

**WHAT IS INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND
ARE WE COMPETENT IN IT? - PERCEPTIONS OF ENG-
LISH LANGUAGE GRADUATES**

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Eri kulttuuri- ja ihmisryhmien välinen kontakti on viimeisten vuosikymmenien aikana lisääntynyt globalisaation ja ihmisten kasvaneen liikkuvuuden seurauksena. Tämä on tuonut kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän osaksi myös arkielämäämme. Sen yleisenä välineenä toimii englannin kieli lingua francana. Siispä niin englannin kielen kuin kulttuurienvälisen kommunikaation roolit nykyajan työelämässä ovat kasvaneet.</p> <p>Tämän maisterintutkielman tavoitteena oli kartoittaa, kuinka kohderyhmä ymmärtää kulttuurienvälisiä kommunikaatiota ilmiönä ja mitkä opintoihin liittyvät tekijät ovat vaikuttaneet heidän kulttuurienvälisen kommunikaatiokykynsä kehittymiseen. Kohderyhmänä olivat viimeisen kahden vuoden aikana valmistuneet englannin pääaineopiskelijat. Tutkimuksen tavoitteiden yhteisenä päämääränä oli selvittää, kuinka kohderyhmän opinnot ovat valmistaneet heitä kohtaamaan ja toimimaan nykypäivän työelämän vaatimuksien kanssa, joihin kulttuurienvälisen viestintä, globalisaatio ja englannin kieli lingua francan roolissa ovat tuoneet oman lisänsä.</p> <p>Tutkimus oli tyypiltään laadullinen, sillä sen aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduilla teemahaastattelulla. Kerätty aineisto analysoitiin temaattisen analyysin avulla, jonka aikana data luokiteltiin eri koodiksi. Nämä koodit koottiin ajatuskarttojen avulla pää- ja alateemoiksi, joista muodostuivat tutkimuskysymysten päätulokset. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että kohderyhmä tunnisti kulttuurienväliselle viestinnälle useita olennaisia piirteitä. Näitä olivat kieli, vuorovaikutus, kulttuuri ja kansainvälisyys sekä kommunikaatio, tavoitteet ja taidot. Lisäksi osallistujat näkivät opinnoissaan hieman enemmän tukevia kuin puuttuvia tekijöitä kulttuurienvälisen kommunikaation kyvykkyyden kehittymisen kannalta. Tärkeimpinä näistä nähtiin kurssit, ulkomailla oleskelu sekä sosiaalinen elämä. Vastaavasti puuttuvia tekijöitä olivat käytännön haasteiden uupuminen ja koronarajoitukset, mutta myös kurssit näkökulmasta riippuen. Näitä kaikkia tekijöitä yhdistää kokemusten kartuttaminen käytännössä tai tämän ulottuvuuden poissaolo.</p>	

Avainsanat - Keywords

intercultural communication, intercultural communicative competence, culture, English as a lingua franca

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1 INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication is an age-old phenomenon with a constantly increasing importance in our globalized world. As contact between different cultures and groups of people has become more common, and immigration has made populations more diverse, intercultural communication has established its role in our everyday lives within the past few decades. This can also be observed from the changes that have taken place in our professional and educational environments due to globalization. For example, we have a progressively global economy that impacts countries worldwide (Seidlhofer 2013), countless universities consider themselves to be international and have multinational student intake (Jenkins 2010: 926-927), and the internet and quickly advancing communication technologies have increased the interconnectedness of people worldwide (Seidlhofer 2013). Consequently, intercultural communication and people competent in it have become and are becoming increasingly more significant.

This leads us to another important factor for intercultural communication: English language and its status as a global lingua franca. English has already been spreading across the world during the past few centuries, at first mainly through colonialism and later through globalization. This has led the language to adapt to new circumstances by implementing new forms and functions when it has come into contact with other languages and cultures. Therefore, it can nowadays be classified as its own separate kind of English that differs from the native ways of language use, and which is shaped by its non-native majority of speakers (e.g., Breiteneder 2009, Jenkins 2010, Seidlhofer 2013, Baker 2015). As discussed above, globalization has increased the amount and importance of intercultural communication for which English as a lingua franca (ELF) serves as the most common means (Jenkins 2010: 926). This can also be noticed in the professional areas of education, international relations, business, and scientific research (Breiteneder 2009: 256).

The impacts of globalization on working life and education are becoming more visible year by year. This can be observed, for example, from how applicants who have intercultural competence and language skills are increasing in demand in the job markets and how educational institutes are integrating these skills into their degree

programs in response to this. For example, even the Finnish National Agency for Education acknowledges and advocates the importance of recognizing one's own intercultural competences and provides resources for learning how to utilize them as an employer, student, or a fresh graduate (2022). These "professionals of a new age" are described accordingly as "people with the ability and passion to function in international interactions on a global scale" (ibid. 2022).

When considering intercultural communication beyond the factors that have impacted its role and importance to us, it is also essential to understand how competence can be acquired in it. A significant environment for this to happen is within educational settings, giving foreign language teaching (FLT) one of the most important roles in creating successful intercultural communicators. In this regard, FLT has a responsibility to evolve students' critical awareness about the importance of diverse cultural practices both in one's own and in the cultures of others. Therefore, this setting is ideally used to obtain competence in IC through learning languages, their relation to cultural practices and identities, and what aspects from the interlocutors can bring to an interactive situation (Byram 1997: 43-46).

The present study concentrates on exploring how a group of non-native English speakers, more specifically graduated English language students, understand intercultural communication (IC) and what factors in their university studies influenced the development of their intercultural communicative competence (ICC). These topics are observed in contexts where English functions as the medium for intercultural interactions between native and other non-native speakers, i.e., where it acts as a lingua franca. The present study thus aims to shed light on what factors the participants understand as part of IC or see important for it and on how their' studies impacted the development of ICC and their understanding of it. These topics were chosen as the research focus to gain insight into how well the target group's studies have prepared them to face the demands of working life influenced by intercultural communication, globalization, and ELF.

After this introduction, Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework of this study. It includes reviewing and defining the key concepts culture, IC, ICC, and ELF. Secondly in Chapter 3, the aims and research methods of the present study are described in more detail. Thirdly, the findings are presented and analyzed in Chapter 4. Finally, the main findings of the study are discussed in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework in Chapter 5. This chapter also includes the concluding element of the present study by discussing the implications and limitations of it and suggests possibilities for future research.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the key concepts of this study are introduced in detail. Firstly, it discusses culture: a vast concept that does not have one single definition. As culture plays an important role in the field of intercultural communication (IC), it is important to gain understanding and discuss some of its definitions and usages in the past. Thus, this chapter sheds light on the complexity of culture as a concept, defines it for the purposes of the present study, and introduces how it is present in research. Secondly, IC is defined and discussed as a new field of study. Lastly, this chapter ties together the discussed points about communication, culture, and language by reviewing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and the role of ELF in IC.

2.1 Culture as a Concept

- (1) "Culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants" (Hall 1959: 53)

Culture has become an increasingly popular term in our globalized world. As the concept has spread all over the world in the past decades, interest in and discussions around it have increased notably (Piller 2017, Wikan 2002). Defining culture can be seen as an interdisciplinary project, as it has been included in academic inquiries of several disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, e.g., anthropology, sociology, linguistics, history, philosophy, literary theory, and psychology so far. The joint understanding of culture that these disciplines share is loose and descriptive, as there is only slight agreement on its theoretical and analytical underpinnings (Sarangi 2009: 81).

Culture is mostly used to refer to patterns of human behavior and the symbolic structures that bring significance to these behaviors (e.g., New World Encyclopedia 2020, McDaniel, Samovar and Porter 2012, Sarangi 2009, Logan 2007, Hall 1871); however, its usage has differed based on context in the past. In the English language context, culture was born in the 19th century during a time of rapid colonial and imperial expansion of the UK and the USA (Piller 2011: 33). The earliest definition is by Edward Hall, the first professor of anthropology, and it dates to 1871 (Logan 2007: 242). He defined culture as the “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1871: 1). This definition is still widely used today, as it is easy to understand (McDaniel, Samovar and Porter 2012: 10), although it has been criticized to be too broad (Baker 2015).

A more succinct definition was created by Ruth Benedict in 1959 who considered culture as a binding factor between people in the form of standards and ideas that they share (1959: 16, as quoted by McDaniel, Samovar and Porter 2012: 10). Then in 1973, a more complex definition was introduced by Clifford Geertz, who stated that culture is “a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (1973: 89, cited in *ibid.* 2012: 10).

Before the 1980's, culture was generally understood as arts, science, and literature in more mundane contexts (Breidenbach and Nyíri 2009: 22, Sarangi 2009: 83). This definition has then started to change, as people began to talk about different cultures, such as “*culture of poverty*”, thus broadening the understanding of what culture is (Breidenbach and Nyíri 2009: 22). In addition to its early definitions, culture was now used increasingly more to comprise all human behavior not determined by biology (Breidenbach and Nyíri 2009: 22, Sarangi 2009: 84), embodying a way of life and having a bigger focus on mass entertainment (Sarangi 2009: 83). Culture and cultural differences were also perceived to be the main explanation for the way people function (Breidenbach and Nyíri 2009: 9).

In contemporary research, the definitions of culture usually focus on shared values, attitudes, beliefs, norms, behaviors, material objects, and symbolic resources between a group of people (e.g., McDaniel, Samovar and Porter 2012). Below, two newer definitions from Sarangi (2009: 84) and Piller (2017: 7-9) are discussed as examples to demonstrate the variety of views, so that we can better understand the complexity of culture, and how no definition is able to capture it in its full extent.

- 1) Sarangi considers culture to consist of patterns of and for behavior that are transmitted or acquired by symbols, constituting the individual achievements

of human groups. In this case, the essence of culture is comprised of traditional ideas and their attached values, and culture systems can be either considered as products of action or as conditioning influences upon additional action. On that account, this definition focuses on how 1) all aspects of social life are absorbed in culture; 2) culture is seen as a synonym with social structure; and 3) the nature of culture is determining individual behavior. However, this comprehensive definition is not able to include everything because it does not involve the relationship between cultural elements and their relationship to what is seen as noncultural in each society.

- 2) Piller discusses the definition of culture through three distinct examples. The first considers culture *as a national asset*, where it is linked to so called high culture (history, arts, music, etc.) and popular culture (folklore, cuisine, beliefs, etc.). The second treats culture *as challenge*, which deals with interpersonal relationships and how they are communicated verbally or non-verbally. For example, whether people engage or avoid small-talk and if shoes are used indoors or not. The final example, culture *as citizenship*, consists of practices that express one's identity. This category also includes practices that have been linked to discrimination based on culture, such as dress codes, or accents and dialects. At first glance, these definitions seem to explain culture in different ways, but they all share the same underlying understanding of culture: *a nation*. In this context, culture is seen as an entity the existence of which is presupposed. For example, when we speak about Finnish culture or Spanish culture, we do not tend to think if such a thing exists; hence, the status of culture is presupposed and goes together with that of a nation.

In the light of the previous discussion, culture should not be seen as something that people have, but as something that is created and recreated in speech and texts (Piller 2017: 5). Culture can be understood as a construct of thought that is related to a collectivity of people and as a lens through which we perceive and handle life (Wikan 2002). This is also the view the present study will adopt about culture. Moreover, through communication and social interaction, we can use culture to develop knowledge about and attitudes towards life and pass them on to the next generations (Logan 2007: 241-242, Sarangi 2009: 84). Culture thus provides us with the rules for living and functioning in society, it is "the software of the mind [...] our mental programming" (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). These rules are different from culture to culture, so to function and be effective in one, we need to become familiar with its rules (Mc Daniel, Samovar & Porter 2012: 11). Ultimately, all cultures are imagined communities, whether they are perceived as nation, faith, ethnicity, gender, or

sexuality, meaning that members of a culture imagine themselves as members of a group and are imagined as such by others (Piller 2012: 5).

When we agree to view culture as a set of societal rules created through social interaction, its function becomes self-evident: a framework that provides meaning to events, objects, and people. In this case, culture helps us to make sense of our surroundings and to reduce insecurity about social settings (McDaniel, Samovar & Porter 2012: 11). On a societal level, culture can be used to strengthen sameness and distinctive forms of identity in varying subgroups (Sarangi 2009: 87). This is achieved by viewing culture as differences, as attributes that distinguish groups of people from each other, linking culture roughly to ethnicity (Breidenbach and Nyíri 2009: 22). Therefore, our cultural identity derives from our sense of belonging to a specific cultural or ethnic group, and as we grow, we learn the rules of social conduct that are appropriate to our own cultural group or groups. This makes culture significant in interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds.

On an individual level, culture provides us with our identity, our sense of self. However, the individual cultures of people can differ even when they are members of the same culture; hence, the culture of a society and the culture of an individual are two different levels of culture (Logan 2007: 267). Culture, on that account, comprises the complexity of human existence well: we are products of the culture we belong to yet unique individuals at the same time (Wikan 2002). Consequently, cultural identity can be a significant factor in the context of intercultural communication (McDaniel, Samovar and Porter 2012: 11-12).

Another essential aspect of culture is social learning. Through it, we can transfer nongenetic patterns of skill, thought, and feeling between individuals in a society (Boyd and Richerson 1985: 34, cited in Logan 2007: 242). This also highlights the interrelationship between society and individuals: culture is lived by individuals, and it is individuals living in their culture (Sarangi 2009: 85). For this reason, culture and society are often viewed as parts of a connected whole, making it possible to explain individuals' behavior as a function of the social structure (Baker 2015: 49). In the past, it was thought that this type of knowledge must be shared and transmitted only from one generation to another, but to see culture only as traditions and values that transmit between generations, freezes it in time. This view ignores the fact that humans learn throughout their entire lives and can have very different life experiences (Wikan 2002). Accordingly, culture is continually changing.

The use of culture as a concept and the attempt to divide groups of people have caused the construction of the cultural other, i.e., culture can be used as a mean to include some and exclude others (see e.g., Piller 2017, Sarangi 2009). *The other* is usually described from the perspective of the observer, and it often happens when a dominant culture uses colonial modes of representation of the cultural otherness. In the

context of the modern world and cultural imperialism, it is the West who holds this authority (Sarangi 2009: 88, 90). This leads to culture becoming “a source of identity construction whereby the non-Western other is presented from the Western point of view, using a discourse of exclusion” (Said 1993: xiii, cited in Sarangi 2009: 88-90). Furthermore, this leads to culture becoming associated with nation or state, as discussed above in Piller’s definition (2017: 7-9), boosting the differences between *us* and *them* and including some degree of xenophobia (Sarangi 2009: 88). Some examples that illustrate the exclusionary nature of culture are stereotyping and assumption making based on someone’s culture, nationality, or racist attitudes (Piller 2017: 8, Sarangi 2009: 89), or “high culture” which is only accessible to people with a certain educational status and financial means (Piller 2017: 8).

In the context of intercultural communication studies, culture is typically seen as a ubiquitous and multidimensional ideological construct that is invoked by social actors (Piller 2012: 5, Piller 2011), as also discussed previously. When considering intercultural communication, the field sees culture as constructing in the specific and various ways of life of different national and ethnic groups (Hinnenkamp 2009). This understanding is close to the broader original perception of culture that intercultural communication studies build on: “the specific and variable cultures of different nations and periods” (Piller 2011: 16, 24), which dates to the 19th and early 20th century. Back then, cultures were commonly seen as positioned on a scale from savagery to civilization. Some traces of this division can still be detected in the field, for example, in the context of racism or discrimination; however, *multiculturalism*, a new school of thought has emerged in which cultural differences and diversity are celebrated and seen as enriching (ibid. 2011: 24).

Nowadays in critical intercultural communication literature, two fundamentally different understandings of the status of culture can be detected. The first sees culture *as an entity* and is essentialist: culture is considered as something people have or which they belong to. The understanding changes if culture is treated *as a verb* instead, making it an active process (Piller 2017: 9, Sarangi 2009: 87). For example, Street argued that “culture is a verb” because “culture is an active process of meaning making and contest over definition, including its own definition” (1993: 25, as quoted in Piller 2017: 9 and in Sarangi 2009: 25). This second perspective changes the status of culture from an entity to a process and is also constructionist: culture is viewed as something people do, perform, or compete over.

Notably, these conflicting understandings have hindered productive dialogue in the field (Piller 2017: 9). Other related problems concern culture in communication or essentialism and the reification of national and ethnic identity as culture. Whatever definition is adopted in the field, there is still difficulty to demonstrate how culture is expressed in communication or how communication is bound by culture. Inevitably,

culture and communication are not separate entities but an integral part of the other. If these two concepts are separated, it would indicate that some forms of communication could be culture-free, contradicting the thought that culture exists within the use of language (Hinnenkamp 2009: 188). Some suggested solutions have been to argue that all communication is intercultural and to develop understanding and theories that make culture manageable to empirical analysis (Piller 2012: 7).

2.2 Intercultural Communication

The following part of Chapter 2 aims to introduce the definition of intercultural communication (IC) and discuss what makes communication intercultural. Additionally, the field of IC studies is reviewed and some key topics within it, such as intercultural encounters, cultural difference, miscommunication, who is an intercultural communicator, what is the role of culture in communication, and what sorts of issues cultural differences can create for communication.

2.2.1 Defining Intercultural Communication

Various terms are in use to refer to communication across cultures, and they are not always used consistently (Piller 2017); therefore, it is necessary to briefly define what these concepts stand for. To begin with, the term *communication* is used to refer to social interaction with exchange of messages and the creation of meaning between individuals. It can also refer to messages developed and delivered in an interactional moment (Neville and Rendle-Short 2009: 87, McDaniel, Samovar & Porter 2012: 8). Second, *international communication* is used when referring to mediated communication between and among countries and to the comparative mass communication systems and communication between national governments. Third, *global communication* is used in the context of transborder transfer of information, data, opinions, and values held by groups and governments, and issues arising from these transfers. Fourth, the terms *interracial* and *interethnic communication* are used to describe how race or ethnicity influence discourse processes (Gudykunst 2003: 163). Fifth, *cross-cultural communication* is used to refer to distinct cultural groups and their communicative practices. And finally, the term *intercultural communication* similarly refers to distinct cultural groups and their communicative practices but focuses on them in interaction with each other (e.g., Piller 2017: 4, Baker 2015: 21-22). For the purposes of this research, the focus will only be on IC, which is reviewed in more detail below.

Similarly to culture, a fixed definition for IC does not exist (Baker 2015: 17); however, it is mainly classified as encounters and interaction where people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interact with each other (Sarangi 2009: 98, Dervin 2016). Therefore, one way to classify IC is to observe who is communicating with whom and in what language, which the following three example definitions from Byram (1997: 22) demonstrate: “1) between people of different languages and countries where one is a native speaker of the language used; 2) between people of different languages and countries where the language used is a lingua franca; and 3) between people of the same country but different languages, one of whom is a native speaker of the language used”. Intercultural encounters, thus in more detail, are occasions where one attempts to exchange information, ideas, or feelings with someone from a culture different from their own (McDaniel & Samovar 2015: 7). One important feature of such encounters is that the perceived cultural difference between the individuals impacts the communication in a way that would not have been significant in the absence of these differences (Arasaratnam 2014: 1).

Another definition describes IC essentially as concerned with how individuals negotiate cultural or linguistic differences, which may be perceived relevant by at least one party, to achieve their communication goals (Zhu 2014: 200; as referred by Baker 2015: 23). This view highlights the importance of interaction and negotiation and adds the component of subjectivity to relating the participants’ perceptions of cultural and linguistic differences. The differences and different expectations about how a specific interaction should proceed can lead to miscommunication and cause conflict between the communicators (Triandis 2012: 34, Baker 2015: 16). It is assumed that intercultural encounters demand extra effort from the participants in making themselves understood, for example, due to them not having fixed communicative practices in the context of IC (Hinnenkamp 2009: 187, Baker 2015: 16). One of the main causes for misunderstandings in these cases is *contextualization cues* (e.g., Gumperz work from 1982, referred to in Piller 2012, Chapter 5): individuals tend to assume that signals such as a smile are universal, but they are not. Since intercultural encounters are conducted in a specific language, the participants often have unequal language proficiency levels (Piller 2012). For these reasons, misunderstandings have the potential to cause additional discrimination and disadvantages, for example, in employment, health, and civil rights (Hinnenkamp 2009: 188).

Cultural and linguistic contact has always been a part of the human experience (Piller 2017), making IC not a recent phenomenon. The roots of the concept are in the evolutionary differentiation of cultures and languages: it started with people regarding other individuals and groups as different (Hinnenkamp 2009: 185). Accordingly in IC, the *inter* refers to interaction between assumed different cultural groups (Baker 2015: 24). *Cultures* are not seen as limited entities with national borders, but as

dynamic and fluid with blurred boundaries, and they are understood to be heterogeneous and contain variety among their members. The discourse communities which can be drawn upon in the *communication* aspect of the concept include national cultures, gender, generation, ethnicity, etc. (Baker 2015: 20, 22). Altogether, IC encompasses the confrontation of one language-culture link with another. This leads us to how IC is viewed in the present study: people dealing with culture in communication, i.e., individuals from distinct groups meeting, talking, having struggles, and conflicts in face-to-face interaction (Hinnenkamp 2009: 186).

The terminology in IC has been under critique to build deeper and more complex understandings of how intercultural communication functions. For example, Baker (2015) presents critique on the terms *inter* and *culture*. On one hand, the first can be problematic because it suggests that IC is between cultures; hence, it implies that cultures have set borders and that IC occurs while the cultures remain separate. This division between different cultures is referred to as the *intercultural line* in research (see e.g., Holliday 2011, Chapter 7). On the other hand, culture has been criticized to be too broad a concept. For that reason, the importance of other discourse communities, such as gender, profession, or generation, have been questioned, as they might be even more influential than culture (Scollon and Scollon 2011, in Baker 2015: 24). This criticism brings out important issues related to the terminology of the field of IC; however, it is as important to recognize that these debates often obscure more crucial issues regarding the notion of cultures that these terms assume. Culture is therefore something that cannot be dodged by replacing it with another term (Baker 2015: 25).

A competent intercultural communicator has been described as someone who is conversant in steering communication in intercultural spaces (Arasaratnam 2014: 1), effective in their ability to achieve goals, and/or appropriate in their ability to display acceptable and expected behavior in a given situation (Arasaratnam 2009). Together, effectiveness and appropriateness influence the quality of the interaction, and they can be used as the criteria to evaluate communication success. When interacting on an intercultural level, communicators can be considered competent when they are coordinating their verbal and non-verbal behaviors to achieve social functions, meet their personal goals, or adapt to the normative dimensions of the situations (Romanowski 2017: 62).

2.2.2 Development of the field

The discussions around culture, cultural difference, and IC first started to appear in the 19th and 20th century as part of the process of colonialism (Piller 2011: 19). Such discourse highlighted difference, otherness, and cultural superiority, which have remained present in most discussions around IC in the 21st century too (Baker 2015:

18). In English, people started to talk about IC in the late 1930s and early 1940s. For example, the first entry related to IC can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary in a 1937 article under the name *Intercultural Contacts*. In the following two decades, an early applied focus of interest for IC can be detected, as it is discussed by anthropologists in growing numbers. Another influential factor that affected the foundational assumptions of this new discipline in the 1940s and 1950s is a connection between early IC scholarships and the US military and diplomacy (Piller 2011: 32). More specifically, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the US Department of State has been identified as the origins of IC studies (see e.g., Leeds-Hurwitz 1990). In addition, books that cover IC first started to appear in the 1940s, and after 1959, they started to grow exponentially in numbers (see e.g., Piller 2017, Chapter 3).

Over the past decades, the field of IC has increased in popularity, and many different fields of research have contributed to it. For example, anthropology, business studies, communication, cultural studies, education, linguistics, management studies, pragmatics, psychology, and sociology (Piller 2017, Baker 2015, Hinnenkamp 2009) have all covered topics that go under the field of IC. The term IC has thereby been used for a number of theoretical, professional, and empirical concerns (Baker 2015: 17). In some sources, the field of IC is portrayed as interdisciplinary in nature (e.g., Baker 2015) due to the variety of disciplines that cooperate; however, other sources regard it only as multidisciplinary (e.g., Piller 2017). For that reason, it is important to note that these separate research fields do not necessarily always interact with each other, and there can be a lack of interdisciplinary research with some topics. This collaborative nature of the field is one of its strengths but not completely free of problems either: it can cause potential tension between the theoretical and practical aims within the field (Baker 2015: 18). Additionally, this can be seen as evidence of the absence of conceptual cohesion, although at the same time, it can represent evidence of overlapping concerns in contemporary social life which are investigated through the frame of IC (ibid. 2015: 17).

The field started to develop into its multidisciplinary nature mainly in the 1960s North America. The first attempt to extent contrastive linguistics to contrastive culture analysis was made by Robert Lado in 1957 (cited in Hinnenkamp 2009: 186). Around the same time, Edward Hall, a pioneer in the field who also worked for the FSI, published his first works that are now considered classics in the field (Piller 2011: 31). Other causes that sparked the growing interest towards IC can be traced directly, for example, to the American immigrant society, the Civil Rights Movement, and the New Ethnicity of African Americans and other largely non-white ethnic groups (Hinnenkamp 2009: 186). Europe followed in this development a couple of decades later in the 1970s and 1980s. Urban multiculturalism was conceptually non-existent before that, although immigration from colonial and postcolonial countries and labor-based

migration from Southern Europe to Western Europe caused a linguacultural challenge already in the 50's. These ethnic minorities were beginning to be acknowledged only when societies became aware of the multicultural reality that the refugees and immigrants had created as an established part of the population (Hinnenkamp 2009: 187).

IC studies expanded from the previously dominant military and religious contexts to business studies in the 1970s; thus, interest in IC started to become widespread during a time when there was a growing awareness and interest of international relationships. However, unlike in the 19th century, the international world was no longer inherently inferior due to decolonization, scientific and technological successes of the Soviet Union, and the economic successes of Germany, Japan, and other Asian nations. Thereby, the increase of discourse around IC coincides with the rise of a US perception of the world regarding international competition and threat (Piller 2011: 33). Additionally, this is also when globalization becomes a widely used term.

In the 21st century, the field of IC studies is vibrant and growing in popularity, as globalization sweeps the world. The pioneers and researchers of the field have investigated a range of topics with different approaches to culture and communication (for an overview, cf. Piller 2017), and there is a variety of discourses about culture and cultural difference (Piller 2012). Accordingly, one of the main questions in the field is "Who makes culture relevant to whom in which context for which purposes?" (Piller 2017). More specifically stated, research most often revolve around issues of language, culture, and communication, identity, representation, or otherization, exclusion, social justice, and multilingualism or -culturalism (see e.g., Piller 2017, Samovar, Porter and McDaniel 2012, Holliday 2011, Holliday, Hyde and Kullman 2004). From the perspective of linguistics, influential perspectives on IC research have been language education, intercultural pragmatics, and discourse analysis (Baker 2015: 19, Hinnenkamp 2009: 186). Intercultural pragmatics has focused on issues around cultural or linguacultural difference, power, and prejudice, and their relationship to miscommunication. More concrete examples of these are speech acts, negotiation of differences, and politeness (Baker 2015: 19, Hinnenkamp 2009: 188).

The research foci discussed above form a major part of contemporary discourse in IC, but in the last decades, they have been problematized and critiqued increasingly (Baker 2015: 19). The context in which these topics are explored are mainly encounters between individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds (Sarangi 2009: 99), and they are more likely to be used in studies focused on communication in which cultural difference is made relevant to and by the participants (Piller 2017: 5). For this reason, Piller (2017) for example argues that for IC studies to be socially relevant and meaningful research, they need to avoid a priori definitions of culture. This is also one of the reasons why culture as a concept is covered in such detail within this study (see Section 2.1 for more).

2.3 Communication, Culture, and Language

The purpose of this section is to move the focus from IC to intercultural communicative competence (ICC). It will be done by exploring and defining the main competences that play a part in forming ICC. In addition, key concepts related to this competence will be defined. The context language that this study focuses on is English, and therefore these competences are discussed in a foreign language context, more specifically English as a lingua franca (ELF). Hence, the aim of this section is to explore how different levels of competence in language, communication, and intercultural skills influence one's capabilities as an intercultural communicator, i.e., their intercultural communicative competence.

2.3.1 Intercultural Communicative Competence

2.3.1.1 Linguistic competence

The concept of *linguistic competence* originated in the 1960s when Noam Chomsky introduced it to demonstrate the relationship between the linguistic knowledge of fluent speakers of a language and their actual comprehension and production of speech. In this context, competence indicates an ideal speaker's knowledge of a system that underlies the actual performance (Chomsky 1965: 113, in Romanowski 2017: 49). In more detail, linguistic competence is 1) the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances which are made in conformity with the rules of the language in question, and 2) the ability to utilize knowledge of the rules of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written forms of it (Byram 1997: 48). Thereby, when it comes to language, linguistic competence covers vocabulary, grammar rules, and all other components in the process of using language by an ideal speaker (Romanowski 2017: 49). It is thus the system of linguistic knowledge that a speaker has and how effectively they use it. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that the context of communication must be considered, as it affects the communicative values of language and is partly responsible for its efficient use. However, from the perspective of language teaching methodology, linguistic competence can be seen as a learning outcome or a goal. In that case, it can be defined in terms of standards or objectives, which do not refer to actual interactions and are free of context (Romanowski 2017: 50).

2.3.1.2 Communicative competence

The term *communicative competence* also originated in the 1960s when the concepts of competence and performance were sought to be combined with relation to

understanding language acquisition (Boye 2016: 30). It is best understood when communication is seen as a series of communicative behaviors demonstrated appropriately by interlocutors (Romanowski 2017: 55). In general, communicative competence comprises grammatical and social knowledge of a language user about how and when to use utterances properly, i.e., it is communication behavior that is effective and appropriate (Arasaratnam 2009). Similarly, Romanowski (2017: 55) discusses this competence as “the ability of an individual to demonstrate knowledge of the appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation”. This knowledge includes phonology, semantics, syntax, and lexis, and different socio-cultural, discourse, and situational features. The importance of each factor is relative and changes depending on the context of the communication act (Romanowski 2017: 53).

In more detail, communicative competence is a situational ability to set appropriate and realistic goals and to maximize one’s success by utilizing knowledge of self, other, context, and communication theory to be adaptive during communication performances (Romanowski 2017: 56). Therefore, a competent communicator is effective in their ability to achieve goals and appropriate in their ability to express acceptable and expected behavior depending on the context (Arasaratnam 2009). Moreover, there are at least two different types of competent communicators: one embraces performed behaviors and the other identifies whether a behavior performed by others is appropriate or inappropriate during a communication act (Romanowski 2017: 55). This kind of behavior is dependent on the cultural and relational context of the interaction, meaning that these factors must be considered when applying the definition of communicative competence into intercultural contexts (Arasaratnam 2009, Romanowski 2017: 55). Consequently, someone who is considered a successful communicator in one situation is not necessarily perceived as competent in a different situation or with a different group of people.

2.3.1.3 Intercultural competence

For intercultural communicative competence to be defined effectively, it is essential to understand the concept of *intercultural competence* first. As a term, it is used more extensively in fields outside language education, and as a result, there has been a challenge to find mutual agreement on its definition (Boye 2016: 27). The use of intercultural competence and other related terms often intersect because they are not used consistently by the authors in the field (Dervin 2010: 158, in Boye 2016: 28). Therefore, it has been suggested that these concepts are seen in terms of their usage (Boye 2016: 28). Generally, intercultural competence does not automatically indicate that a foreign language is used but indicates the ability to build successful relationships with cultural others (ibid. 2016: 27). In the Routledge encyclopedia of language teaching and

learning, intercultural competence is discussed accordingly as “the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognize as being different from our own” (Guilherme 2004: 297). It can also be understood as the values, skills, attitudes, knowledge, and critical understanding that equip us to effectively take part in our diverse societies (Dervin 2016).

Other broader definitions also focus on the idea of effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural encounters. For example, Arasaratnam (2014: 1) presents the following definition by Spitzberg and Chagnon (2011: 7): “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent cognitive, affective, and behavioral orientations to the world”. In this context, *effective* can be understood as achieving a desired outcome and *appropriate* as being able to meet contextual and relational standards (Guilherme 2004: 298). However, this idea can be misleading since the true argument in defining intercultural competence becomes apparent in the way the concepts *intercultural* and *culture* are understood (Boye 2016: 28). On that account, intercultural competence can be viewed as a competence that is needed for successful communication between interlocutors who do not share a native language, most often that language being ELF. In these situations, the use of foreign language adds an extra dimension to the interaction (ibid. 2016: 30).

Intercultural competence consists of a list of objectives and core competences. These main objectives are attitude, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness (cf. Byram 1997: 56-63). They are most likely acquired in a classroom, fieldwork, or independent learning contexts (Byram 1997: 64). The core competences can be related to the objectives; however, research has identified up to 20 of them: e.g., responsibility, listening skills, tolerance, empathy, and conflict resolution (cf. Dervin 2016). It is important to note that the suggested core competences can be criticized for their underlying polysemy and Eurocentric values. In the past, intercultural competence has been treated as a neutral transactional encounter, dismissing the reality that it contributes to differential treatment of people, unbalanced power relations, and different kinds of -ism such as culturalism and racism (Dervin 2016).

2.3.1.4 Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)

- (2) “A knowledge of intercultural communication, and the ability to use it effectively, can help bridge cultural differences, mitigate problems, and assist in achieving more harmonious, productive relations.” (McDaniel, Samovar & Porter, 2012: 8)

As some of the other concepts discussed earlier in this section, one clear definition for *intercultural communicative competence* (ICC) has not been established in literature. It

was also first introduced in the 1960s by Peace Corps volunteers and researchers interested in overseas technical assistants (Gardner 1962, in Romanowski 2017: 61). Since then, it has been referred to, for example, as *intercultural communication effectiveness* (Arasaratnam 2014: 1), *cross-cultural adjustment*, *intercultural understanding*, and *cross-cultural effectiveness*, and it has been the central interest in a variety of studies from culture shock and immigrant acculturation to international management and social change (Romanowski 2017: 61). Another term that has been used interchangeably with ICC is *intercultural communication competence*, though there is a distinction between the two. Intercultural *communicative* competence is focused on the topic within foreign language education, whereas *intercultural communication* competence focuses on it in intercultural communication training and thus from the perspective of communication studies (Guo 2010: 28, in Boye 2016: 33). During the last two decades, however, there has been a rising consensus on how to define ICC (Romanowski 2017: 61). Hereby, this section will discuss the understanding of the concept and tie it to the context of the present study.

Originally, Byram (1997) introduced the notion of ICC and further developed that of the intercultural speaker, both derived from his work for the Council of Europe. To create ICC, he (Byram) combined intercultural competence and communicative competence together, which has since had an immense influence on the field of foreign language education and become an important goal of foreign language teaching and learning (Boye 2016: 27). Other partial competences which create ICC are linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence (Byram 1997). The communicative element of ICC is generally understood as the connection through which intercultural competence can be put into action and interaction. It relates particularly to the use of a foreign language and the opportunities that learning a foreign language creates for developing intercultural competence (Boye 2016: 27-28).

Overall, ICC refers to the dynamic interaction of different attitudes, skills, motivation, and knowledge which influence individuals' effective and appropriate communication acts with members of different cultures in a foreign language (Boye 2016: 27, Romanowski 2017: 61-62). Hence, ICC takes place with an interlocutor who has perceived a different set of cultural patterns of interpretation, as experiences by the individual (Boye 2016: 70). It requires the use of proper language and actions that meet the expectations of the intercultural communicators in a culture-specific situation, meaning that an effective intercultural communicator must avoid improper behaviors (e.g., abrasive, unusual, impolite) and enact communication in an appropriate manner (e.g., responsive, clear, considerate) (Romanowski 2017: 62). These discussed definitions and aspects express how the relevance of ICC is situated in the presence of notable differences between people and the extent to which they can effectively and appropriately engage with these communicative differences (Arasaratnam 2014: 1).

Derived from that, success in IC requires understanding the skills that are needed and becoming proficient using them. Such skills are, for example, managing anxiety, being mindful, adapting one's behavior, empathizing, and making predictions about and explaining others' behavior (cf. Romanowski 2017: 38-39), which also constitute the central components of ICC (ibid. 2017: 69).

Another important element of ICC is intercultural sensitivity. It can be understood as the ability to be aware of distinct cultures and to detect and accept the differences stemming from them (Chen & Starosta 2000: 155, in Romanowski 2017: 66-67). This ability generally embraces the emotional desire to acknowledge, accept, and appreciate cultural differences, their several perspectives, their recognition of their own cultural values and those of others, and their empathy and ability to adjust to diverse ways of communication (Chen & Starosta 2000: 155, in Romanowski 2017: 67). Thus, if individuals are taught how to confront cultural differences, they are likely to become more sensitive to them and be able to predict some of them. This sensitivity helps to reduce misunderstandings and failures (Bennet 1993, in Romanowski 2017: 66), which is why intercultural sensitivity plays a crucial role in accounting for success in intercultural encounters.

A significant amount of acquisition around ICC takes place within educational settings (Byram 1997: 43); therefore, foreign language teaching (FLT) too plays a crucial role in creating successful intercultural communicators. FLT has a responsibility to develop students' critical awareness about the values and significance of diverse cultural practices in other cultures and thus awaken awareness of one's own culture. Hence, FLT is ideally used to attain competence in IC through learning a language and its relation to cultural identities and practices that interlocutors bring to an interaction (Byram 1997: 46). Techniques that can be used to acquire intercultural skills in authentic and active ways in a classroom setting include e.g., simulation games, case studies, critical incidents, role plays, and culture assimilators (cf. Romanowski 2017: 96-115 for a comprehensive description). These methods enable students to gain experience about the challenges and opportunities of IC and build their ICC as they engage in a safe environment.

2.3.2 Intercultural Communication and English as a Lingua Franca

When we consider IC and look at some of its definitions, we can see that the chosen language of communication plays a crucial role in intercultural interaction (Section 2.2). This is where English as a lingua franca (ELF) comes into play, as it functions as the most common means for IC in our globalized world (Baker 2015: 6-7, Jenkins 2010, Seidlhofer 2013). On a general level, current research understands ELF as the use of English as a common tool for communication between people from different language

backgrounds (cf. Breiteneder 2009, Seidlhofer 2013, or Baker 2015). One other comprehensive definition is by the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE 2021) website. It adds one aspect to the general definitions, as it sees ELF as a language system that has been acquired additionally, and which serves as a common medium of communication for speakers of distinct first languages.

As seen above, modern day ELF includes all the speakers or users of the language; however, this was not the case a few decades ago. Older definitions used to exclude native English speakers from ELF (Seidlhofer 2013, Baker 2015). For example, the following two definitions from the 90s are discussed in Seidlhofer (2013): 1) First (1996: 240) saw ELF as a contact language between people who do not share a first language nor a (national) culture, and for whom English functions as the chosen foreign language of communication; and 2) House (1999: 74) defined ELF as interaction in English between people from two or more different linguacultures for whom English is not the first language. On that account, Seidlhofer's present day definition, and the definitions discussed previously, view ELF as any use of English between speakers of separate first languages for whom English functions as the communicative medium of choice, and many a time, the only option. Therefore, the present-day understanding does not leave any groups of people outside ELF based on their language background.

Nowadays, ELF has more non-native speakers than native English speakers (Baker 2015: 6), which impacts the way the language is developed and influenced. This change in dynamics is what has caused the language to adapt to new environments, as it has come across other languages and cultures, by implementing new forms and functions. Therefore, it can now be classified as its own variety of English that is different from the native ways of speaking (e.g., Breiteneder 2009, Jenkins 2010, Seidlhofer 2013, Baker 2015). Consequently, the native speakers are presumed to use this variety of English like the non-native speakers do. Hence, ELF has become a form of English that the native speakers too need to acquire to be able to communicate effectively in ELF settings. Before this, the native speakers were in the role of a norm provider for all other speakers (Jenkins 2010: 928, Seidlhofer 2013).

The international aspect of ELF is therefore effectively captured in its definitions and in the field of ELF research. Baker also notes this clear correlation between the two by concluding that "ELF is by definition intercultural in nature since ELF communication is typically defined as involving speakers from different linguacultures" (2015: 43). Moreover, it is important to note that in these multilingual scenarios where ELF is used, other languages can potentially be used a similar way. So, what makes ELF research important is the extent to which ELF takes place in comparison to other languages (ibid. 2015: 8). If we observe the fields of IC and ELF, we can notice three themes with points of convergence that have the potential to inform one another.

These are the concepts of culture, identity, and successful communication, or more specifically, intercultural communicative competence (ibid. 2015: 44).

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, the present study will be introduced in detail. First, it discusses the aims and research questions. Second, an overview of the participants and some background for why this target group was chosen are presented. Lastly, the data collection method and the method of analysis are described in detail.

3.1 Aims and research questions

The first aim of this study is to assess how the target group, graduated English language students, understand and view the concept of intercultural communication. The other aim is to investigate what factors have influenced the development of the target group's intercultural communicative competence (ICC) during their years of studying at their university. Based on these aims, the following research questions can be drawn:

1. How do the participants understand intercultural communication?
2. What factors have influenced the development of the participants' intercultural communicative competence during the time they have studied for their degree?

Besides the research questions' individual aims, they help to grasp how well the target group's study program has considered interculturality and the rising importance of intercultural communication in professional life. These both are factors that are increasingly visible and evident in the professional environment the participants enter as English language experts.

3.2 Participants

For the purpose of this study, four participants between the ages of 25 and 28 were interviewed. The participants had started their studies either in September 2015 or 2016, and they graduated five to seven years after the beginning of their studies. The participants were chosen based on the following criteria: 1) has graduated after spring 2021, and 2) studied English as a major at the university. All the participants were approached in person or over a text message and asked to take part in the study.

English language graduates were chosen as the target group for the following reasons. First, English language has a global status as our lingua franca, and most intercultural encounters in our lives use it as the medium of communication. Second, it can be assumed that this group is generally proficient and accustomed to using English; therefore, their level of ICC is not negatively impacted by their proficiency in English. This is an important factor for the research, as it helps to minimize possible negative effects that language proficiency may cause for intercultural communication (Piller 2012). Third, recently graduated students have reached the “peak” level of knowledge that their degrees offer them, and it has not yet been too long for them to have forgotten their experiences as students. This target group has also had time to improve their IC skills and gain experience, which is why they were chosen over less experienced students of the same field, for example. Lastly, in our globalized and interconnected world, the target group will most likely need IC and competence in it in their future careers; therefore, it is current to assess their understanding of it and how their studies have prepared them in this aspect.

All the participants were familiar with the researcher from before. This was seen to affect the interview setting in a positive way and helped to create good *rapport* in the interview situation. According to Keats (1999: 23), *rapport* refers to the “comfortable, cooperative relationship between two people in which there are maintained both feelings of satisfaction and an empathetic understanding of each other’s position”. In other words, there is a feeling of acceptance and lack of aggression together with favorable attributions and evaluations between the interviewer and the interviewee. This contributes to the interviewee feeling more comfortable sharing their experiences and not keeping some information private. Moreover, being familiar with the participants assisted the researcher during the interviews to help the participants find suitable intercultural experiences to share.

3.3 Data collection

The data for this research was qualitative in nature, and it was collected with semi-structured theme interviews. To answer the set research questions, qualitative research was chosen for the purposes of this study, since in general, it allows the researcher to gain a richer understanding of a certain theme and to seek data that is based on perceptions or personal experience of the research topic (Stake 2010: 88, Valli, Aaltola, and Herkama 2018). Interviewing was chosen as the method for data collection, as it enables the researcher to collect information or interpretation held by the participant (Stake 2010: 95). It is a useful tool to find out more about the researched topic by collecting the experiences, understandings, thoughts, or feelings of the interviewee (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000: 41, Kalaja et al. 2011), as it is customized and often conversational in nature.

More specifically, the data collection was done with semi-structured theme interviews. This is an interview method where the researcher wants to discuss certain predefined themes with the participants but where the order in which the themes are covered, and the formulation of questions, can change from one interview to another. Thus, the semi-structured method permits a certain open-endedness and the researcher to be more flexible in the interview situation, i.e., they can make clarifying questions to refine and deepen the understanding of the responses (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018: 87-88, Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000: 47-48). With the theme part of the method, it is indicated that the interview is focused on specific themes to discuss. It is used to find out more about the basic nature and qualities of the research topic and the interviewees' subjective experiences about a concept that the researcher has explored in advance (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000). The terms semi-structured interview and theme interview are often used interchangeably, and they refer to a more-or-less similar type of interview (c.f. *ibid.* 2000, Section 4.2.3).

The interviews were organized mid-October in 2022, four months to one and a half years after the participants had graduated. Three of the interviews were conducted in-person and one remotely over Zoom. Each interview took place in a peaceful one-on-one setting to remove outside disturbances and to make interaction easier. The lengths of the interviews varied between 36 and 43 minutes, and they all were recorded. The interview questions were designed to identify 1) how the participants already understand IC, and 2) how supportive they view their studies to the development of their intercultural communicative competence. Previous research focusing on these similar themes were used as a basis when designing the interview questions and as a guiding tool for the analysis (in Chapter 4). A pilot was organized with one participant earlier in the same month. The pilot was 29 minutes long and it was conducted with an English language major student from the same university as the participants.

The structure of the interview stayed the same after the pilot, and only some slight modifications were made to how the researcher should approach the themes with clarifying questions.

Research ethics were considered in the following ways during the conduction of this research. Before the interviews, the participants received a research notification and a data privacy notification, and they signed a consent form that stated the purpose of this study, the researcher's information, and how the collected data will be handled. The interviews were anonymous, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym. All the interviews were recorded and roughly transcribed, after which the recordings were deleted. Once the data had been coded and analyzed, the transcripts were also deleted except for the quotes used in the final text.

3.4 Method of analysis

As mentioned above, the interview data was collected through semi-structured theme interviews. A qualitative research approach supported the aims of the study by allowing it to identify central categories from the data which could later be used as a basis for the analysis (Valli, Aaltola, and Herkama 2018). The chosen method of analysis was data-based qualitative content analysis, or more specifically thematic analysis, which can be seen as a parallel form of the previous method. Thematic analysis was chosen as the primary tool for analysis, as it is a flexible approach that can be used to examine written, observed, or heard data (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, Braun and Clarke 2006). Therefore, it can be applied to identify, analyze, and describe patterns or themes within the participants' perceptions and experiences (Braun and Clarke 2006: 79). Additionally, it offers a comprehensive and nuanced account of specific themes or groups of themes inside the data (ibid. 2006: 83).

The analysis stage adopted Braun & Clarke's model *Phases of Thematic analysis* (2006: 87), where a researcher begins by familiarizing themselves with the data. This includes transcribing, which was done for the purpose of this study. Secondly, primary codes are created by marking interesting features and collating relevant data to each code. Thirdly, the researcher looks for themes in the data by assembling the codes into potential themes. In the fourth phase of the analysis, the identified themes are reviewed in relation to the coded extracts and the whole data set. A thematic map can also be created. Finally, before producing the final report and analysis, the themes are defined and named.

To describe how the previous model was implemented in more detail in this study, the transcribed data was divided into two sections based on the research questions,

then divided further based on the structure of the interview, and finally it was initially coded by the researcher. Then, the data from each section was reduced and organized to a separate file containing only relevant interview extracts. This was followed by clustering and finding common themes from the initial codes, for example, by creating a mind map for each category. This helped to pinpoint the correlation between each created theme and category in connection to each other and the research questions. These themes and sub-themes created by the data reduction and clustering can be found in Table 1 in Chapter 4. In total, the process created eight main themes and twenty sub-themes under the two research questions. Accordingly, the analysis is presented in the next chapter, and it is structured around the identified themes. Their correlation to the research questions is then recapitulated in Chapter 5.

4 FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings from the interview data are presented. As explained in the previous section, the data was first divided into two main sections based on the research questions and then into three based on the structure of the interview. A total of eight main themes consisting of 21 sub-themes were created under the research foci as the data was being analyzed. Main themes 1-6 are related to the first research question and main themes 7 and 8 to the second one. The following chapter has been structured around these main themes and divided according to their sub-themes. The first section (4.1) examines how the participants view and understand intercultural communication based on their already existing knowledge, experiences, and beliefs, i.e., how they generally perceive IC as a phenomenon. The second section (4.2) provides insight into what factors in their studies the participants think contributed to the development of their ICC.

TABLE 1 Research foci, their main themes, and sub-themes.

Research focus	Themes	Sub-themes
Understanding of intercultural communication	1. Language 2. Interaction 3. Culture 4. Internationality	1.1 Multilingualism 1.2 Shared understanding of language 1.3 Language background 2.1 Shared understanding 2.2 Quality of interaction 3.1 Cultures 3.2 Cultural differences 3.3. Cultural knowledge 4.1 Contexts for IC

Defining intercultural communication	5. Communication 6. Goals and skills	5.1 Means of communication 5.2 Who is communicating 5.3 Background of communicators 6.1 Shared understanding 6.2 Effectiveness 6.3 Utilizing knowledge
Influence of studies on the development of intercultural communicative competence	7. Practical aspects (Supportive factors) 8. Lack of practicality (Unsupportive factors)	7.1 Courses 7.2 Spending time abroad 7.3 Social life 8.1 Courses 8.2 Lack of practical challenges 8.3 Covid restrictions

4.1 Views on intercultural communication

In this section, the participants' general views on and understanding of IC are presented. Firstly, they were asked to describe freely what comes to mind about IC, and secondly, to come up with a definition of their own. The purpose of the first section is to assess e.g., what types of situations the participants view as IC, who takes part in it, what factors are important between the communicators, and what skills does an intercultural communicator need. The second section aims to refine these views and understandings with the help of the concise definitions from the participants. Together from these two sections, we can get a more comprehensive picture about the participants' understanding of IC.

4.1.1 Language, interaction, and culture constructing intercultural communication

For this section, the focus of analysis was on what the participants understand as IC. In total, four main themes were identified in the data, out of which language, interaction, and culture were the most prominent ones. They were present in each interview, and their sub-categories are somewhat interrelated. The fourth and last main theme was internationality, which was less prominent since it was not directly present in all the conducted interviews. Each of these four themes and their findings are presented in detail below.

Language. Three of the four participants began their descriptions with a language-related topic. These were further connected to multilingualism, a shared understanding of a language, and language background. In extract 3, Evan discusses the role of

languages in IC and raises an interesting point, linking IC with language and multilingualism in a fundamental way. Also in extract 4, Lucy describes the multilingual nature of IC, even though she does not directly name it.

- (3) Evan: Communication of course takes place through languages, so maybe when we talk about IC, we may often talk about multilingualism too. And that we know how to for example use several languages to be able to participate in intercultural communication.
- (4) Lucy: Well mostly what comes to mind is maybe a shared understanding of language and like people who have different first languages and their mutual understanding in the chosen common language that is being used to communicate.

From these extracts, we can clearly grasp the importance of knowing different languages in intercultural encounters. This also comes across from Byram's definition (1997: 22) in Section 2.2.1, where the three different types of IC are presented. They all have one commonality: they take place between people of different languages, as Lucy also stated. Consequently, to participate in IC, we are most often required to know and be able to use at least one language in addition to our first. Along with the discussed extracts, Evan mentioned the Multilingual Intercultural Communication Competence (MICC) model during his interview (cf. Monikielisen akateemisen viestinnän keskus Movi). He specified that our attitudes, motivation, knowledge, and skills are of impact since we need to know how to apply them in different multilingual conversation settings. This can be directly tied to Boye (2016) and Romanowski's (2017) discussion about the influence of the said aspect on an individual's effectiveness and appropriateness in communicating with members of different cultures in a foreign language (see Section 2.3.1.4).

Extract 5 below also relates to using one's linguistic repertoire but pays more attention to a shared understanding between communicators. All in all, this aspect was present in three of the interviews, making it one of the main features that the participants brought up.

- (5) Evan: You can use your linguistic and maybe non-linguistic resources too to make yourself understood and to convey messages successfully for example between different languages or by using a language that is not the first language of the people in the interaction.

Here Evan pointed out using one's skills, linguistic and non-linguistic resources, to be a successful communicator. This goes according to the MICC model and what Arasaratnam (2014), Boye (2016), and Romanowski (2017), for example, discuss in relation to ICC: to be an effective intercultural communicator, one must use proper language in a culture-specific situation (cf. Section 2.3.1.4). Moreover, we can look at extract 4 again, where Lucy discussed the shared understanding of language and the mutual understanding between interlocutors in the language used to communicate. While her description stated the context in which IC takes place, it also voiced well what we can

perceive as the primary goal of IC: to achieve mutual understanding through language and interaction in a multilingual setting.

Another language related aspect in IC that was identified in the data is language background. As can be seen in extract 6, Alice talks about how language background and possible language barriers can impact the quality of interaction.

- (6) Alice: Language and language background are also kinda organically related, who is present in the interaction, so if there is a language barrier, or if in the setting, one is a native speaker and the other isn't. So, I think this has a defining effect on the quality of the interaction too.

She discussed who is present and how the linguistic abilities of the people, such as being a native or non-native speaker, can change the quality of interaction. These issues relate to the linguistic competence aspect of ICC (Section 2.3.1.1) and power structures, out of which the latter is covered later under *Interaction*. Since communicators often do not use their first language in IC settings, one or more of them not having a necessary level of language proficiency can lead to miscommunication and cause conflict (e.g., Baker 2015). Consequently, this linguistic aspect is not the only one that the participants need to negotiate in IC: they also must pay attention to perceived cultural differences (see Section 2.2.1 for more). Thus, IC can demand additional effort from the participants when there are differences or imbalance between language proficiency levels.

Interaction. This category intertwined the most with the previous one; hence, some topics are discussed under both sections. The following interaction related factors were detected in the data: shared understanding and quality of interaction. Extract 7 is by the one participant who began to describe IC in relation to interaction instead of language.

- (7) Alice: Well probably like interaction and exchange of thoughts and cooperation between people who come from different cultural areas. And like becoming understood, or maybe that would also be one of the goals for functional intercultural interaction. And then what comes to mind is this interest and curiosity and respect and appreciation that extends both ways.

Alice considered IC as reciprocal interaction between people from different cultural areas where one becomes understood. Hence, we can tie what extract 5 discussed about the shared understanding and being able to convey messages successfully to the theme interaction as well. In a similar way that the participants' linguistic and non-linguistic resources and the chosen shared language of the interaction are related to the language theme, they also play a role in how successfully we can convey messages in IC.

We can also go back to extract 4 and note that Alice mentioned the quality of interaction. This topic can also be linked to language background, as both interaction

and language background are dependent on who is present, whether the participants are native or non-native speakers, and if there are any language barriers between them. In other words, participants bring their language backgrounds with them, influencing the interaction; however, that is not the only aspect to shape its quality. If we look at the last phrase in extract 7, we can see it suggested that interaction is influenced by the attitudes of the participants. In an ideal situation, all the participants are interested, curious, respectful, and appreciative towards each other and their perceived differences, as Alice described. This influences the quality of the interaction in a positive way, allowing cooperation and the exchange of thoughts to happen in a safe environment. In contrast, if the participants have prejudice against each other, interaction is more likely to lead to miscommunication and conflicts.

Culture. This theme contained factors in connection to cultures, their differences, and cultural knowledge. As discussed in Section 2.1.1, the concept of culture has often been used to divide groups of people (see also Piller 2017, Sarangi 2009). This was also visible in extract 8, where Alma begins by mentioning Western culture and then continues differentiating other cultures and cultural areas.

- (8) Alma: Western culture comes to mind. More exotic cultures come to mind. As cultural areas, Africa and Asia and Latin America, which can be divided much further. And also, their cultural differences and perhaps intercultural conflicts especially.

From her description, it seems that Alma feels a sense of belonging to the Western culture and that she associated culture with a nation. These observations are supported by how she described the other cultures as *more exotic* and how she does not separate Western cultures in the same manner but categorizes them only under one label. As Sarangi (2009: 88, 90) discusses, the cultural other is usually portrayed from the perspective of the observer. When we describe cultures this way, we may further the differences between us and them, and therefore, create cultural otherization. In this context, however, it is hard to say if Alma used the word *exotic* because she is, in fact, unfamiliar with the cultures she refers to, or because she was describing them from a Western point of view, or both.

In extract 9, the participant focuses on the importance of having appropriate cultural knowledge and skills to use it in IC. Thus, he describes IC from the perspective of what a communicator needs to participate successfully in it.

- (9) Evan: Perhaps in such situations, the communicator has to be aware of what is, for example, acceptable or polite in a certain culture and what is not and use their knowledge and skills in that situation depending on the context.

Evan's view goes hand in hand with previous research in the field. For example, Mc Daniel, Samovar & Porter (2012: 11) argue that for an individual to function effectively from culture to culture, they need to be familiar with the rules that each specific

culture holds. In this case, the cultural knowledge functions as a tool that helps us to make sense of our surroundings and reduces the uncertainty in social settings (ibid. 2012: 11). Moreover, Evan later continued to specify that in addition to one's cultural knowledge, attitudes and prejudice can also be an impacting factor for IC. This view is also supported by research, as one's cultural identity can be a notable factor in IC (ibid. 2012: 11-12). Potential prejudice in IC can bring out some exclusionary features of culture, which include stereotyping, assumption making, and racist attitudes (see Section 2.1.1).

The last identified theme, *internationality*, was not as prominent in the data as the three discussed above. This theme brought up factors that can be seen as contexts where IC is needed, which were more specifically related to the global and international aspects of IC. In extracts 8 and 9, Alma and Alice talk about what such contexts can be.

(10)Alma: Then exchange studies and internationalization at home come to mind. [...] Internationality as well.

(11)Alice: In our global world, after all, it is a vital form of interaction when everything is international, everything is global, so it's a very important skill too.

They both pondered about the importance of IC in our global world, exchange studies, and internationalization at home. Alice specifically described and seemed to acknowledge the important role that IC has in our currently globalized world. These all are directly related to the environments and contexts that the participants will be working as they transition from students to employees.

4.1.2 Different elements of communication

After reflecting on IC in a more general manner, the participants were asked to define the concept in their own words. One feature that all the definitions shared was that they indicate that IC takes place between people from different backgrounds, mostly cultural or linguistic, which is also consistent with the results from the last section (4.1.1). The definitions can be divided into two separate groups based on their content. The first paid attention to *communication* and its different *modes or means* and *who is communicating*. Alma and Lucy in extracts 12 and 13 discuss their views on this.

(12)Alma: People from two or more cultures communicating with each other either verbally or I would broadly count in other modes of communication too. Even from clothing [...] since culture is also very strongly expressed through clothes. So yeah, communication between two or more cultures with different means.

(13)Lucy: Interaction between people from different backgrounds and language backgrounds with a shared means of communication, whether it's body language or some electronic device or spoken language or some other mean.

They did not only consider verbal modes or means but some non-verbal ones as well. Alma mentioned clothing as an example of a communication mode and Lucy body language and electronic devices that can be used in an interaction. They both also stated that IC takes place between people from different cultures or language backgrounds, which is where the background of the communicators becomes an important factor for the interaction and how the goals are achieved.

The second group in turn concentrated more on the *goals* of IC and *skills* that a communicator needs to achieve them. Extracts 14 and 15 provide insight into what Alice and Evan discuss about this.

(14) Alice: Finding common ground regardless of differences and dissent viewpoints and backgrounds.

(15) Evan: An individual's ability to utilize linguistic and cultural knowledge and skills to be able to communicate effectively between cultures.

Hence, Alice and Evan's definitions paid attention to finding a *shared understanding* and the ability to *communicate effectively* despite differences. Alice's definition was the most general out of the four, and it strongly focused on becoming understood, which she also named as a goal for IC in extract 7. Evan, in turn, specified some skills and the ability to *utilize knowledge* needed to communicate successfully in intercultural settings specifically, those being the ability to communicate effectively and to adapt one's linguistic and cultural knowledge.

In addition to the discussed similarities, there were some further individual features within the definitions. Even though both Alma and Lucy included different means of communication, Lucy was the only participant to specify that IC happens through shared means of communication, which most often is ELF (see Section 2.3.2). Moreover, Evan was the only participant who described IC as an ability instead of a phenomenon and mentioned being effective. This is seen as one of the core features of successful IC also by Romanowski (2017) (see Section 2.2.1).

4.2 Impact of studies on the development of ICC

The impact of the participants' university studies for the development of their ICC was also an interest of this research. To gain insight into this, the participants were first asked to name factors from their studies that they saw as a positive or supportive influence, and secondly, to name factors that they saw as unsupportive or lacking in their studies. Moving from the most prominent to the least, the factors that the participants named as supportive for the development of their ICC are organized under the

following main themes: *courses*, *spending time abroad*, and *social life*. In turn, the factors that were seen as unsupportive are divided under themes *courses*, *lack of practice*, and *covid restrictions*. These themes are presented and discussed in detail in this section.

4.2.1 Gaining experience, factors seen as supportive

All the participants brought up some factors related to the *courses* they took. The factors they found useful were teachers, group work, immersion in language, or some specific courses or study modules. The participants recalled having *teachers* from abroad, both native and non-native English speakers. In extract 16, Alma describes how she found this aspect helpful.

- (16) Alma: One of the first significant factors was that we had native English speakers as teachers, one from [country x], one from [country y], and one from [country z]. So, they were from many different regions and that could be seen and heard from them. It was my first touch to IC through my studies, and that in itself perhaps somehow broadened my understanding. At least teachers Y and Z shared a lot about their home countries and how things are there.

Thus for Alma, interacting with the teachers was the first contact with IC that her studies offered, and it helped her to expand her understanding of it. Alma also mentioned later in her interview, that during covid restrictions, she attended a course that was organized fully remotely with a Latvian teacher. She saw this as a supportive factor for the development of her ICC, as the remote teaching period gave her an opportunity to participate in teaching in an intercultural context which would not have been possible otherwise. This also supports the discussion on FLT in Section 2.3.1 and the role it has in creating competent intercultural communicators by developing critical cultural awareness in students (e.g., Byram 1997).

The next course related factor is *group work*. This was seen supportive because it enabled practicing communicating in English and with people from different cultures. According to Alma, they sometimes had exchange students or international degree students attending the courses in her degree program. Hence, group work provided opportunities to get practical with the topics and gain experiences about IC. Lucy, in extract 17, mentions how she found the group work situations especially useful.

- (17) Lucy: From my studies themselves it's kinda hard to name anything besides group work, and like properly practicing communication with people from different cultures. So that is the only thing, [...] Theory helps to understand in a way and maybe to explore the topic, but I feel like it doesn't bring it to practice in the same way as getting to talk. Those few times when I was able to talk with people from different cultures about IC made me feel like I could gain some concrete insight from others.

From her response, we can see that being able to communicate with people allowed her to move what she had learned from theory to practice. In addition, she feels like group work helped her to gain more insight into IC by learning from others.

Being *immersed in the English language* was also seen as a supportive factor in the participants' courses. This factor helped them to become more proficient in the language, and thus, be better equipped to use English as a communicative tool. Alice discusses her experience about this factor in extract 18.

- (18) Alice: The most concrete (supportive factor) is that my language proficiency has improved, and that the requirement was to speak English in our courses and all the course materials were in English. So in a way, you were surrounded by the language. So that's probably one big factor that's influenced why I'm also more competent (in IC) than before.

She linked evolving one's linguistic proficiency to ICC for she seems to view that when you improve the former, you become better in the latter as well. This is partly accurate, as for example (e.g., Baker 2015) discusses that lack in linguistic proficiency can impact one's effectiveness in IC and increase the likelihood of misunderstandings. This finding also overlaps with the ones of the second main-theme language.

In extracts 19, 20, and 21, Alice and Evan give specific *examples of courses* that they found particularly useful, and they describe why. These courses are offered in the advanced level of the participants' degree programs, the first as joint advanced studies and the second and the last as part of the English studies.

- (19) Alice: There was this pretty nice course, it was something about multilingualism, that I did in the spring 2021. It nicely dealt with a variety of topics like, for example, different accents and what sorts of conceptions we have about them, and sign language, and themes like this.
- (20) Alice: Then there was a book exam course that I did that was really engaging. It was this [name of the course] where we dealt with different linguistic strategies to advance equality and justice. Since English language is politically very charged, and it covers many areas of the world where there's a lot of injustice, so how can we use the language to dismantle that.
- (21) Evan: I'd like to say as an example this [name of the course] where we orientated how cultures are taught. [...] I've kinda forgotten what we covered and how we talked about culture and IC during the course. But I believe that if I had memorized these things a bit better, they would be directly related to how my skills in IC developed during my studies.

As the participants stated, they viewed these courses effective because they dealt with a variety of topics from accents to using language to promote equality and how to teach culture, which are all relevant for developing one's ICC. Another example that came up is the teacher practice study module, which was mentioned by Lucy. She found those courses useful, as they brought plenty of practical side to her studies and insight into how to consider IC situations in a classroom setting.

All the participants also discussed factors related to *spending time abroad* as supportive for the development of their ICC. The factors related to this theme can be divided into two sub-themes: immersion in language and cultural environment. All the participants spent time abroad during their studies, either on student exchange or on a voluntary internship: two went to English-speaking countries, and one to Asia for their exchange periods, and the fourth did a voluntary internship in an Eastern European country.

When discussing their exchange experiences, several factors related to *immersion in language* were identified in the data. This aspect was influenced by the country where the participant resided in and by the people they spent time with; therefore, this aspect was unique for everyone. Nevertheless, all the participants stated that their interaction was dependent largely on their language skills in English and took place in intercultural settings. In extracts 22 and 23, we can see how two of the participants describe this aspect.

(22) Lucy: I was teaching in [an Eastern European country] [...]. It was completely about gaining experience and such, that there were a lot of positives and negatives both ways. [...] That's exactly what everyday life there was like, as I was the one not being understood because only few people there even spoke English, and I don't speak a single word of [the local language].

(23) Alice: I was on student exchange in [Asian country]. The 5 months that I spent there I was fully or my whole interaction was dependent on communicating in English both with native English speakers and with people who speak English as a second language.

Even though the contexts were different for both participants, Lucy and Alice both experienced an environment where their first language had no status, and thus, they had to completely rely on English in their communication. Presumably, adapting to the change of environment and the social atmosphere might have been simpler for Alice, as she could communicate with people in a shared language opposed to Lucy who struggled to become understood at times.

The previous aspect leads us to the next one connected to the linguistic environment: gaining confidence. The participants unanimously found their exchange periods useful in relation to becoming more confident in communication both in English and in diverse settings. Extracts 24, 25, and 26, provide fitting examples for that from the data.

(24) Alice: It was probably like the biggest growth experience for me as an intercultural communicator. And I feel like through that experience, my confidence operating in English grew immensely. [...] After being in [Asian country] and having exposed myself to situations where this was the only option, it felt like I gained so much more confidence and plucked up courage. And after coming back, it has definitely helped. Somehow it feels like it has been a lot easier to like speak English in any group of people.

- (25) Evan: In a situation where you go to a country where your first language has no status whatsoever, and except for other exchange students Finnish is not spoken there, yeah so those experiences. My exchange gave me terrifically more confidence because I met a lot of people who for example speak English as a second language [...].
- (26) Lucy: Even all the so-called negative experiences there in [Eastern European country] taught me so much. I feel like were very fruitful even though when I went there, I necessarily didn't have the skills to communicate as much and to understand, but even that taught me about the practical side.

What the first two extracts share is that the participants directly stated gaining more confidence. Lucy, in turn, stated gaining experience and learning from them, which can also be interpreted as being more confident or comfortable in such situations. Out of the three extracts, Alice especially seemed to find herself significantly more competent and confident after her exchange experience. This comes across, for example, from the way she described it as the biggest growth experience as intercultural communicator.

Extracts 24-26 above can also give the impression that the participants link increase in their language proficiency and linguistic awareness to being more competent in IC. This factor also came across from Evan's statement, extract 27, later in his interview.

- (27) Evan: For example, certain nationalities make specific grammatical or vocabulary errors. Like for example, people who speak French may take a lot of influence from French words, and once you learn that okay this group uses certain words through French, and they may even pronounce them this way. So, when you get used to that, it makes it easier to understand them. [...] Only being exposed to these features in an authentic context develops confidence a lot, and in general, the fact that you hear many different ways that English is spoken. It helps you to let go of this illusion that there are only some native-like ways to speak English that are seen as acceptable manners or means to convey messages.

The data implied that an increase in language proficiency makes one able to understand their interlocutors better, therefore making them more effective in their ICC. Evan put this well into words by giving an example from his exchange and how he became more aware of different ways that non-native English speakers speak English. A similar finding was also done in under the previous theme courses.

As language and culture are interconnected, the other sub-theme *cultural environment* is also a sum of the participant's exchange country and the people they spent time with. However, instead of observing the linguistic features from the data, this sub-theme focused more on the cultural aspect of the social environment. In extract 28, Alma explains how the experience was like for her in terms of developing ICC.

- (28) Alma: My exchange studies were really significant because I lived the fall semester in [an English-speaking country], and basically, I only hung out with locals and my American roommates. I had one Finnish friend who lived there permanently [...], but all other communication was intercultural.

For her, the cultural environment was influenced by her local English-speaking friends and roommates. She also stated that she had very little connection to other Finnish or Finnish speaking people, and this made almost all her communication to be in English and with native English speakers, which was a significant factor for developing her ICC.

Alice and Evan also had similar experiences, which are described in extracts 29 and 30.

(29) Alice: Also, when you go so very far away from home and to a very different culture, it forces you to throw yourself into it and to get out of your comfort zone to be able to manage there.

(30) Evan: In my opinion if you concretely go to a different country and different culture, it forces you to face situations like this and you can't resort to your first language.

For them the supportive factor was being surrounded by a different culture and having no choice but to engage in IC. In conclusion, the participants thought that getting to practice interacting in a different cultural environment with people from different cultures was one of the most significant supportive factors for the development of their ICC in their studies.

The final supportive theme that was recognized from the data is *social life*. In the context of the research question, the social life related factors that were considered are all connected to the university: friends made through studies, student events, and international students on campus. From the overall data, it can be interpreted that all the participants saw social life and interacting with people from different cultures as a supportive or important factor for the development of their ICC. However, only Evan and Lucy mentioned it specifically in this part of the interview. In extracts 31 and 32, we can see that they both place emphasis on their friends with international background.

(31) Evan: I have international friends also here in Finland with whom I've been a lot in contact with, and through that, I've also developed. But I wouldn't say as much as by leaving Finland and spending time in another culture.

(32) Lucy: Then of course student events when you meet exchange students. They are always such situations and of course when I have met my friends, who came into our friend group, so these made IC increase a great deal. I feel like that the discussions about it perhaps in like different circumstances became a bigger part only after this, because there's no need to discuss such topics when there was no members who would've brought this aspect up.

For Evan, his international friends have offered him a possibility to practice and develop as an intercultural communicator in English, although he specified that going abroad will always be more effective. Lucy, in turn, mentioned student events, which will be discussed in the following paragraph, and friends that she made through her

studies. She saw her friends as a supportive factor, since through them she has been able to have discussions about IC and gain new perspectives on it.

Evan and Lucy both also discussed the role of student events and how they can be supportive. In extract 31 above and in extract 33 below, we can see why they mentioned this factor.

(33) Evan: Some student events can also be factor. For example, I remember one St. Patrick's Day pub crawl that was organized by our student association, and they had invited AIESEC, or what is it called, so their student had been invited too. We then went, there were Irish and some other, and they hung along through the evening, and we spoke a lot of English [...].

Lucy seemed to think that student events are good opportunities to meet exchange students and they offer opportunities to engage in IC. Evan's comment followed the same idea, as he gave an example of an event where he was able to meet native English-speaking students and spend time with them, thus practicing his ICC.

4.2.2 "From paper to practice", factors seen as unsupportive

Three of the participants brought up factors and examples that they viewed as unsupportive in the *courses* they took. These were related to focus on theory, classroom setting, elitism, and what the participants would have wished more. The *theoretical focus* that the participants described their courses having was not seen as supportive as being able to gain experience about IC in practice would have been. In extract 34, we can see how Evan talks about the topic.

(34) Evan: There was basically no practical side to it besides the theoretical level. [...] I wouldn't say that during my studies I received a lot of tools for IC.

He stated that his studies only offered a theoretical approach to IC, and therefore, he feels like he did not receive enough tools to become competent in it. This perspective was also present back in extracts 17 and 21, the former being from Lucy. She mentioned that theory helps to understand and to explore but it does not bring the knowledge to the practical level. The latter is from Evan, and in it, he explained how what was learned is easily forgotten when you cannot apply the knowledge to practice. This aspect partly overlaps with the lack of practical challenges, which is discussed later in this section.

The next factor concerns *classroom settings*. In extract 35, Alice describes how she felt participating in English courses in the beginning of her studies.

- (35) Alice: Before my student exchange, I remember that for example on the English major courses there was some pressure. It was surely a sum of many factors, but for example, on the courses of those native speaking professor, it felt more challenging to speak English or to respond to questions or just to share my thoughts. It felt somehow very nervous.

She remembered feeling a sense of pressure and being nervous in the presence of the native English-speaking professors. Based on her description, we can draw a suggestive conclusion that before Alice had gained confidence in her ICC, she did not feel as comfortable to participate. This most likely hindered her will to practice and engage in IC as much as she would have hoped to; therefore, being an unsupportive factor for the development of her ICC.

The third factor concerns *elitism* and presents critique on some approaches taken in courses or even by the university. Alice emphasized this factor during her interview; hence, we can spot many examples of the said factor described by her in extract 36.

- (36) Alice: What I would've wished for more was like, it was kinda like well us here, us white middle class academic people discussing linguistics together. So that, some level of elitism perhaps, was a bit of a bummer in my opinion. Like if we had had some more authentic environments that we would've visited during our studies as groups. Bit different environments, since it feels like the university is still quite a rigid institution. Really white and really Eurocentric.

From this extract, we can identify that Alice recognized a level of elitism present in her studies and in the university she attended. She argued this by explaining how there was a lack of diversity in the students and staff of the university in terms of race, social class, and educational background. This was relevant for the development of her ICC, as she criticized the learning environments for not being diverse enough. She also saw the university as white and Eurocentric, and thus, probably a space for people with some privilege. Observed together, we can understand that the university may not have offer enough authentic environments to learn about IC and ICC.

Lastly for the unsupportive factors seen in courses, some of the participants expressed what factors they *wish* had been more present in their studies. Extracts 37 and 38 present some examples of those from the data.

- (37) Evan: Movi for example has in their language and communication studies this course about multilingual interaction [...]. I think having such a course would've been amazing in my own studies, since you don't really get to interact with international students in our English major studies unless you seek their events or go on student exchange yourself.
- (38) Alice: We observed all things from a pretty privileged perspective, so we probably didn't really take into account how and what sort of possibilities and starting points people have to become understood to begin with. It bothered me that such topics were often left on a shallow level and dealing with them as a part of communication and interaction [...]. So I would've wished for deeper and more critical aspects. I feel like that remained as your own responsibility, to observe these and develop critical thinking.

Evan would have wanted some more opportunities to engage in IC in his studies. For this, he gave an example of studies offered by Movi (Centre for Multilingual Academic Communication) for student of other faculties where they have courses specifically designed around multilingual interaction and where the students get to practice their ICC with international students. He also criticized English studies for not offering a similar opportunity, which raises the following question: Does the university assume that language students receive similar opportunities as a part of their major courses since a similar course is not offered to them? Alice's wishes, in turn, related to the earlier discussion about elitism and privilege. In her opinion, her studies could have taken a more critical perspective on the possibilities and limitations that people have regarding communication and interaction. Thus, she would have wished for more guidance from the course instructors in observing privilege and to develop one's critical thinking around these topics.

The second theme for unsupportive factors is *lack of practical challenges*, and it was present in all four interviews in varying degrees. More specifically, this theme encompasses factors connected to the lack of practical challenges and the theory driven viewpoint of courses. They were both also connected to the factor *theoretical aspect* discussed under the previous theme and will continue to deepen the analysis around this topic accordingly. Lucy and Evan in extracts 39 and 40 discuss the *lack of practical challenges* and provide relevant examples of how this was visible in their studies.

(39) Lucy: If there hadn't been that (experience abroad), then I probably wouldn't have faced practical challenges. So maybe there's that that in the studies themselves, that belong to the English curriculum, so maybe they perhaps don't have such, I don't know if they cover such challenges in theory but probably to some extent, but that's usually the case and challenging communication situations are those.

(40) Evan: There weren't that many options to making interaction with international students a dynamic part of your studies, even if you wanted to. [...] I wish this (course on multilingual interaction) was also a part of the curriculum for us English students. I think it would make a wonderful course for the first year for example or something similar, so you really get to meet and use IC in an authentic context.

They both criticized the lack of opportunities to gain practical experience and gave examples of what could be added to fix the situation. Lucy doubted that she would have experienced practical challenges in her studies if it was not for her experience abroad. She also pondered whether the English curriculum included such aspects enough or at all outside theory and argued that challenging communication situations would have been needed to develop ICC further. Evan was on the same page with her, as he stated that including interaction with international students was not made accessible. He also thought that to develop ICC, studies should have provided more opportunities to engage in IC in authentic contexts.

Extracts 41 and 42 focus more on the *theory driven viewpoint* of the courses in the English curriculum and the university in general. They both express the participants' views on what the studies would have to offer instead of or in addition to theory to help students become competent communicators in intercultural environments.

(41) Lucy: So, there was this one really good course. But even there the practical aspect, it was non-existent. And like university is really theory based and that's what it most often is like, and perhaps the idea behind it is to get the theory so then you're able to apply it in practice and reflect on it. So I don't know if there's a need for that in a sense. But of course, adding practicality in some way is always good, but that probably has never been part of universities' principles.

(42) Evan: It should be approached from a more practical perspective since you can look at such things on paper only until a certain point. After that it should be transformed from paper to practice to actually benefit the students.

In her extract, Lucy acknowledged how university as an environment is traditionally very theory based, but still, she felt like adding practicality whenever it is possible is a positive thing for the development of ICC. Her idea might therefore be interpreted as critique on the purpose or aims of higher-level education offered in universities. Evan commented on the same matter, too. He pointed out that it is not possible to observe everything on paper and that students would need more opportunities to transform what they have learned to practice for learning to be more beneficial.

The last theme for supportive factors centers around *covid restrictions*. This aspect was discussed by one participant only, but due to the timely nature of the topic and how it has forced education to adapt within the past couple of years, it is discussed on its own. In extract 43, Alma shares her experience with the restrictions and how they impacted her studies in the context of the interview question.

(43) Alma: My second student exchange got cancelled, which saddened me a lot. I could've gone to [country X], which, since I don't speak the local language at all, would totally have been a new kind of experience. [...] When covid like, yeah covid, so you couldn't go on student exchange and no exchange students were coming here either. So yes, it has impoverished the international aspect in my studies.

From this extract, we can understand that Alma lost one fundamental experience for developing ICC when her second student exchange was cancelled due to covid restrictions. This factor was discussed previously in Section 4.2.1, where the findings indicate that student exchange is one of the most supportive factors for the development of ICC during studies. Additionally, she described that this period impoverished the international aspect in her studies overall. Together, both examples also relate to the lack of practical challenges offered by the target groups' studies. Hence, it can be argued that covid restrictions reduced the opportunities for practical challenges from what was already not seen as enough before the restrictions.

5 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

As IC keeps on becoming a more widespread phenomenon, the role of ELF and the need for individuals with ICC increase as well. This shift has already been visible in many professional fields through the changing nature of job descriptions and what qualities are seen appealing in employees. More recently, the impacts have also started to become visible in higher education, for example, in how intercultural skills are incorporated into curriculums, student exchange becomes more frequent, and internationalization at home gains importance. Therefore, the present study aimed to shed light on how newly graduated English language students understand and define IC and how they perceive their studies in developing their ICC. This chapter focuses on reporting the main findings of the study in relation to previous research and the research questions, which are as follows:

1. How do the participants understand intercultural communication?
2. What factors have influenced the development of the participants' intercultural communicative competence during the time they have studied for their degrees?

The joined goal between the two research aims was to gain understanding on how prepared the target group is to face the effects of globalization in professional life and the increased importance of IC in it. After the overview of the main findings, this section concludes with their implications. Lastly, a critical review of the research process and the limitations of the present study are discussed before considering some possibilities for further research.

5.1 Main findings

As presented in Chapter 4, the analysis process for the first research question yielded six main themes in total. The final forms of the themes were 1) *language*, 2) *interaction*, 3) *culture*, 4) *internationality*, 5) *communication*, and 6) *goals and skills*. Out of them, themes 1-4 represented the main aspects of the participants' understanding of IC as a concept and how much or little they knew about it (Table 2). Themes 5-6 in turn represented what aspects the participants saw as the most important for IC through their own definitions (Table 3). Together, these themes revealed an overall picture of the plurality of factors that the participants viewed as part of or important in IC.

TABLE 2 Themes 1-4 and their sub-themes.

1. Language	Multilingualism
	Shared understanding*
	Language background
2. Interaction	Shared understanding*
	Quality of interaction
3. Culture	Cultures
	Cultural differences
	Cultural knowledge
4. Internationality	Contexts for IC

For the first theme, language, the results revealed that the participants link IC with language and multilingualism, and they recognize the importance of using one's linguistic skills and repertoire to achieve mutual understanding. They seemed to believe that to participate in IC, one is required to be able to use at least one language in addition to their first and use non-linguistic resources as well. This observation is supported by existing research around ICC, as e.g., Arasaratnam (2014), Boye (2016), and Romanowski (2017) state in their studies that to be an effective intercultural communicator, we must use appropriate language in culture-specific contexts. The results also proved that the participants are aware of the influence that language background and language barriers can have for the quality of interaction, and that differences in language proficiency can lead to miscommunication and conflicts, also discussed by Baker (2015).

The main findings for the second theme, interaction, suggested that the participants see IC as two-way interaction between people from different cultural areas where the interlocutors become understood. Therefore, there is some overlap

between this and the first theme in terms of finding mutual understanding. Additionally, the participants were aware that pre-existing positive or negative attitudes can lead to different outcomes. These findings are also directly related to the research of the field, as this specific aspect has been discussed for example in McDaniel, Samovar and Porter (2012).

The third theme, culture, revealed that the participants were mostly aware of the importance of having appropriate cultural knowledge and skills to apply them in IC. However, data from one of the participants demonstrated some signs of otherization, discussed for example by Piller 2017 and Sarangi 2009, as the participant linked cultures with nationality and described them from the dominant Western perspective. Otherwise, the participants appeared to be aware that to function effectively in different cultural contexts, one needs to be familiar with the rules of the culture in question, which goes accordingly with the conversation in McDaniel, Samovar and Porter's (2012). Additionally, the results discussed the role of attitudes and prejudice in a similar manner to the previous theme, but added the importance of one's own cultural identity and its influence to attitudes.

Theme 4, internationality, was the last one for the first research focus (see Table 1). This one suggested that the participants were aware of the importance of IC and the contexts where it takes place, such as exchange studies and internationalization at home. They also demonstrated general understanding of globalization and of how IC plays an important role in the modern world, which was discussed for example in Section 2.3.2.

TABLE 3 Themes 5-6 and their sub-themes.

5. Communication	Means of communication
	Who is communicating
	Background of communicators
6. Goals and skills	Shared understanding
	Effectiveness
	Utilizing knowledge

Themes 5 and 6 (Table 3), communication and goals and skills, belong to the second research focus. They consisted of factors that the participants brought up in their own definitions for IC. The results showed that all the participants understood IC as taking place between people from different backgrounds. The backgrounds were seen mostly as cultural or linguistic, which is consistent with the findings of the first research focus and with many discussed definitions of IC (cf. Dervin 2016, Baker 2015, Sarangi 2009, Section 2.2.1). Two of the participants demonstrated greater awareness of the different modes or means of communication and who is communicating. The

other two were more focused on the goals of IC and skills that a communication needs to achieve them which were also emphasized under the themes 1 and 2 (language and interaction).

To conclude the first research question, the participants seemed to have a consistent understanding about IC with each other and with existing research. Even though each participant had some aspects that the others did not mention, together they formed a broad and multifaced description of IC that covered most of the relevant topics from present-day discourse in the field of IC research. Generally, the participants seemed to share the understanding that IC takes place between people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, the study suggests that 1) the participants see achieving a shared understanding between communicators through language and interaction in multilingual settings as the primary goal in IC; and 2) they believe one should be able to use different means of communication and apply their skills and knowledge to be effective in it.

The remaining themes 7 and 8, practical aspects and lack of practicality, were based on the results of the third research focus and second research question. Theme 7 contains all the factors that the participants named as supportive for the development of their ICC in their studies, and in contrast, theme 8 comprises all the factors they saw as unsupportive. The factors named as supportive were organized under the following sub-themes: *courses*, *spending time abroad*, and *social life* (Table 4). In turn, the unsupportive ones were divided under the sub-themes: *courses*, *lack of practical challenges*, and *covid restrictions* (Table 5). Mostly, the participants shared different factors that they perceived as influential, but when they are observed together, the findings created a versatile description of how studies can shape the development of students ICC.

TABLE 4 The supportive factors in relation to each other.

7. Practical aspects	Courses	Teachers
		Group work
		Immersion in language*
		Examples of courses
	Student exchange	Immersion in language*
		Cultural environment
		Friends*
	Social life	Immersion in language*
		Friends*
		Student events
International students		

In theme 7, the three sub-themes were created from the following factors in the data: *teachers, group work, immersion in language, examples of courses, cultural environment, friends, student events, and international students on campus* (Table 4). Overall, the identified sub-themes and the factors they consist of could all be tied to one bigger theme: practicality. More specifically, the abovementioned factors were connected to how many opportunities the factors provided for gaining practical experience in IC and enabled for developing ICC.

For the first sub-theme, courses, the results indicated that interacting with teachers offered contact to IC and helped to expand understanding about the concept. Group work facilitated practicing communicating in English and with people from diverse cultural backgrounds; therefore, it provided opportunities to apply what was learned from theory to practice. Immersion in language seemed to support the development of language proficiency, which helped the participants to become better equipped to use English as a communicative tool in intercultural settings. The results also suggested that the participants link evolving one's linguistic proficiency to increase in ICC, which was also partially visible in theme 1. This finding can partly be supported by Piller's discussion about language proficiency level lowering the potential for misunderstandings to take place (2012). Some example courses were also mentioned, and they were seen useful because they provided information around topics that helped to build ICC.

The second sub-theme, spending time abroad, was possibly the most influential supportive theme in the data. The participants unanimously named it supportive because spending time abroad was seen to offer the most opportunities to practice interacting in different cultural environments with people from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Here, the factor *immersion in language* was found in the first sub-theme courses as well; hence, the second sub-theme also supported the finding that the participants link an increase in language proficiency to higher ICC. As the first two sub-themes shared a couple of points of convergence, it can be seen as a strengthening element for these specific findings.

The last sub-theme for theme 7 is social life, and it had a strong focus on gaining experiences and being able to practice communicating in intercultural settings. Specifically, the results suggested that social life and interacting with people from different cultures were supportive for developing ICC, as they offer opportunities to improve as an intercultural communicator while using ELF. Friends were also supportive for the development of ICC, as with them, discussions about IC became more relevant and one could gain new perspectives on it. This theme was also supported by the opportunities to meet exchange students and how this opened possibilities to engage in IC and thus develop ICC.

The three sub-themes for the final theme 8 were formed from the following factors: *focus on theory, classroom setting, elitism, wishes, lack of practical challenges, and impoverishment of the international aspect* (Table 5). The sub-themes in this section can be united under one bigger theme: *lack of practicality*, which is the opposite to the one named under theme 7. It can be connected to most of the factors that the participants discussed as an unsupportive influence for the development of their ICC. This aspect was also mentioned by all four participants, however in different levels of detail and through different examples.

TABLE 5 The unsupportive factors in relation to each other.

8. Lack of practicality	Courses	Focus on theory*
		Classroom setting
		Elitism
		Wishes
	Practical challenges	Focus on theory*
		Lack of practical challenges
	Covid restrictions	Impoverishment of the international aspect

The first sub-theme, courses, was already discussed under the supportive factors; however, it yielded results for both categories. From this angle, the results indicated that the theoretical approach of courses did not offer enough tools to develop one's ICC in practice. A sense of pressure was also reported as a hindering factor in relation to the classroom settings with native English-speaking professors due to performance pressure. The findings also suggested that a lack of diversity in learning environments, which was also associated with elitism in institutions of higher education, did not offer opportunities to learn and practice in authentic contexts. Lastly, the participants would have hoped for more opportunities to engage in IC within their studies and some more critical perspectives on communication and interaction in general.

The implication of the last two sub-themes seemed to go hand-in-hand with the first one. The second sub-theme, lack of practical challenges, validated what the first already suggested: the participants felt that their studies lacked opportunities to gain practical experiences in IC. The importance of this factor can also be noted for example from the findings of the previous theme 7, where gaining experience was regarded as one of the most supportive factors for the development of one's ICC. The last sub-theme, covid restrictions, found that the time of stronger restrictions was seen to impoverish the international aspect of studies in general which also relates to the lack of practical challenges. Consequently, the findings of the last two sub-themes also strongly suggest that adding practicality and opportunities to engage in IC in authentic contexts to the English curriculum were needed.

Observing the third research focus, the study concludes for the second research question that the participants identified slightly more supportive factors than unsupportive ones for the development of ICC from their studies. These factors were courses for both themes, student exchange and social life for the supportive ones, and practical challenges and covid restrictions for the unsupportive ones. Additionally, all of these factors can be tied to one general aspect: practicality. Based on this, the present study implies that the participants evaluated the mentioned factors based on how much practical experience there was to be gained. Thus, this umbrella term functions like a two sided coin: whether a factor falls into the supportive or unsupportive side depends on how useful the participant views it and how much it can help them to prepare for real life experiences with ICC and ELF.

Overall, the participants seemed to recognize the importance of IC, ICC, and ELF for their future careers. They also seemed to be able to identify areas of their studies that influenced their knowledge and skills of IC and ICC and to critically reflect on their experiences. The findings indicated that all the participants had an accurate understanding of IC, although there were differences in what they viewed significant. They all seemed to have become confident in their intercultural skills and knowledge, but when discussing the influence of their studies, more practicality was seen needed in the curriculum. On that account, the present study suggests that the degree program of the target group could be taken under review. Some aspects to consider incorporating more are intercultural contacts in authentic contexts and moving some of the focus from theory to practice. Although more research on this specific topic is needed, such suggested measures could help students graduating in the future to feel more prepared on a practical level when they enter the workforce as English language specialists and subject teachers.

5.2 Review of the research process

The current study had some limitations, the first of which considers the target group. The study had only four participants which is not enough to draw definite conclusions from the gathered data; hence, the findings of this study cannot be directly applied to the whole target group and are more suggestive in nature. The participants were also familiar with the researcher from before, which was seen as a source for good rapport during the interview phase. However, it is important to acknowledge that this factor can also alter the research findings. For example, the participants can share more similar views and experiences with the researcher than participants who are unfamiliar

with the researcher. There is therefore a risk that the results come to be unilateral to some extent or adhere to the hypothesis, even if neutrality and objectivity are pursued.

It is possible that with a different set or a bigger group of participants, the analysis might have yielded somewhat different results. Therefore, the discussed findings and their implications are only suggestive and preliminary in nature, and the research topic would need more extensive research or to be repeated with a bigger group of participants in the future. The study could also have benefited from testing the interview questions with more than one pilot. As not much previous research exists on how to assess proficiency in ICC efficiently and accurately, an already existing method for data collection could not be adopted. Thus, the interview questions were designed specifically for the purpose of the present study and focused on more concrete factors in connection to it. To conclude, using more refined interview questions could have helped to collect more accurate and specific data from the participants.

Based on the present study and its limitations, future research around intercultural communication and intercultural communicative competence in the context of ELF could continue to assess how well newly graduated students of different fields have been prepared to operate in the said context. Other suggestions for future research are 1) to explore what factors influence the development of one's ICC in more depth, such as different environments, interaction, or practice; 2) to assess how competent the target group is in different aspects of ICC, such as empathy, experience, motivation, or attitude towards other cultures (cf. Arasaratnam 2006); or 3) to investigate the target groups' personal experiences about situations where they engaged in IC in an ELF setting. In that case, future research could focus on how comfortable the target group feels communicating in an intercultural setting using ELF and identify features of a competent intercultural communicator from the data.

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APPENDIX 1: BASE STRUCTURE OF THE INTERVIEW

Background information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Please state your age and have you already graduated.- When did you graduate?- How many years did you study before your graduation?
Understanding intercultural communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can you describe what comes to mind about IC?- How would you define IC in your own words?
Factors seen as influential for the development of intercultural communicative competence during studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can you name any positive or supportive factors from your studies that influenced the development of your ICC?- Can you name any negative or missing factors that hindered the development of your ICC during your studies?

APPENDIX 2: ORIGINAL INTERVIEW EXTRACTS

(3) Evan: "Viestintä tietenkin tapahtuu kielten avulla, niin ehkä painottuu se, että monissa kulttuur- et jos puhutaan kulttuurien välisestä viestinnästä niin usein puhutaan myös ehkä monikielisyydestä myös. Ja siitä, että pitää käyttää useampaa eri kieltä, niin että osataan käyttää esimerkiksi useampaa eri kieltä, että pystytään sitä kulttuurienvälistä viestintää harjoittamaan."

(4) Lucy: "No siitä tulee mieleen lähinnä semmoinen ehkä yhteinen kieliymmärtäminen ja sellainen niinku ihmiset, joilla on eri äidinkieliä. Niin heidän sellainen keskinäinen ymmärtäminen sillä valitulla yhteisellä kielellä, millä niinku tota keskustellaan."

(5) Evan: "Sinä pystyt käyttämään sun kielellisiä ja ehkä myös ei kielellisiä resursseja saadaksesi itsesi ymmärretyksi ja välittääksesi viestejä onnistuneesti esimerkiksi eri kielten välillä tai käyttämällä kieltä, joka ei esimerkiksi oo keskustelutilanteessa olevien äidinkieli."

(6) Alice: "Siihen myös aika elimellisesti liittyy se kieli ja kielitausta, ketä siin on niinku siinä vuorovaikutustilanteessa mukana, että miten se onko siinä jotain kielimuuria tai onko sellainen asetelma, että toinen on vaikka natiivi sen kielen puhuja ja toinen ei ole. Niin luulisi, että se vaikuttaa kans aika sillain määrittävästi siihen vuorovaikutuksen laatuun."

(7) Alice: "Varmaan niinku sellaista eri kulttuuri alueilta tulevien ihmisten välistä kanssakäymistä ja ajatuksen vaihtoa ja yhteistyötä. Ja sitä, että tulee ymmärretyksi tai se olisi ehkä se myös sellaisen toimivan kulttuurienvälisen vuorovaikutuksen yksi tavoite. Sitten tulee kans mieleen sellainen molempiin suuntiin ulottuva kiinnostus ja uteliaisuus ja kunnioitus ja arvostus."

(8) Alma: "Tulee mieleen länsimainen kulttuuri. Tulee mieleen eksoottisempisia kulttuureja. Kulttuurialueina Afrikka ja Aasia sekä Latinalainen Amerikka, joita voi jakaa paljon pienemmiksi. Ja niiden erilaiset kulttuuriset erot ja ehkä semmoset kulttuurien väliset konfliktit erityisesti."

(9) Evan: "Tollasissa tilanteissa pitää olla ehkä myös keskustelijan tietonen siitä, mikä esimerkiksi on hyväksytyä tai kohteliasta tiettyssä kulttuurissa ja mikä ei ja käyttää myös niitä tietoja ja taitoja siinä tilanteessa kontekstista riippuen."

(10) Alma: "Sitten tulee mieleen vaihto-opinnot, kotikansainvälistyminen. [...] Tulee mieleen kansainvälisyys."

(11) Alice: "Tässä globaalissa maailmassamme on ihan tosi tärkeä vuorovaikutuksen muoto, kun kaikki on niinku kansainvälistä, kaikki on maailmanlaajuista, niin sillai tärkeä taito myös."

(12) Alma: "Ihmiset joko kahdesta tai useammasta kulttuurista kommunikoivat keskenään joko verbaalisesti tai laskisin siihen myös tosi laaja-alaisesti mukaan niinkun kaikkia muitakin kommunikaation moodeja. Vaikka ihan jostain pukeutumisestakin [...] kulttuurikin ilmentyy tosi vahvasti myös pukeutumisen kautta. Että joo, kahden tai useamman kulttuuriin välinen kommunikaatio erilaisin keinoin."

(13) Lucy: "Eri taustoista ja eri kieli taustoista tulevien ihmisten välistä kanssakäyntiä jollain niinku yhteisellä yhteisellä sellaisella kommunikaatiovälineellä, oli se sitten kehonkieli tai joku elektroninen laite tai ihan omaa niinku puhuttu kieli tai joku semmoinen väline."

(14) Alice: "Yhteisen sävelen löytäminen eroista ja ehkä niinku eriävistä näkökulmista ja taustoista riippumatta."

(15) Evan: "Yksilön kyky hyödyntää kielellisiä kielellistä ja kulttuurista tietoa ja taitoa pystyäkseen kommunikoimaan tehokkaasti kulttuurien välillä."

(16) Alma: "Ihan ensimmäisiä merkittäviä asioita oli se, että meillä oli natiiveja englannin puhuja niin kun tota opettajina ja että meillä oli [yksi maasta x] ja tota [toinen maasta y], [kolmas maasta z]. Niinku oli monesta eri paikasta ja se myös näkyi ja kuului heissä, että se oli semmonen ensikosketus tommoseen kulttuurienväliseen viestintään näiden opintojen kautta. Ja se jo itessään silleen laajenti ehkä jollain tapaa sitä ymmärrystä, koska ainakin opettajien Y ja Z tapauksessa, niin he myös paljon puhuvat siitä kotimaasta ja miten asiat on siellä."

(17) Lucy: "Opinnoista itsessään ehkä vähän vaikea nimetä mitään tiettyä muuta kuin tietysti ryhmätyöt ja sellaiset se oikein niinku kommunikaation ns. harjottelu muista kulttuureista tulevien ihmisten kanssa. Se on ainoa. [...] Teoria se auttaa tavallaan ymmärtämään ja ehkä tutkimaan sitä asiaa, mutta ei se ehkä tuo sitä siihen käytäntöön sitten samalla tavalla kuin se, että ihan oikeasti vaan pääsee juttelee. Ja sitten ehkä ainoa se, että silloin kun pääsee, on ehkä pari kertaa niinku harvat pari kertaa päässyt oikeesti juttelemaan jonku muusta kulttuurista tulevan ihmisen kanssa, on niinku just

tästä asiasta, niin silloinhan se on tietysti tullut esille. Ja silloin se tuntuu, että sä oot voinut saada vaikka sellaista konkreettista näkökantaa muilta.”

(18) Alice: ”Varmaan silleen konkreettisin on se, että kielitaito on kehittynyt ja silleen et se vaatimus on ollut just, että kurseilla puhutaan englantia ja kaikki materiaalit on englanniksi. On tavallaan niinku ympäröinyt itsensä sillä kielellä. Se on varmaan semmoinen yksittäinen iso tekijä, että mikä on vaikuttanut siihen, että on kompetentimpi kuin ennen.”

(19) Alice: ”Semmoinen oli aika kiva kurssi, se oli joku tämmöinen monikulttuurisuus vai monikielisyys. Mä en muista mikä se oli tarkemmin nimeltään mutta mä tein sen 2021 keväällä, missä olisi silleen tosi kivasti mun mielestä käsitelty monia asioita ja esimerkiksi erilaisia aksentteja ja minkälaisia mielikuvia niihin liitetään ja viittomakieltä ja niinku tämmöisiä teemoja.”

(20) Alice: ”Sitten semmoinen kurssi, jonka ihan kirjatenttinä luin, mutta olin tosi kyl sillee engaged siihen niin toi [kurssin nimi], missä käsiteltiin tavallaan myös sellaisia kielellisiä strategioita siihen yhdenvertaisuuden edistämiseen ja oikeudenmukaisuuden edistämiseen. Englannin kielikin on kuitenkin silleen poliittisesti tosi latautunut ja se kattaa monia alueita maailmassa, missä on sikana epäoikeudenmukaisuutta, niin että miten sitä kieltä voisi käyttää niiden purkamiseen.”

(21) Evan: ”Haluisin sanoa esimerkiks sen [kurssin nimi], missä vähän perehdytään siihen, miten kulttuureja opetetaan. [...] on vähän päässy jo unohtumaan et mitä siellä kurssilla käytiin ja miten vaikka kulttuurista ja kulttuurienvälisestä viestinnästä saatiin sillä kurssilla puhua. Mut mä uskoisin, että jos ne kurssin sisällöt ois painanu vähän paremmin mieleen niin se ois suoraan liitännäinen tähän kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän kehittymiseen opintojen aikana.”

(22) Lucy: ”Mä olin siellä [itäeurooppalainen maa] opettaa [...]. Sehän nyt oli ihan täysin niinku kokemusta ja tällaista, että siellä oli paljon positiivista vai negatiivista molempiin suuntiin. [...] Siellä nimenomaan arkipäivää just se, että mä oon se, jota niinku ei ymmärretä, koska harvat siellä puhuu niinku englantia edes ja mä en puhu sanaakaan [paikallista kieltä].”

(23) Alice: ”Mä olin vaihdossa [Aasian maa]. Se 5 kuukautta, minkä mä vietin siellä niin mä olin ihan täysin sen tai mun koko vuorovaikutus oli sen varassa, että kommunikointiin englanniksi sekä natiivi englannin kielen puhujien että englantia vieraana tai toisena kielenä puhuvien ihmisten kanssa.”

(24) Alice: "Se on varmaan silleen isoin semmoinen kasvatus- kasvamiskokemus mulle kulttuurienvälisenä viestijänä. Ja mä koen, että se sen kokemuksen myötä mun rohkeus kasvo roimasti niinku toimimaan toimimaan sillä englannin kielellä. [...] Sen jälkeen, kun oli [Aasian maa] ja jotenkin vaan altisti itsensä sellaisille tilanteille, missä se oli ainut vaihtoehto, niin tuntui, että kyllä silleen sai tosi paljon enemmän itsevarmuutta ja keräsi rohkeutta. Sen jälkeen, kun tuli takaisin niin se on kyllä sillain kantanut myös, että jotenkin tuntuu, että on ollut vaan tosi paljon helpompaa sitten puhuu enkkuu ihan missä tahansa porukassa."

(25) Evan: "Tollasessa tilanteessa, jossa sä lähet maahan, jossa sun äidinkielellä ei oo minkäänäköstä statusta ja muita vaihto-oppilaita lukuun ottamatta suomea ei siellä puhuta, niin ne tollaset kokemukset. Se vaihto toi ihan hirveesti itsevarmuutta siihen, kun törmäs esimerkiks paljon englantia toisena kielenä puhuviin ihmisiin [...]."

(26) Lucy: "Ne kaikki ns. negatiiviset kokemuksetkin ne oli siellä [itäeurooppalainen maa] ja niistä niinku oppi kuitenkin ihan hirveästi. Niin tuntuu, että siitähän niinku sai itselleen silleen, vaikka silloin ehkä, kun meni sinne niin ei ollut taitoja välttämättä kommunikoida noin paljon ja niinku ymmärtää, niin sekin opetti siihen käytäntöön."

(27) Evan: "Esimerkiks tietyt kansalaisuudet vähän niinku lankeaa tietyn tyyppisiin vaikka rakennevirheisiin tai jotkut sanastot, kuten esimerkiks ranskaa puhuvat ihmiset saattaa ottaa ranskankielisistä sanoista paljon vaikutteita ja sit kun oppii siihen et okei et näillä tietyt sanat tulee sieltä ranskan kautta ja ne saattaa lausuakkin ne näin, niin sit kun niihin on tottunut niin se helpottaa esimerkiks sitä ymmärtämistä. [...] Se pelkästään niille altistuminen sellasessa autenttisisessa kontekstissa kehittää sitä tosi paljon ja ylipäättänsä se, että kuulet monia eri tapoja, joilla esimerkiks englantia puhutaan. Niin pääset irti siitä semmosesta illuusiosta, että on vaan ne tietyt natiivinoloiset tavat puhua englantia, jotka on hyväksytyjä tapoja tai keinoja saada viesti välitettyä."

(28) Alma: "Vaihto-opinnot oli tietenkin todella merkittävä, koska asuin sen syyslukukauden [englanninkielisessä maassa] ja hengasin lähinnä vain ja ainoastaan paikallisten kanssa ja [englantia ensikielenä puhuvien] kämppisten kanssa. Et en siellä tota mulla oli tää yksi suomalainen kaveri, joka siellä sitten asu niinku vakituisesti [...], että kaikki niinku kommunikaatio siellä oli ihan tämmöstä kulttuurien välistä."

(29) Alice: "Myös se just, että kun menee ihan tosi kauas kauas kotoa ja tosi erilaiseen kulttuuriin, niin sitten se, että sun pitää sellain heittäytyä ja mennä epämukavuusalueelle, että sä pärjät siellä."

(30) Evan: "Minusta se, että sinä konkreettisesti lähet eri maahan eri kulttuuriin, niin se pakottaa sut kohtaamaan tällasia tilanteita, että sä et pysty enää turvautumaan siihen sun äidinkieleen."

(31) Evan: "Täällä kotisuomessakin on kansainvälisiä kavereita, kenen kanssa on sit ollu paljon tekemisissä ja sitä myötä myöskin kehittyny. Mut en sanois että niin paljon kun sillä, että meet Suomesta pois ja konkreettisesti johonkin toiseen kulttuuriin."

(32) Lucy: "Sitten tietysti opiskelutapahtumissa, kun tapaa vaihtareita ja tälleen. Niin ne nyt on aina semmoisia tilanteita ja tietysti sitten, kun on tavannu omat kaveritkin, jotka on tullut silleen kaveripiirin, niin sittenhän se on lisääntynyt hirveästi. Ja ollaanhan me sitten musta tuntuu, että ehkä sitten se keskustelu kans siitä eri tilanteesta ja kaikesta tällaisesta, niin siitä on tullut kans isompi osa sen jälkeen vasta, koska eihän nyt ole mitään tarvetta keskustella tollasista asioista, jos ei oo ketään jäsentä, kuka tois sitä aspektia siihen."

(33) Evan: "Jotkut semmoset opiskelijatapahtumatkin voi olla jossain. Esimerkiks muistan joku St. Patrick's Day pub crawl, jonka [oma ainejärjestö] järjesti joskus ja sinne oli noita mitäs ne on niitä AIESEC tai mikä se on se, niitä opiskelijoita oli silloin pyydetty sinne kans silloin mukaan. Sit mentiin semmosessa, siellä oli irlantilaisia ja jotain muita niin ne roikku sitten siinä illan mukana matkassa ja tosi paljon siinä puhuttiin englantia [...]."

(34) Evan: "Ei sitä (käytännön harjoittelua) käytännössä mun mielestä ollu ku ihan vaan teoriatasolla [...]. En mä sanois, että opintojen aikana oikein kulttuurienväliseen viestintään hirveesti annettiin eväitä."

(35) Alice: "Ennen vaihtoa mä muistan, että esimerkiksi noilla enkun pääainekursseilla oli jotenkin vähän painostavaa. Se oli varmasti monien tekijöiden summa, mutta esimerkiksi niiden natiivi englannin kielen puhuja professorien kursseilla oli jotenkin aika iso kynnyks puhuu enkkuu tai vastata kysymyksiin tai kertoa ajatuksista. Se tuntuu jotenkin tosi jännittävältä."

(36) Alice: "Sitten mitä olisi kaivannut enemmän olisi niinkun kun se oli vähän selaista no me täällä, me valkoiset keskiluokkaiset akateemiset ihmiset täällä nyt keskenään jutellaan jostain kielitieteestä. Niin se ehkä tällainen niinku elitismi siinä vähän tökki. Jos olisi ollut jotain sellaisia autenttisempia ympäristöjä, missä olisi käynyt vaikka opintojen aikana porukalla. Vähän erilaisissa ympäristöissä, kun tuntuu, että

se yliopisto on aika silleen vielä kuitenkin aika semmoinen jäykkä instituutio. Tosi niin tosi valkoinen ja tosi eurosentrinen.”

(37) Evan: ”Movillakin ku esimerkiks näissä uusiutuvisissa viestintä- ja kieliopinnoissa on esimerkiks tämmönen monikielisyys-kurssi, monikielinen viestintä [...]. Minusta tollanen ois esimerkiks omissa opinnoissa ollut ihan mahtava, että ois ollu et kun kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden kanssa et oikeastaan meidän niinku enkun pääaineopiskelijoiden opintojen aikana pääse oikeen mitenkään ellet itse tietosesti hakeudu vaikka johonkin vaihtari-iltoihin tai sit lähe vaihtoon.”

(38) Alice: ”Aika semmoisesta etuoikeutetusta näkökulmasta tarkkailtiin kaikkia asioita, ettei ehkä ihan otettu huomioon sitä, miten oikeasti tai minkälaisia mahdollisuuksia ja minkälaisia lähtökohtia ihmisillä on vaikka ylipäänsä tulla ymmärretyksi. Niin ehkä vähän silleen se häiritsi, et se monin paikoin jäi silleen tosi pinnalliseksi noitten asioiden käsittely osana sitä viestintää ja vuorovaikutusta. [...] Olisi ehkä toivonut siihen vähän sellaista syvällisempää ja kriittisempää jotenkin, että niin tuntuu, että se jäi vähän ehkä omille harteille sitten.”

(39) Lucy: ”Jos sitä ei olisi ollut niin sitten ehkä sellaisia käytännön haasteita ei olisi tullut vastaan. Niin ehkä siinä on se, että itse niistä opinnoista, mitkä kuuluu niihin enkun opintoihin, niin eihän niissä ehkä tuollaisia niissä en tiedä käsitelläkö teoriassa sellaisia haasteita, mutta varmaan jonkun verran, mutta sehän nyt yleensä on ja sellaiset haastavat niinku kommunikaatiotilanteet on niitä.”

(40) Evan: ”Jos haluaisit osana sun opintoja, silleen jotenkin dynaamisesti saada sen osaksi sun opintoja, niin ei semmosii hirveesti minusta ollu. Oispa tällanen (kurssi monikielisydestä) ollu esimerkiks enkun opiskelijoiden jossain opetussuunnitelmassa. Minusta ihan hirveen hyvä tota ois vaikka ykkösvuoden kurssiks joku ton tyyppinen kokonaisuus, missä päästään oikeesti tapaamaan ja niinku autenttisessa kontekstissa käyttämään tämmöstä kulttuurienvälistä viestintää.”

(41) Lucy: ”Se oli siis tosi hyvä kurssi. Mutta siinäkin se käytäntö niin eihän sitä ollut. Ja yliopisto on tosi teoriapohjasta niin sitähan se tosi usein on ja ehkä se idea onkin se, että sä saat sen teorian niin sitten se vaan osaat soveltaa sitä käytäntöön tai pohtia sitä. Niin en mä tiedä onko siellä välttämättä niinku tarvettakaan sit sinänsä. Mutta niinku tietysti ja jollain tavalla niin käytännön lisääminen aina hyvä, mutta se ei varmaan tai ainakin ei ole varmaan ikinä oikein kuulunut yliopiston niinku niihin periaatteisiin.”

(42) Evan: "Sitä pitäis niin sen käytännönläheisyyden kautta lähestyä, että sitä ei oikein pysty muuta kun paperilla sit vaan pyörittelemään tiettyyn pisteeseen asti. Mut sit se pitäis saada niinkun siitä paperilta käytäntöön, et siitä ois varmasti oikeesti opiskelijalla hyötyä."

(43) Alma: "Toinen vaihtoni peruuntui, mikä harmitti tosi paljon. Et silloin olisin voinut lähteä [maahan x], mikä sitten, koska en puhu niinku paikallista kieltä lainkaan niin olisi ollut aivan uudenlainen kokemus. [...] Kun korona tavallaan, niinku korona sitten, että ei voinut lähteä vaihtoon eikä meille tullut vaihto-oppilaita niin kyllähän se on sit köyhdyttänyt sitä semmoista kansainvälisyyttä tässä opinnoissa."