 presents the overall mean scores for the required ICC skills and dispositions among undergraduate students. Among the three components, intercultural knowledge recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.29$), followed by intercultural skills ($M = 3.27$). Intercultural attitudes recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.26$). Overall, the mean scores for all three components were very close, indicating only slight differences in students' perceived ICC skills and dispositions.

Table 12: Attitudinal Dimension

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Ability to adapt to diverse social and cultural situation	41	3.27	.549
2. Ability to modify own behavior according to changing situations	41	3.22	.571
3. The desire to learn more about something or someone	41	3.34	.530
4. Ability to accept lack of clarity and to be able to deal with ambiguous situations	41	3.27	.593
5. Ability to realize automatically about what people think in a certain kind of situation	41	3.22	.613
Valid N (listwise)	41		

The table 12 presents the mean scores for five items under the attitude component of ICC. The highest mean score was recorded for Item 3, which refers to the desire to learn

more about something or someone ($M = 3.34$). This was followed by Item 1 and Item 4, both with a mean score of 3.27. Item 1 relates to the ability to adapt to diverse social and cultural situations, while Item 4 concerns the ability to accept lack of clarity and deal with ambiguous situations. The lowest mean scores were recorded for Item 2 and Item 5, both with a mean score of 3.22. Item 2 refers to the ability to modify one's behaviour according to changing situations, whereas Item 5 relates to the ability to realise what people think in certain situations.

Table 13: Knowledge Dimension

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
6. The knowledge of one's own desires, strength, weakness, and emotional stability	41	3.29	.602
7. The knowledge about the different positions or role relationship the person holds in society	41	3.27	.501
8. The knowledge about cultural norms, values, behaviors, and issues	41	3.32	.521
9. The appropriate knowledge of the country and culture and being open to new information and perspectives	41	3.29	.559
10. The knowledge about resolving misunderstanding and discover new information	41	3.27	.593
Valid N (listwise)	41		

The table 13 presents the mean scores for five items under the knowledge dimension of ICC. The highest mean score was recorded for Item 8 ($M = 3.32$), which refers to knowledge of cultural norms, values, behaviours, and issues. This was followed by Item 6 and Item 9, both with a mean score of 3.29, indicating knowledge of one's own desires, strengths, weaknesses, and emotional stability, as well as knowledge of the country and culture while being open to new information and perspectives. The lowest mean scores were recorded for Item 7 and Item 10, both with a mean score of 3.27. These items refer to knowledge of social positions or role relationships in society and knowledge related to resolving misunderstandings and discovering new information.

Table 14: Skill Dimension

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
11. Ability to interpret one document to make it accessible to someone from another country	41	3.29	.559
12. Ability to acquire new cultural knowledge and use that knowledge in real time communication	41	3.27	.593
13. Ability to cope with problems and direct to achieve the goal when no solution method is obvious	41	3.27	.593
14. Ability to assess the practices, viewpoints, and product critically in the environment of one's own cultural communities and other countries	41	3.20	.601
15. Ability to make an effort to communicate until reaching the acceptable points or agreement about differing needs or ideas	41	3.34	.575
Valid N (listwise)	41		

The table 14 presents the mean scores for five items under the skills dimension of ICC. The highest mean score was recorded for Item 15 ($M = 3.34$), which refers to the ability to make an effort to communicate until reaching an acceptable point or agreement about differing needs or ideas. This was followed by Item 11 ($M = 3.29$), which refers to the ability to interpret a document and make it accessible to someone from another country. The lowest mean score was recorded for Item 14 ($M = 3.20$), which refers to the ability to critically assess practices, viewpoints, and products within one's own cultural community and those of other countries.

5. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to identify the level of ICC among Bachelor of Professional Communication in Arabic Language students. The findings indicate that the students generally possessed a high level of ICC, with most of them recognising its importance in the teaching and learning of Arabic for specific purposes.

The finding that Arabic for Professional Communication students demonstrated a high level of ICC was expected, as they are exposed to Arabic culture and its core values through their courses and assessments. They have also been introduced to cultural knowledge and communication practices involving Arabic speakers, both native and non-native. This finding is consistent with Semivel-Sahin (2020), who reported high levels of ICC among students, as well as Mostafa Alaei and Nosrati (2018), who found high levels of ICC among Iranian EFL teachers.

For the second objective, the study aimed to identify the level of ICC according to knowledge, skills, and attitudes among Bachelor of Professional Communication in Arabic Language students. Regarding the first component of ICC, namely knowledge, the findings show that students had a strong desire to learn through real-life discovery. Their tolerance of cultural differences also indicates active engagement during interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In addition, students were eager to learn through discovery when engaging in real-life experiences while communicating in a L2. This aligns with Byram's (1997) model, which emphasises that "knowledge of others" is a fundamental pillar of ICC. However, studies by Mostafa Alaei and Nosrati (2018) and Lei (2020) found the knowledge aspect of ICC to be a moderate or weaker area among students and teachers.

In the skills dimension, students were often motivated by curiosity to expand their knowledge of their own culture. They also believed that social systems influence the decision-making of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, which may have contributed to their open-mindedness regarding intercultural marriage. In contrast to these findings, Vu and Dinh (2022) found that students often perceived their skills in interpreting and relating as limited. This difference may be due to the specialised Arabic curriculum, which appears to successfully foster these specific skills. It may also be influenced by students' exposure to cultural contexts in which mixed marriage is more familiar.

For the third component, the study highlighted students' openness to "surface-level" cultural elements, such as enjoying foreign music and relating concepts found in storybooks. However, lower scores were recorded for items related to dealing with ethical problems and interest in religious arrangements. This suggests that while students are open to general cultural exchange, navigating more complex and deeply

rooted cultural aspects, such as ethics and religion, remains challenging. Semivel-Sahin (2020) noted that even when overall ICC is high, students often encounter difficulties with the behavioural and complex knowledge aspects of intercultural elements. This also relates to Csillik (2019), who notes that engaging with distinct cultural perspectives requires individuals to confront beliefs and expectations that may differ significantly from their own.

Research Objective 3 investigated Bachelor of Professional Communication in Arabic Language students' perceptions of the importance of intercultural communication in learning Arabic for specific purposes. The findings show a strong consensus that ICC is vital. This emphasises that students themselves recognise that language proficiency alone is insufficient in professional contexts. This finding is supported by Shoman (2021) and Kustina et al. (2024), who argue that integrating ICC into Arabic language learning is essential because of its significant role in multicultural contexts. Similarly, Zainudin (2010) noted that students understand how ICC helps them navigate nuanced communication patterns with diverse individuals.

Another finding showed that Intercultural Knowledge was rated slightly higher than Skills and Attitudes as the most required component. Students highlighted knowledge of cultural norms, values, behaviours, and issues as a primary requirement. As noted by Byram and Morgan (1994) and Toscu and Erten (2020), foreign language instruction must move beyond the language itself and take into account the cultures that contextualise its use. Sinkus and Ozola (2023) also confirmed that students favour cultural integration for specific purposes because it contributes to the holistic development of their knowledge.

In addition, making an effort to reach agreement and interpreting documents across cultures emerged as the highest-ranked skills. Surprisingly, these skills are highly specific workplace functions. In Professional Communication, the goal is often negotiation, problem-solving, and the facilitation of mutual understanding between parties. This is reflected in the study by Ghani et al. (2019), who asserted that Arabic materials designed for specific purposes stimulate the communication skills needed in specialised fields. The students' desire to master cross-cultural negotiation demonstrates that they understand the demands of their future careers.

6. Pedagogical Implications

Reflecting on the findings, students demonstrated a strong desire to learn and a high ability to reach agreement. Therefore, it is recommended that lecturers provide materials that further challenge and develop these specific areas. As suggested by Rehman (2014) and Saleh (2022), active and scenario-based tasks should be incorporated into the teaching and learning process. These may include mock professional negotiations, cross-cultural conflict resolution role-plays, and the translation of culturally specific business documents. Such activities would ensure that the curriculum directly addresses students' identified needs and prepares them to function effectively in real-world Arabic-speaking professional environments.

It is also recommended that Arabic language lecturers introduce more complex scenario-based learning activities, such as role-playing ethical dilemmas in professional Arabic workplace contexts. These activities can help build students' confidence in tactfully navigating high-stakes intercultural conflicts. This recommendation aligns with

the goal of Arabic for Specific Purposes, which is to prepare students for authentic professional situations.

7. Conclusion

Intercultural communication is highly important in the teaching and learning of Arabic for Specific Purposes, as it exposes students to ways of communicating with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Students need to develop intercultural communicative competence to ensure that they are able to interact professionally while demonstrating respect for different cultures and norms. In addition, designing an Arabic language curriculum that emphasizes the importance of understanding the target language culture can help prepare students to meet the demands of the job market. Overall, the findings of this study highlight the need to integrate intercultural elements more explicitly into Arabic language teaching and learning. Such integration may enhance students' awareness, knowledge, and skills in managing intercultural interactions effectively. Therefore, Arabic for Specific Purposes should not only focus on linguistic competence, but also on preparing students to communicate appropriately and confidently in multicultural professional contexts.

Ethical Approval and consent from participants

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi Mara (REC UiTM). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

Acknowledgement

We would like to show our appreciation to everyone directly or indirectly involved in this research.

Funding

This study received funding from Geran Terbuka APB, UiTM Shah Alam.

Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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