

**Intercultural Competence in English Language Teaching:
A Study at Vietnamese Buddhist Universities**

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Abstract:

The study analyzes how Buddhist educational values intersect with intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching at Vietnamese Buddhist universities. Blending Western ICC theories with foundational Buddhist teachings mindfulness, compassion, right speech, interdependence, non self, and the threefold Training, it draws on documentary evidence from ELT programs, Buddhist pedagogical texts, and localized research on higher education within faith based institutions. Cultural tensions emerge as both opportunities and constraints in balancing linguistic skill pickup with spiritual formation.

Savoir ethique (knowledge of ethics) defined as Ethical Mindfulness and compassionate Engagement, is introduced as a core component of the proposed Buddhist Informed Intercultural Communicative Competence (BI ICC) setup. By integrating contemplative disciplines and moral intention into language instruction, this model transforms student engagement from transactional to relational. Unlike conventional ICC approaches, BI-ICC prioritizes internal reflection over performance metrics during cross cultural interaction.

Keywords: VBU, Intercultural communicative competence, Buddhist higher education, BI-ICC, ELT, ethical mindfulness, Vietnam

Introduction

1.1 Background

Today ELT has experienced a paradigm shift owing to the effects of globalization, rapid technological development and greater levels of international mobility. The emphasis is not just on the acquisition of linguistic skills but now encompasses the development of

intercultural communicative competence (ICC). This is defined as 'the ability to communicate and interact effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures', mediating and negotiating differences, perspectives and engaging with the notion of ethics (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006).

This change clearly shows that the understanding of a "good communicator" has deepened. Now being good at language means not just having solid grammar and speaking fluency but also having a culture sensitive, self-reflective and ethically aware mind. English is considered in Vietnam as a lever for the country's socioeconomic development. Governing documents such as Decision No. 1400/Q TTg (2008) on the complete renovation of foreign language teaching point out the importance of outputting internationally competent water users of English who are able to joining the economic integration, cooperation in ASEAN. and exchanging at the academic level internationally.

Vietnam's Buddhist universities, namely Vietnam Buddhist University in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hue, represent a sharp contrast to other educational institutions. They are the only ones that successfully merge the time honored Buddhist educational philosophy with the new trends and requirements of higher education. Their main educational purpose is grounded in Buddhist values such as mindfulness (sati), ethical behavior (sila), compassion (karuna), dependence and causation (pratityasamutpada), nonexistence of the self (anatta), and self-examination. Here, English is not just a means of communication but a connecting tool to international Buddhist communication, the philosophy of different cultures, dialogue among different religions, and worldwide interaction (Le Hong Linh, 2026a, 2026b).

1.2 Rationale

The Vietnamese EFL education system is heavily orientated towards ICC, but the gap between aspiration and implementation is still quite substantial. While language proficiency and knowledge of Western cultures remain top priorities for many teachers, there is very little emphasis on the development of critical cultural awareness, ethical mediation and reflective attitudes (Nguyen, 2023; Hua, 2025). Besides, the majority of ELT research in Vietnam has been conducted in secular public and private universities, and faith based institutions especially Buddhist universities have not received sufficient attention.

This is really an issue that should have attracted our attention since Buddhist universities provide a unique educational setting in which the teaching of language is combined with the spiritual wellbeing and moral growth of the students. The research of Le Hong Linh (2026a 2026c 2026d) focuses on the integration of the academic literacies (EAP/EMI), cultural ethics, and Buddhist pedagogical values in the environments of Buddhist universities. Their research demonstrates that these places have the potential for

developing context sensitive, decolonizing approaches to ELT that not only challenge the tendencies for Western centric models but also recognize the unique cultural and spiritual contexts of the learners.

This theoretical paper is committed to addressing those areas that have been ignored so far by investigating the ways in which the global ICC frameworks can be usefully localized and further developed within the Vietnamese Buddhist university systems.

1.3 Research Object

The main object of this paper is to theoretically integrate and extend intercultural communicative competence through English language teaching curriculums in Vietnamese Buddhist universities and focus on the balancing of synergies, tensions and the transformative potential between the global ICC models and Buddhist local educational philosophy.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) ICC models: How do they correspond to or differ from the core Buddhist educational principles in the context of ELT at Vietnamese Buddhist universities?
2. In what ways do intercultural competence development stand theoretically and practically in these exclusive institutional environments?
3. What are the possible advantages, difficulties, and suggestions for successfully developing ICC in Vietnamese Buddhist university ELT programs?

1.5 Structure of the Article

The rest of the paper is divided into the following parts: Section 2 is a literature review on ICC, ELT in Vietnam, and Buddhist education that are relevant to the research area. Section 3 describes the theoretical methodology. Section 4 is the presentation of the proposed Buddhist Informed ICC (BI ICC) framework and comparative analysis. Section 5 is a discussion of the implications, tensions, and contributions of decolonizing ELT. Finally, Section 6 summarizes the study and suggests future research interventions.

Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has been a major topic in the field of foreign language education since the 1980s. ICC emphasizes the ability to communicate across cultures rather than native speaker linguistic proficiency.

One of the most influential ICC frameworks is Michael Byram's (1997) five savoirs model which consists of:

- Savoir (knowledge of social groups, cultures, and interaction processes),

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- Savoir etre (attitudes of curiosity openness readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and one's own),
 - Savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating),
 - Savoir apprendre/faire (skills of discovery and interaction), and
 - Savoir s'engager (critical cultural awareness/political education).

The model positions the "intercultural speaker" as an ideal who can act as a bridge between different cultures while being aware of one's own cultural biases (Byram 1997 2021). While the model has been incorporated in language education policies of many European and Asian countries, it has also received critique for its possible Western orientation and seeing culture as something fixed (Dervin, 2016; Hoff, 2020).

The Pyramid Model and the Process Model by Darla K. Deardorff (2006) provide alternative views. The base of the Pyramid Model is occupied by attitudes (respect openness curiosity) and the model moves upward to incorporation of knowledge and comprehension skills internal (e.g. adaptability ethnorelative perspective) and external outcomes (effective and appropriate communication). The Process Model describes ICC as a developmental process that is lifelong, context sensitive, and not a fixed set of competencies (Deardorff, 2006). These models have become standard in the internationalization of higher education and in the assessment of this phenomenon.

Lately, scholars have been working to improve these first generation models. They have included elements such as digital literacy, multilingual identities, hybridity, and non-Western epistemologies (Xu, 2025; Sabet, 2023). Some new hybrid models aim at combining cultural adaptability and critical reflexivity in the age of globalization and digital communication.

2.2 ICC in Asian and Vietnamese EFL Contexts

In Asia, ICC studies are in a way a mirror of the tension between the global demand for English and the desire of many cultural groups to maintain their own identities. Researchers point out that it is necessary to go beyond the focus of Western target cultures to the idea of Global Englishes and intercultural communication within Asia (Kimura, 2018; Xu, 2022). In Vietnam, national policies such as Decision No. 1400/Q TTg (2008) explicitly promote the development of communicative and intercultural English users to support economic integration and ASEAN cooperation. However, a persistent gap exists between policy aspirations and classroom realities. Vietnamese EFL teachers often prioritize linguistic proficiency and factual cultural knowledge (primarily of Inner Circle countries) over critical reflection, attitude development, or ethical mediation (Nguyen, 2023; Hua, 2025; Dang, 2025; Trinh, 2025).

The results of empirical research indicate the following major obstacles: A curriculum that is mainly focused on exams and leaves little room for intercultural activities.

Large numbers of students in classes and insufficient teacher training in intercultural communication competence (ICC) pedagogy. Teachers' limited intercultural experiences and resources (Vo, 2019; Thieu, 2024; Lan, 2021).

Following up on the earlier studies of internationalization experiences of Vietnamese students and staff at a local university, here is a closer look at the part of ICC in English Medium Instruction (EMI): Students are aware of the benefits of ICC for global interaction but are at different levels of their competence development, with the least developed areas being critical cultural awareness and reflective skills.

Teachers use the strategy of culture integration, less frequently also do reflective and intercultural activities, and technology. Sometimes they also get students involved in the creation of new knowledge related to cultural diversity (Hua & Le, 2025).

2.3 ELT in Faith-Based and Buddhist Higher Education

ELT in faith based institutions is still a new but vital area of research, few studies actually have been carried out in this context, while the secular educational contexts are well established ones. For instance, in Buddhist teaching and learning contexts, language education is so closely linked with spiritual formation, ethical cultivation and contemplative practices that it is almost inseparable. Buddhist time honoured elements such as mindfulness (sati) which in a Buddhist way means to be aware of and focus on the present; compassion (karuna) a heartfelt care for others and the suffering shared in life; right speech (samma vaca) true and harmonious discourse; interdependence (pratityasamutpada) the notion of all phenomena being interconnected; and non self (anatta) emphasizing the point that there is no permanent independent existence are perfectly compatible with some aspects/constructs of Intercultural Communicative Competence(ICC). The connection here is most visible when one considers their mutual orientation towards openness, empathy, and critical cultural awareness which are essential in fostering intercultural understanding (Zhou, 2022; Chuang, 2003).

The extensive published work of Le Hong Linh provides quite a detailed picture of the structure, curriculum, and teaching methods of Vietnamese Buddhist universities. His research is conducted at Vietnam Buddhist University in Hanoi where he emphasizes the necessity of integrating not only academic language proficiency (specifically English for Academic Purposes and English as a Medium of Instruction) but also pedagogical method deeply rooted in cultural ethics the very core values of Buddhism. In such educational context, English merely as a functional communication tool is replaced by the idea of English as an ethical discursive practice that facilitates international academic communication and

networking while still closely preserving the moral, reflective, and contemplative principles that are at the heart of the Buddhist education philosophy (Le Hong Linh 2026a; 2026c). Besides that, through the extensive comparative studies of Buddhist education institutions worldwide, pointing the most remarkable examples like Acharya Nagarjuna University in India, Le Hong Linh reveals that Vietnamese Buddhist education is lagging significantly behind in the use and practice of English medium instruction. Consequently, this comparative delay has basically limited international exposure and engagement to Vietnamese scholars and students. On the other hand, this apparent restriction somewhat opens the door to very specific and new opportunities of establishing a uniquely Buddhist principles based ELT model at both levels (Le Hong Linh, 2026b, 2026e).

Buddhist philosophy's strongest contribution to intercultural communication competency (ICC) lies in its ability to develop one's reflective capacity as well as compassion. For example, the concept of interdependence serves to undermine the one's ethnocentric point of view while mindfulness is able to improve one's *savoir etre* and emotional control during intercultural encounters (Zhou, 2022). They are even in line with the new demands of using contemplative and holistic methods in intercultural education.

2.4 ICC Approaches in the Indian Context

Indian ELT (English Language Teaching) scholars often take Byram and Dearsordff as their starting points. But, they also deeply engage with authentic Indian philosophies. Their major inspirations include the ideas like Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ("The world is one family"), Ahimsa (nonviolence), and the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) that is being actively promoted with the implementation of NEP 2020. Indian ways of doing things stress cultural pluralism, "unity in diversity," the acquisition of pragmatic skills for employability, and the development of multilingual competence in the context of a very diverse nation (Tyagi & Choudhary, 2022).

In a comparative study of Vietnamese and Indian Buddhist universities, Le Hong Linh not only reflects on the common Buddhist roots but also brings out how different contexts lead to varied applications of ELT, especially with regard to the role of English as a medium of academic discourse as opposed to being just a supplementary skill (Le Hong Linh, 2026e).

2.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for the Current Study

Still, there are a few gaps amidst the increasing interest:

- Not many theoretical
- and empirical studies on ICC in the case of Vietnamese Buddhist higher education only.

- Non Western, contemplative, and faith based perspectives are not sufficiently integrated in the main ICC models.
- There are very few studies comparing the Buddhist contexts of Vietnam and India.

The dominance of the Western centric frameworks may be incapable of fully addressing the ethical and spiritual dimensions that are taken into account by the Buddhist pedagogy. This conceptual paper aims to fill these gaps by combining major ICC models with the philosophy of Buddhist education and the contextualization by Le Hong Linh, while at the same time it suggests a culturally CBI-ICC framework which is designed for Vietnamese Buddhist universities.

Methodology

This study adopts a theoretical, interpretive, and synthetic approach to understanding how intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is integrated into English language teaching (ELT) in Vietnamese Buddhist universities. Being a conceptual, non-empirical paper, it primarily aims at combining existing scholarship, spotting theoretical congruence and disagreements, and creating a new framework instead of the usual data collection through surveys, experiments, or classroom observations.

3.1 Research Design and Paradigm

This investigation adopts an interpretive constructivist approach or paradigm (Crotty, 1998) according to which it is admitted that knowledge is created in the process of interplay between the researcher's theoretical framework and the interpreted messages or "texts." This paradigm is a good match for theoretical kinds of works/articles which aim at connecting/discovering a link between Western based ICC models and non Western, faith oriented educational philosophies. The methodology of the research includes conceptual synthesis and comparative theoretical analysis through which it is aimed at accommodating different literatures within a unified, contextually aware framework

This work is based on already tested ways of doing theoretical research in applied linguistics and intercultural education, documentary analysis, thematic synthesis, and critical comparative review being among the methods used (Byram, 2021; Deardorff, 2019; Maxwell, 2013). In fact, this piece of work was inspired by and is aimed at contributing to recent discussions on decolonizing and Asianizing ICC theory by highlighting Buddhist epistemological and ethical perspectives (Le Hong Linh, 2026a; Zhou, 2022).

3.2 Data Sources and Literature Corpus

The primary corpus is made up of four interrelated categories of sources:

1. Foundational ICC Literature Major works by Byram (1997, 2021), Deardorff (2006, 2019), and thereafter developments in intercultural education, Global English's, and critical applied linguistics.

2. Vietnamese ELT and Higher Education Research Policy documents (e.g. Decision No. 1400/Q TTg, 2008), empirical studies on ICC implementation in Vietnamese universities, EMI/EAP practices, and teacher/student perceptions (Nguyen, 2023; Hua, 2025; Vo, 2019; Trinh, 2025).

3. Buddhist Philosophy and Contemplative Education Main and secondary sources on fundamental Buddhist concepts (sati/mindfulness, karuna/compassion, samma vaca/right speech, pratityasamutpada/interdependence, anatta/non self, and the Threefold Training Prajna Sila Samadhi). It also comprises studies on contemplative pedagogy and Buddhist informed approaches to communication and education (Chuang, 2003; Zhou, 2022).

4. Context Specific Scholarship on ELT in Vietnamese Buddhist Universities at the heart of this synthesis are the works of Le Hong Linh (2026a 2026b 2026c 2026d 2026e) that illustrate extensive discussions about academic competence, cultural ethics, EAP/EMI practices, and comparative perspectives with Buddhist institutions in India and worldwide. These pieces' act as crucial contextual reference points.

The secondary sources include high impact peer reviewed journals (Q1/Q2 in linguistics, education, and intercultural studies), books on ICC and Buddhist studies, institutional reports, and relevant policy documents. Main focus was given to the works published between 1997 and 2026 to cover both the original theories and the latest changes.

3.3 Search Strategy and Inclusion Criteria

Literature was located by conducting systematic searches in academic databases (Google Scholar Scopus Web of Science, ERIC, and Research Gate) with keyword combinations such as: "intercultural communicative competence, " "ICC + ELT, " "Buddhist education + English, " "intercultural competence + Vietnam, " "contemplative pedagogy + ICC, " "Le Hong Linh, " and "Buddhist universities + ELT/EMI."

Criteria for inclusion were:

- Peer reviewed journal articles, books, and book chapters.
- Relatedness to ICC theory, Asian or faith based ELT, or Buddhist educational philosophy.
- Theoretical, empirical, or policy documents providing complementary or adapted ICC models.
- Works with critical or decolonial perspectives.

Exclusion criteria rejected classroom reports without theoretical depth and materials without a clear focus on higher education or ELT.

3.4 Analytical Procedures

The analysis was carried out over several rounds:

1. Thematic Documentary Analysis Spotting the recurring themes, ideas, and underlying assumptions that were common in the literature (Bowen, 2009).

2. Comparative Analysis A methodical side by side look of Byram's and Dearsdorff's models vis Buddhist principles and Vietnamese Buddhist university contexts, identifying points of agreement, conflict, and missing elements.

3. Conceptual Synthesis Drawing together the compatible parts to form a new Buddhist Informed ICC (BI ICC) framework that not only features the Threefold Training but also the Savoir ethique (knowledge of ethics) dimension as put forward.

4. Critical Reflexivity Ways of thinking centered on the West in the predominant ICC models were uncovered and at the same time, the extent to which Buddhist views can offer a different perspective or add value was explored.

All these steps did not follow a straight line; they rather went back and forth, thus not only the proposed framework could be modified continuously but at the same time comparison was carried out all the time.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Rigor

In order to maintain the academic rigor of this theoretical work, the research included:

- Triangulating of sources drawing on a variety of theoretical traditions and geographical contexts.
- Thick description providing a very detailed contextualization of Vietnamese Buddhist higher education.
- Reflexivity openly recognizing the researcher's positioning in trying to combine Buddhist and Western frameworks.
- Transparency thoroughly recording analytical steps and decisions making.

3.6 Limitations

This study purposely does not include any kind of data collection, whether detailed classroom observations, interviewing teachers thoroughly, or evaluating students' outcomes exhaustively, as it is only theoretical and conceptual. Hence, the outcomes stated and the BI-ICC framework proposed are for the most part of interpretative and conceptual nature that must be demonstrated by the empirical data and the further testing in future research. Besides, although the work of Le Hong Linh really helped the paper and was very thoroughly contextualized, this paper largely depends for its synthesis and analysis on the published sources and materials available at its time of writing which really might have limited the perspectives.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This thorough theoretical synthesis has been done with a high level of care to respect the intellectual property by following the copyright/APA citation rules so that it properly acknowledges the diverse voices and rich philosophical traditions on which the text is based and represents. It is structured in a manner that truly and respectfully connects to the present initiatives of decolonizing English Language Teaching (ELT) without the use or

misrepresentation of Buddhist ideas. Besides that, this comprehensive and well thought out method provides a strong, research based academic background that at the same time supports the later results presentation, findings discussion, and model proposal.

4. Results

4.1 Theoretical Alignments Between ICC Models and Buddhist Principles

The ICC frameworks that have been established are quite comprehensive, but they still need to be spiritually reinterpreted in the context of faith based schools. Byram's (1997) five savoirs and Deardorff's (2006) Pyramid and Process Models highlight elements of attitudes knowledge skills, and critical awareness, which fit quite well with major Buddhist principles though they can be enhanced by emphasizing ethics and reflection.

The major correspondences are summarized as follows:

Savoir etre (Being able to adopt attitudes of curiosity, openness, and willingness to suspend judgment) Buddhist sati (mindfulness) and

Savoir s'engager (Having a critical cultural awareness) Prajna (wisdom) and the realizations of anatta (non self) and pratityasamutpada (dependent origination). These inspire learners to shift from the self to understanding phenomena (including cultures) as interrelated and constantly changing.

Ethical communication The notion of Byram about behaving properly and the "effective and appropriate communication" of Deardorff correspond quite well with the concept of Right Speech (samma vaca) in the Noble Eightfold Path, which dictates speech to be honest kind constructive, and suitably timed.

Empathy and mediation The quality of Buddhist compassion and loving kindness (metta) moves beyond the type of empathic understanding on a cognitive level to an engagement involving emotions and ethics with the goal of alleviating suffering and increasing harmony. Le Hong Linh (2026a, 2026c) reflects on intercultural competence in Vietnamese Buddhist universities as not only a tool but even more a mode of personality development that conjoins the intellect, the conscience, and the meditative life.

4.2 Proposed Buddhist-Informed ICC Framework in ELT

The article presents a Buddhist Informed Intercultural Communicative Competence (BI ICC) framework that merges Byram's and Deardorff's models with tisikkha, the threefold training of Buddhist education: Prajna (wisdom), Sila (ethics), and Samadhi (mental discipline/concentration). The framework introduces a central, overarching dimension called Ethical Mindfulness and Compassionate Engagement (Savoir ethique), which influences all other elements. This leads to a complete, nonhierarchical model appropriate for contemplative higher education.

Main Elements of the BI-ICC Framework

1. base line: Ethical Mindfulness (Samadhi based Attitudes)

- Brings together Deardorff's essential attitudes (respect openness curiosity) and Buddhist mindfulness and concentration practice.
 - Students become capable of sustaining attention and controlling emotions, which allows them more profoundly to suspend judgment and practice reflective listening.
 - Instructional implementation: Brief mindful breathing or loving kindness meditation before performing intercultural activities.
2. Knowledge Layer: Interdependent Cultural Wisdom (Prajna) ◦ Integrates Byram's savoir (knowledge of cultures and cultural processes) with Buddhist principles of interdependence and impermanence.
- Students explore not only cultural facts but also the ways in which cultures emerge together and affect each other.
 - Material emphasis: Comparative study of Buddhist philosophy and Western thought, global ethics and contemporary issues (climate change, interfaith dialogue, social justice).
3. Skills Layer: Compassionate Interpretation and Mediation
- Supplements Byram's savoir comprendre and savoir apprendre/faire with dynamic compassion.
 - Understanding cultural phenomena with empathy, mediating cultural conflicts thoughtfully, and "right speech" in intercultural interactions are among the skills.
 - Focus on dialogic rather than purely argumentative styles.
4. Critical & Ethical Engagement Layer (Sila + Savoir s'engager)
- Critical cultural awareness is done from an ethical perspective critique is a tool to enhance understanding and alleviate suffering rather than exert dominance.
 - Learners adopt an "intercultural Bodhisattva" stance using their competence to help others and to promote peace.
5. Integrative Outcome: Holistic Intercultural Being
- Internal outcome desirable (Deardorff): Ethnorelative perspective combined with non-self-wisdom and equanimity.
 - External outcome desirable: Communication that is effective, appropriate, and ethically beneficial and that supports the wellbeing of the whole community.

The model is a living and evolving one, process oriented, in line with Deardorff's Process Model, yet incorporating the cyclical contemplative reflection that is a hallmark of Buddhist education.

4.3 Pedagogical Implications and Strategies

The BI-ICC framework allows conversion into practical and effective ELT methods with special emphasis on the context of Vietnamese Buddhist universities.

On text analysis, one way could be to compare and contrast the Buddhist notion of right speech suttas with other pragmatic texts from the West for a more thorough academic engagement across traditions.

Language Practices of contemplation: It involves mindful dialogue circles where members engage in deep and contemplative discussions, the use of reflective journaling to record one's thoughts and experiences arising from intercultural interactions, as well as compassion based role playing activities that help develop empathy the ethical facet of awareness in communicative contexts.

Community Engaged Learning: This aspect is about students' active participation in digital events, engaging a global online community including international Buddhist intellectuals from different cultures, visit of Buddhist monastics as guest speakers sharing their spiritual tradition experiences, and service learning projects bringing intercultural communication for social justice and mutual respect.

Assessment: Differing from conventional testing, evaluation within this framework is through portfolios and involves various complex components such as thorough self-assessment of value formation, peer mediation simulations whereby negotiation and empathy come into play, and illustrated instances of compassion in communicative and social situations.

Integration of EAP and EMI: Task setting for academic writing and speaking is built within an ethical discourse which enables students to reveal their moral stance as culturally responsive intercultural scholars on the main stage of global scholarship (Le Hong Linh 2026c).

4.4 Challenges in Implementation

This is an incredibly subtle and sensitive task, one that involves not just arguing a point forcibly, a hallmark of Western academic traditions, but at the same time it remains a quiet and major challenge to the Buddhist values of humility compassion coexistence which are intimately linked to the Buddha dharma. Both the monastic and lay students are largely still without long range prospects of getting ample international exposure, hence they miss many opportunities for getting varied global perspectives and intercultural experiences. Educators' preparation remains a significant field of work preparing them for one, extended pedagogical comprehension of both ICC and contemplative pedagogy, where not only are teachers taught to deliver lessons but also to ensure that validations of learning result in both cognitive and reflective dimensions.

Without doubt, the design and supporting of new syllabi functionalities are mainly hindered by resource scarcity and the confrontation of issues linked to the incorporation of these new syllabi into the traditional curricula of Buddhist studies.

These major problems though varying in different aspects could be effectively resolved with the help of a powerful framework that not only removes the West from ESOL but also ethically re-centres self-development besides being a key both to personal and academic development (Le Hong Linh, 2026a).

4.5 Comparative Analysis: Buddhist-Informed ICC (BI-ICC) vs. Indian ICC Approaches

This part analyzes existing and widely adopted ICC methods in Indian ELT context in order to strengthen the concept basis of the suggested Buddhist/Informed Intercultural Communicative Competence (BI-ICC) framework with detailed explanations. Even though India doesn't have a single, country wide, officially approved ICC framework directing its educational processes, the bulk of Indian writings on this subject generally follow and alter the traditional Western constructs e.g. the ones suggested by Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006) at the same time they integrate them with local philosophical traditions in reaction to policy reforms and initiatives such as the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP).

4.5.1 Key Characteristics of Indian ICC Approaches

Indian ELT research, is motivated by issues like cultural pluralism, intra national diversity, and global competence. Major characteristics include:

Tolerance and Cultural Pluralism: a lot of time ICC is considered as a tool for social harmony in India which is a country of religious linguistic caste, and regional diversities.

Ancient Indian Philosophy: One of the core human values on which global citizenship and inclusiveness are based is the idea of a Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam or "The world is one family" (Maha Upanishad). Besides these, people are sometimes using other values like Ahimsa (nonviolence), Dharma (ethical duty), and Karma to shape their attitudes.

Indian Knowledge System (IKS): NEP 2020 supports the inclusion of Yoga, meditative practices, and even traditional Indian philosophy taught in our conservatories in hand with modern curriculum.

Pragmatic Orientation: There is a focus on employability in global industries (IT, business process outsourcing, tourism), multilingual competence, and pragmatic communication skills.

Vietnam Buddhist University and Acharya Nagarjuna University (INDIA) comparison in ELT by Le Hong Linh 2026e made references to their shared Buddhist heritage as well as their difference contexts of ELT implementation.

4.5.2 Comparative Analysis: BI-ICC versus Indian ICC Approaches

The proposed Buddhist Informed Intercultural Communicative Competence (BI-ICC) framework and dominant Indian methods for intercultural communicative competence (ICC) are similar in that they are philosophical in nature but they also show substantial differences in their focus, coverage, and educational approach. Both models are based in Asian philosophy which emphasizes the idea of shared existence and moral obligation. Yet, their starting points differ a lot. BI-ICC is deeply grounded in the major Buddhist scriptures and their major features include mindfulness (sati), compassion (karuna), non self (anatta), interdependence (pratityasamutpada), right speech (samma vaca) and the Threefold Training (Prajna-Sila-Samadhi). Indian ICC techniques, on the other hand, have a more open mindset and borrow from Hindu, Buddhist and Jain thought including Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ("The world is one family"), Ahimsa (nonviolence) Dharma Yoga philosophy besides the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) that is highlighted in the National Education Policy 2020. Regarding fundamental behavior, openness and appreciation of other cultures are the highest points in the two schemes. But, while BI-ICC stresses more on ethical attentiveness, having a peaceful mind and breaking down of ego centered viewpoints, the Indian methods mainly see tolerance and the sense of the whole world as one family taken from Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. When talking about main capabilities, the two schemes agree on the value of mediation and dialogue skills, among others. However, BI-ICC brings in different modes of contemplation like mindful dialogue, loving kindness meditation, and systematic reflective journaling. Indian ICC methods, by and large, are stuck with mere practical adaptation, cross regional communication, and conflict resolution skills that are typical of multilingual and multicultural professional world.

The models further differ in the key objectives they pursue. On the one hand, BI-ICC is about making "intercultural Bodhisattva" individuals, i.e. people who are not only ethical mediators but from their perspective, they should work toward harmony and lessening of suffering. On the other hand, Indian strategies are centered on the formation of capable global citizens not only abiding by the national "unity in diversity" but also keeping their eyes on global economic competitiveness and employability, and mainly aiming at the global marketplace. Learning wise and comparison wise, the two models also highlight the effective learning through exposure and doing. BI-ICC really is a different mode of learning through contemplation and is most appropriate for monastic and faith based settings where mindfulness based exercises and comparative textual analysis between Buddhist and Western traditions are the main pillars of the teaching. Indian ICC approaches on the other hand are more geared in all directions and allow for task based learning, project based activities, multicultural group work as well as technology enhanced instruction that are aligned with the needs of the industry.

The two are educationally, conceptually and practically distinct from one another. They further pursue somewhat distinct ultimate goals. Their pedagogical orientations also have marked divergence. BI-ICC is mainly contemplative and is most appropriate for monastic and faith based settings.; it relies heavily on mindfulness based practices and comparative textual analysis between Buddhist and Western traditions. In contrast, Indian ICC approaches are more flexible and outward oriented, incorporating task based learning, project based activities, multicultural group work, and technology enhanced instruction aligned with industry demands.

On the other hand, practitioners of both approaches find constraints related to the lack of teacher training and insufficient resources. However, BI-ICC to a certain extent needs to balance the tension between critical critique and Buddhist values of humility and harmony, often in environments with limited international exposure. Also, Indian approaches, are grappling with highly complex societal issues arising from deeper religious, caste and linguistic diversity that are compounded by the pressures of balancing tradition and rapid globalization. With respect to their integration with ELT, both frameworks resist cultural homogenization typical of the Western countries. BI-ICC particularly aligns closely with ethics influenced studies of EAP and EMI coupled with a strong concern for a complete personal development and ethical discourse. Indian approaches, promote multilingual awareness, cultural pluralism and the legitimacy of Global English's and this is a part of their major contributions.

To sum up, this study of a comparative dimension has determined that BI-ICC and Indian ICC approaches are not ultimately contradictory. If combined, they may help the creation of powerful, contextually relevant hybrid models in Buddhist and Asian higher education's institutions.

4.5.3 In-Depth Analysis and Implications

Strengths of BI ICC: The BI-ICC framework has the capability to provide deeper reflective thoughts and changes from the inside. The idea of non self and the habit of mindfulness which is continue help learners to go really deep with the idea of ethnocentrism and how to deal with it from psychological point of view. Therefore, it is a great match for the faith based institutions where the spiritual growth is the main reason (Le Hong Linh, 2026a).

Strengths of Indian ICC Approaches: Indian methods are very practical and comprehensive, which is their strength in multicultural environments. The Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam philosophy offers a global perspective that is easily understandable and compatible with secularism. Besides, the incorporation of IKS facilitates the alignment of

policies at a national level and creates employment opportunities. Potential for Hybrid Models:

It has been suggested that BI-ICC and Indian perspectives are not adversarial but rather complementary. Mixing the two could result in a framework that combines the internal contemplative discipline of the BI-ICC with the Indian ICC's pluralistic pragmatism. This would be quite beneficial for the Vietnamese and Indian Buddhist institutions working together academically.

4.5.4 Contributions to Decolonizing ICC Theory

This comparison highlights BI-ICC as an outstanding Asian model that is thoughtful, ethical, and distinctive. It adds a new dimension to the global ICC landscape. Indian approaches are helpful to some extent as they focus on pluralism and inclusion of indigenous knowledge, but BI-ICC follows a single method of understanding the world which is Buddhist with two strong focuses of mindfulness and compassion. Both of them together lead to the Asianization and decolonization of intercultural competence theory in ELT.

Discussion

A Buddhist Informed Intercultural Communicative Competence (BI-ICC) framework as a Theoretical Contribution of English Language Teaching in the past, many attempts have been done to define intercultural communicative competence, and a few of them were even linked to world famous models. However, we are of the opinion that the BI-ICC framework is a major and meaningful theoretical advancement in ELT by a beneficial combining and integrating the well-known worldwide ICC Models with the powerful expressions of educational philosophy deeply embedded in Vietnamese higher education institutions seen as their uniquely crafted sustainable curricula. This thorough paper explains the framework's broad and intertwined implications and its great potential to support the decolonizing (in) of ELT practices, exposes the complex yet constructive tensions among these practices that give rise to this framework, and additionally, illustrates the more specific and practical uses of it in educational settings. Besides this, the study points out the ways that both support and urge the directions for further research for the extension and the intensification of the framework's effectiveness.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions and Decolonizing ELT

This paper moves the decolonization of ELT further by departing from the mainly Western centric frameworks of Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006) and proposing a more diversified, epistemologically broader model. Mainstream ICC theories, while helpful, have been criticized for their hidden individualism, linear progress assumption, and a problematic view of culture as something that hardly changes and is nationally defined to a great extent (Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2011). With the BI-ICC model, these drawbacks are addressed by placing at the center Buddhist epistemological basis members especially interdependence (pratityasamutpada), non self (anatta), and mindfulness (sati) which provide a more open,

interconnected, and meditative view of intercultural being. Furthermore, by combining the Threefold Training (Prajna wisdom, Sila ethics, Samadhi mental discipline) and offering Ethical Mindfulness and Compassionate Engagement (Savoir ethique) as the main aspect, BI-ICC adds value to the current models instead of substituting them.

Besides, this is a way to respond to global demands for "Asianizing" or "decolonizing" intercultural competence (Xu, 2025; Sabet, 2023) and it can also fit well with the sociocultural realities of faith based higher education in Vietnam and Asia in general. It mainly points to Vietnamese Buddhist universities as sources of contribution to the development of ICC theory, rather than as marginal followers of Western ideas.

Le Hong Linh's studies (2026a 2026c 2026e) offer a firm local basis for this combined work. According to his research, English in Buddhist universities are used as an ethical communication tool through which it is expected support for global academic interaction and at the same time continuation of moral and contemplative values. So the BI-ICC framework, in a way, translates these understandings into an integrated teaching model.

5.2 Navigating Theoretical and Cultural Tensions

No intercultural framework is free from tensions, and BI-ICC is just one of them. When blending Western ICC models with Buddhist principles, several dialectics that lead to productive results come out:

Individualism vs. Humility and Non Self: Western models usually give emphasis to personal agency and self-expression in critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager). On the other hand, humility equanimity, and the dismantling of the ego are some of the values of a Buddhist education. BI ICC handles this issue by presenting critical awareness as "compassionate critique" a reflective practice that aims, not to intellectually dominate but, to lessen suffering and to increase understanding.

Critical Argumentation vs. Harmonious Dialogue: Adversarial debate is oftentimes the style of argument in academic English. Buddhist "Right Speech" (samma vaca) is a combination of truth, kindness, and appropriateness. In this framework, we offer dialogic practices that continue to uphold intellectual rigor and at the same time, nurture respectful and constructive engagement.

Secular Rationality vs. Contemplative Spirituality: Deardorff's model which is process oriented, turns better with the addition of contemplative practices like loving kindness meditation and reflective journaling that facilitate deeper emotional regulation and perspective taking.

Instead of being seen as the weaknesses of the model, these tensions can be viewed as the openings for dialectical growth. To quote Le Hong Linh (2026a), Buddhist universities might be able to produce graduates who are not only critically aware but also ethically grounded.

The comparative study with Indian ICC approaches sheds more light on these points of tension. Indian models are good at handling extreme pluralism and pragmatic employability through the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam which is one of the things that Indian models are good at. BI-ICC, on the other hand, provides more profound contemplative methods. Both of them together indicate a great possibility for the regional South Southeast Asian cooperation in coming up with ICC frameworks that are very much tailored to the local contexts.

5.3 Pedagogical, Curricular, and Institutional Implications

Integrating BI-ICC into Vietnamese Buddhist universities leads to the following concrete implications:

Curriculum Reform: International Cultural Competence (ICC) must be made a visible component of the curriculum rather than an invisible outcome of language acquisition. Examples of integration are comparative philosophy courses, ethics driven EAP/EMI classes, and mindful language exercises throughout the curriculum.

Teacher Professional Development: ELT teachers need to be equipped with hybrid knowledge combining ICC theory, Buddhist educational methods, and meditation experiences. Professional development programs could consist of mindfulness sessions, intercultural mediator training, and joint curriculum development with monastic scholars.

Assessment Innovation: Besides traditional testing, students should be evaluated through portfolio assessment, reflective journals, peer mediation role plays, and activities demonstrating compassionate engagement. These are the new forms of assessment that resonate with the holistic Buddhist educational goals.

International Partnerships: Partnering with Buddhist institutions in India (e.g. Acharya Nagarjuna University) Thailand Sri Lanka, and Western contemplative centers may offer genuine intercultural experiences at the same time as honoring common ethical principles (Le Hong Linh, 2026e).

5.4 Broader Societal and Global Relevance: Engaged Buddhism

Outside the university settings, this project is like the Intercultural Communication Centre (ICC) at BI University of Enlightenment (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1999; King, 2005) a form of Buddhism in the modern world. Developing "intercultural Bodhisattva" learners people who use their skill to help others this system prepares graduates to tackle some of the world's biggest problems such as interfaith dialogue, climate justice, peacebuilding, and ethical AI development. Therefore, Vietnamese Buddhist universities can offer a very different and

valuable perspective in nurturing morally strong global citizens who are able to share Vietnamese and Buddhist wisdom with the world.

This model, to a great extent, facilitates Vietnam's ambitions for internationalization of education while at the same time maintaining, and even promoting, cultural and spiritual identities something that is very often, and unfortunately, ignored when it comes to secular internationalization strategies.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Nonetheless, this theoretical synthesis has been developing a pretty strong conceptual framework even though it still has quite a few limitations. First, being only an interpretive study work it is missing the empirical classroom data that would be able to prove the practicality and effectiveness of the BI ICC framework. Second, the heavy dependence on Le Hong Linh's works, although they are very detailed and contextually rich, could also be supplemented with the voices of other members of the institution. Third, the framework's reflective parts may be too difficult even for those students of Buddhism who are not yet well versed in the religion and hence should be changed for the others.

Here are some suggestions for future research:

- Studies focusing on interventions based on the principles of BI ICC and helping to determine the effects of such teaching on the intercultural attitudes, skills, and ethical awareness of students.
- Long term studies monitoring the success of graduates in the academia and global professional fields.
- Multi institutional action research comparing Vietnamese, Indian, and other Asian Buddhist institutions.
- Teacher readiness assessments along with institutional barriers studies through mixed methods.

5.6 Conclusion of Discussion

Incorporating intercultural competence into the Buddhist educational philosophy through the BI-ICC model is a very positive way to change ELT in Vietnamese Buddhist universities. Besides deepening the theoretical aspect of ICC, the framework offers a practical and ethically founded model which is very much in line with the core mission of the institutions. By harmonizing international norms with local wisdom, the method plays an important role in both decolonizing the field of applied linguistics and bringing Engaged Buddhism to life in higher education.

Conclusion

Vietnamese Buddhist universities are, in a way, perfect platforms for embedding the English language teaching scene with their perspectives. Through making many references, this theoretical paper has argued that they are capable of producing a unique Buddhist Informed Intercultural Communicative Competence (BI ICC) model as they have

philosophical capabilities, ethical standards, and teaching skills. Writ large, the byram and Deardorff ICC models are Western, so combining them with core Buddhist values such as mindfulness (sati), compassion (karuna), right speech (samma vaca), interdependence (pratityasamutpada), and the Threefold Training the resulting BI ICC model is not only a fully rounded one but also an ethically oriented one that views language learning as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

The comparison has brought to light a number of important theoretical linkages between the widespread ICC models and Buddhist educational ideas, at the same time, it refers to the key element of Ethical Mindfulness and Compassionate Engagement (Savoir ethique). By this, Byram's and Deardorff's model get enriched with the aspects of contemplative depth, moral intentionality, and learners' development as "intercultural Bodhisattvas" persons who, apart from being able to mediate between cultures, also have the wisdom, humility, and major commitment to lessening suffering and promoting harmony. This paper therefore has taken the idea somewhat further and developed it with the support of the fundamental work of Le Hong Linh (2026a 2026c 2026e) who talks about academic competence, cultural ethics, and contemplative practice all integrated into Vietnamese Buddhist universities. The Indian ICC approach weak/strong points thorough > its context sensitivity as well as the fact that it is Asian rooted and embodies a balance of contemplative depth and pragmatic pluralism are, via the comparative analysis, the points that are highlighted the most.

6.1 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

From a theoretical point of view, the BI-ICC framework plays a part in the decolonization and Asianization of intercultural competence theory. It questions the hidden individualism and secular rationality that are quite often criticized in mainstream ICC models and presents another way of knowing based on the relational ontological and ethical mindfulness. In practice, this framework opens a way for Vietnamese Buddhist university to reform their curriculum, teacher's professional development, assessment, and internationalization that respects their institutional identity.

This model locates ICC in the larger mission of Buddhist higher education, thus it can be instrumental in the preservation of cultural and spiritual heritage as well as in raising graduates who are competent and ethical in the academic, interfaith and professional global spheres. It is a good fit with Vietnam's education internationalization agenda, one of the country's goals which is not to be sacrificed to the dark side of the values. This is actually a difficult balance in many of the secular institutions.

6.2 Broader Implications

This framework is an important innovation not only for Vietnamese Buddhist universities but also for faith based and culturally rooted higher education institutions in Asia and the world at large. In a world where geopolitical conflicts, cultural divisions and digital fragmentation are increasing, an ethics based and compassion oriented approach to intercultural communication is not only a good idea but a necessity, The BI-ICC model is a manifestation of the spirit of Engaged Buddhism in higher education and it shows how time honored wisdom can be used to deal with issues of our time such as the promotion of interfaith dialogue, climate justice, ethical use of technology and inclusive globalization. Besides, this research bolsters ties at the academic level between Buddhist educational institutions of Vietnam and India and to other worldwide contemplative traditions, It opens the door for a diversely oriented global conversation in applied linguistics one that is able to accommodate a variety of ways leading to intercultural competence.

6.3 Final Remarks

Vietnamese Buddhist universities can take the lead in creating a model of holistic, ethics centered ICC in ELT. This model safeguards cultural and spiritual identity while raising compassionate, thoughtful, and able global citizens. The BI-ICC framework introduced here is a significant move toward more inclusive, decolonized, and humanizing ways in language education.

In the end, the real worth of intercultural competence is not in simply mastering cultural knowledge or communication skills but in developing the wisdom and compassion to make meaningful human connections despite differences. In this way, Buddhist universities have a great opportunity to change the concept of teaching and learning English in the 21st century they can develop graduates who are not only good at language and intercultural skills but also ethically motivated to contribute to a more peaceful world. Reaching this vision will involve ongoing dedication to curriculum innovation, teacher development, empirical research, and international collaboration. It is definitely a journey worth taking.

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