

## Intercultural Communication Barriers and Strategies of Thai Buddhist Monks with Foreigners at an International Buddhist Center in Thailand

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### ABSTRACT

This research explored intercultural communication (IC) barriers and strategies employed by Thai Buddhist monks during interactions with foreign visitors at an International Buddhist Center (IBC) in Thailand. Recognizing the growing importance of English as a lingua franca (ELF), especially in religious and cultural exchanges, the study aimed to investigate how monks manage linguistic and cultural challenges while communicating in English. As monks often serve as cultural ambassadors, effective intercultural communication is crucial for sharing Buddhist teachings and enhancing cross-cultural understanding. This mixed-methods study utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data was collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 30 and 10 monks respectively. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and conceptual content analysis. The findings revealed that language barriers were the most significant challenge for monks, followed by philosophical/religious and cultural barriers. Interviews also highlighted language and cultural barriers, including difficulties with Buddhist vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural differences. Regarding communication strategies, verbal strategies were most frequently used, followed by non-verbal and interactive strategies.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communication Strategies (IC), Communication Barriers, Buddhist Monks, Foreigners

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### Introduction

Nowadays, English is the most widely spoken language globally, with over 1.5 billion people using it as a first or second language. As the dominant international language, it serves as a lingua franca in commerce, diplomacy, education, and intercultural communication. Proficiency in English is essential for individuals and nations to engage in the global economy and promote cross-cultural exchanges (Crystal, 2012). Its significance continues to grow as it facilitates communication across diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

In Thailand, English is a crucial skill, particularly in education, tourism, commerce, science, and religious communication (Ruanklai & Yodmongkol, 2017). With the expansion of global tourism, especially in Southeast Asia, the demand for English proficiency has grown. This is particularly true for Buddhist

monks, who often serve as spiritual guides and cultural representatives for foreign visitors in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines.

Despite the importance of English, Thailand consistently ranks low in international English proficiency indices. According to the English Proficiency Index (EPI), Thailand ranked 97th out of 111 countries in 2022, 101st out of 113 in 2023, and 93rd out of 109 in 2024 (EPI, 2022–2024). These rankings highlight significant educational challenges, as many students struggle to attain functional English proficiency by university level. While Thai graduates are expected to reach B2 (upper-intermediate) proficiency under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), most remain at A1 or A2 (basic level) (Waluyo, 2019).

Several factors contribute to this proficiency gap. Oeamoum and Sriwichai (2022) highlight outdated curricula, limited practical learning opportunities, and a disconnect between classroom instruction and real-world communication needs. Additionally, most Thai students, particularly in rural areas, have minimal exposure to English in daily life (Imsa-Ard, 2020). These challenges also apply to Thai Buddhist monks, who often lack formal English training, making it difficult to engage in intercultural interactions effectively.

Previous studies on Thai Buddhist monks' English proficiency remain limited. However, research by Phongsiri (2017) has examined monks' struggles in using English for religious discussions, particularly their difficulties in explaining Buddhist terminology and pronunciation. Similarly, Varasayananda and Prakrai (2020) explored efforts to enhance monks' English proficiency through programs like Monk Chat, which provide monks with opportunities for real-world language practice. Despite these initiatives, structured training remains insufficient. If no dedicated studies exist on this topic, this gap highlights the need for further research on how language education can better support monks in their roles as cultural and religious communicators.

Addressing these challenges is crucial to improving Thailand's English proficiency and enhancing intercultural communication, particularly for Buddhist monks engaging with international visitors. However, monks often struggle with English proficiency, particularly when discussing complex religious concepts, limiting their effectiveness in intercultural communication. The lack of intercultural communication strategies further hinders their ability to engage in cross-cultural interactions. As globalization increases, monks encounter individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, necessitating effective communication skills. However, traditional monastic training often prioritizes spiritual development over intercultural communication skills (Talanuek & Tham-ngarn, 2024).

**English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Religious Contexts:** Beyond commerce, education, and tourism, English plays a vital role as a lingua franca in intercultural communication (IC) within religious contexts. Thailand attracts millions of international visitors annually, many of whom seek to explore its rich Buddhist heritage. Buddhist monks frequently engage with tourists interested in Buddhism and Thai culture, where English serves as the primary medium for religious and philosophical exchanges.

ELF refers to the use of English by speakers of different native languages for communication in multilingual settings. Monks regularly interact with tourists from Western countries such as the United States and Europe. With the expansion of global tourism, especially in Southeast Asia, the demand for English proficiency among Buddhist monks has increased, as they often act as spiritual guides and cultural

representatives in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines. Furthermore, English is widely used as a second language in neighboring countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, reinforcing its significance in the region (Jenkins, 2007).

As Chaiyasit (2018) notes, the growing international interest in Thai culture and Buddhism requires improved English proficiency among monks to facilitate meaningful exchanges with foreign visitors. However, these interactions are often hindered by monks' limited English skills, resulting in communication breakdowns (Soma & Sribayak, 2023).

**Thai Buddhist Monks' Roles in Thai Society, Using of Intercultural Communication and the Lack of Intercultural Communication for Monk:** Buddhism is deeply embedded in Thai society, with over 90% of the population practicing Theravada Buddhism (Arunsutalangarn, 2023). Buddhist monks play a crucial role as spiritual leaders and cultural representatives. Beyond their religious duties, they serve as cultural ambassadors, particularly in international tourism, where they engage in conversations with foreign visitors about Buddhism and Thai culture. This makes IC a core aspect of their interactions. To promote understanding and connection with diverse communities, monks employ various IC strategies, such as storytelling and parables, which transcend cultural barriers and resonate across backgrounds. They also practice active listening, engaging with others through empathy and compassion (Smith, 2019).

However, monks struggle with English proficiency, particularly when discussing complex religious concepts, limiting their effectiveness in IC. As globalization increases, monks interact with people from diverse cultures, necessitating effective cross-cultural communication. Yet, traditional monastic training often prioritizes spiritual development over language and communication skills (Talanuek & Tham-ngarn, 2024). Several studies highlight the barriers Buddhist monks face in developing and using English for IC. Phongsiri (2017) examined IC challenges at the International Buddhist Center, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai, finding that monks' limited IC skills hindered communication, especially in Dhamma discussions. Similarly, Varasayananda & Prakrai (2020) found that despite English training efforts at Mahamakut Buddhist University, monks still struggled with real-world communication strategies.

Additionally, Moontha and Taweasuk (2023) explored the impact of technology on IC, noting that while it facilitates cross-cultural exchange, it also introduces language barriers and cultural misunderstandings. Furthermore, Williams (2021) emphasized the need for practical IC training, as traditional English courses fail to equip monks with real-world communication skills. These studies indicate that while monks are motivated to use English as cultural ambassadors, their low proficiency hinders effective engagement in intercultural communication. Addressing these language and IC barriers is essential to improving monks' ability to communicate with international visitors.

**Significance and Gaps of the Study:** This research provides valuable insights into IC, which refers to the process of exchanging information and ideas between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, often requiring the navigation of linguistic, social, and behavioral differences (Gudykunst, 2003). In the context of this study, IC barriers and strategies refer to the challenges Buddhist monks in Thailand face when communicating in English with foreign visitors and the methods they employ to overcome these difficulties. By addressing both linguistic and cultural challenges, this study offers data

that can enhance language education programs and IC practices, particularly in the context of monks interacting with foreign visitors at International Buddhist Centers (IBCs). The findings can also support the development of educational workshops and training sessions to help monks overcome specific communication barriers. Additionally, the study's results may inform the creation of targeted language curricula, emphasizing strategic communication skills and practical language use. On a broader level, this research could contribute to the formulation of institutional guidelines and policies for Buddhist universities across Thailand, enhancing cross-cultural understanding through improved English proficiency.

Despite existing research on English proficiency in Thailand, several gaps remain. Previous studies have not thoroughly explored IC strategies used by Buddhist monks in real-world interactions with foreigners. While Dornyei and Scott's (1997) communication strategies have been applied in general English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, little research has examined how Buddhist monks adapt these strategies when discussing complex religious and cultural topics. Furthermore, most prior studies focus on controlled educational environments rather than spontaneous, unscripted interactions between monks and tourists at IBCs.

By addressing these gaps, this study contributes to the literature by applying IC frameworks (Byram, 2017; Dornyei & Scott, 1997) specifically to Buddhist monks' communication experiences. It explores how monks manage linguistic and cultural IC barriers when engaging with foreigners. Additionally, it examines the role of cultural factors, such as social norms, religious beliefs, and attitudes toward authority, to provide a comprehensive view of IC challenges in religious contexts.

Ultimately, this study's findings will have practical applications in improving English language training for monks, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and enhancing the visitor experience at IBCs.

## Research Objectives

1. To explore IC barriers encountered by Monks when engaging in communication with foreigners in English at an International Buddhist Center.
2. To identify IC strategies utilized by Monks when speaking English with foreigners about Buddhism at an International Buddhist Center.

## Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the communication barriers and strategies experienced by Buddhist monks in IC exchanges with foreigners regarding Buddhism. Mixed methods provided a comprehensive analysis, combining numerical data with in-depth qualitative insights to enhance the credibility and validity of findings through triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

This approach was particularly relevant, as IC complexities required quantitative data to identify trends and frequencies and qualitative data to offer context-specific insights into monks' experiences. Qualitative data provided a deeper understanding of monks' perceptions and communication strategies, while quantitative data measured the extent and impact of communication barriers. By employing triangulation, this study aimed to develop a nuanced comprehension of the challenges Buddhist monks

faced when communicating with foreigners and the effectiveness of their communication strategies (Kozlowski, 2015).

The mixed-methods approach was well-suited for examining IC barriers and strategies at International Buddhist Centers (IBCs), which serve as key institutions for Buddhist education, meditation, and cultural exchange. IBCs are established in various locations, often within major temples or affiliated with Buddhist universities, to facilitate international engagement and promote Buddhist teachings to a global audience. Their primary mission is to provide a space for cross-cultural learning, enabling foreign visitors to gain insights into Buddhist philosophy and Thai monastic traditions while allowing monks to practice their communication skills with non-native speakers.

To investigate these interactions, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed, offering a multi-dimensional perspective on monks' social engagement with foreigners. The quantitative aspect involved questionnaires distributed to 30 monks, ensuring data saturation by collecting sufficient responses to identify key themes. Quantitative research, which systematically collects and analyzes numerical data, helped identify patterns, trends, and relationships between variables (Amaratunga et al., 2002). The structured nature of quantitative methods enhanced objectivity and reliability, though it may have overlooked contextual details of complex intercultural interactions (O'Connell et al., 2009).

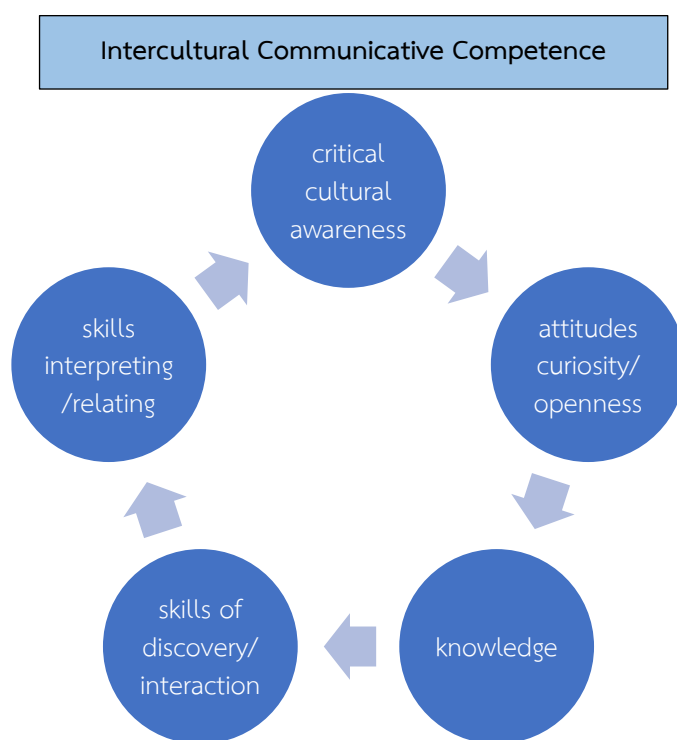
For this study, quantitative data was gathered using questionnaires adapted from Dörnyei and Scott (1997) to assess communication barriers and strategies. A sample of 30 participants ensured comprehensive data collection, using a Likert scale to measure the occurrence and impact of these barriers.

The qualitative aspect employed semi-structured interviews with 10 Buddhist monks engaged in IC with foreigners. Qualitative research, an exploratory approach that investigates human experiences, provided profound insights into monks' communication challenges and coping strategies (Aspers & Corte, 2019). While quantitative data revealed trends, qualitative data captured rich, detailed experiences, including cultural sensitivity and adaptation strategies. However, qualitative methods were time-consuming and potentially subject to researcher bias (Mwita, 2022). The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling interviewers to explore unexpected themes and build rapport with participants.

In conclusion, the mixed-methods approach provided a holistic understanding of monks' IC experiences, combining the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative insights. This method was essential for examining the cultural and linguistic factors shaping IC at International Buddhist Centers and improving monks' English communication skills in intercultural settings.

### The Conceptual Framework

This study employed the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) framework by Byram (1997) and the Intercultural Communication Awareness (ICA) framework by Baker (2015) to analyze intercultural communication (IC) among Thai Buddhist monks. These frameworks emphasize the competencies necessary for effective cross-cultural interactions, including critical cultural awareness, openness, interpretation, and the ability to relate cultural information in diverse settings.



**Figure 1** Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence

As shown in Figure 1, Byram's ICC framework is essential for Buddhist monks in Thailand, emphasizing cultural awareness, knowledge, interpretation, and discovery. It enhances monks' ability to understand both their own cultural norms and those of foreign visitors, enabling them to adapt their explanations of Buddhist teachings to be more accessible and culturally sensitive. Additionally, openness and curiosity are crucial attitudes, allowing monks to approach intercultural interactions with empathy and mutual respect. The knowledge component highlights the importance of understanding both one's own cultural context and that of the audience, improving communication effectiveness. Furthermore, interpretation and relating skills help monks translate complex Buddhist concepts into clear, meaningful terms, while discovery and interaction skills encourage continuous learning from intercultural experiences, refining their communication strategies over time.

However, Building on Byram's ideas, Baker's ICA framework expands intercultural communication by recognizing the growing role of digital platforms in cross-cultural exchanges. As Buddhist monks increasingly use online platforms to share teachings and conduct virtual meditation sessions with international audiences, they must develop an adaptive communication style that accommodates linguistic diversity and cultural expectations. As shown in Figure 2, Baker's framework includes three levels of cultural awareness: **Basic Cultural Awareness**, which involves understanding one's own culture and its impact on communication; **Advanced Cultural Awareness**, which recognizes that cultures are dynamic and context-dependent, requiring monks to adapt their communication strategies; and **Intercultural Awareness**, which goes beyond specific cultural identities to focus on how globalization and digital communication shape intercultural exchanges. Given that English serves as a lingua franca in many global interactions, Buddhist monks must develop strategies that enhance mutual understanding, regardless of their audience's linguistic background.



**Figure 2** Baker’s (2015) Intercultural Communication Awareness (ICA)

In summary, IC is crucial across various fields, including religious contexts, where Thai Buddhist monks serve as cultural ambassadors. Effective IC extends beyond language proficiency, requiring a deep understanding of cultural norms, beliefs, and values. The ICC (Byram, 1997) and ICA (Baker, 2015) frameworks highlight the need for adaptability in both face-to-face and digital interactions. By applying these models, Buddhist monks can improve their communication with diverse global audiences, raising cross-cultural understanding and enhancing religious and educational exchanges.

## Research Results

### 1. To explore IC barriers encountered by Monks when engaging in communication with foreigners in English at an International Buddhist Center.

This section presents the key intercultural communication barriers faced by Thai Buddhist monks, based on both quantitative and qualitative data. The findings identify four major challenges: language barriers, philosophical/religious barriers, cultural barriers, and pragmatic considerations.

#### 1.1 Quantitative Results from Questionnaires

This subsection presents statistical findings from the Intercultural Barriers and Strategies Questionnaire distributed to 30 Thai Buddhist monks. Using a five-point Likert scale (1 = "Never" to 5 = "Always"), the overall mean score of 3.14 ("Generally") indicates that monks frequently face communication challenges with foreign visitors. Each barrier category is analyzed in detail based on the questionnaire results.



**Table 1** Demography of Part II: Intercultural Communication Barriers

Language Barriers		$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Percentage	Interpretation
1	I have trouble pronouncing certain English words.	3.60	1.07	72%	Usually
2	I encounter grammar mistakes when explaining religious concepts.	3.50	1.11	70%	Usually
3	I struggle to understand different foreign accents.	3.50	1.29	70.0%	Usually
4	I have limited vocabulary for complex religious terms (like "karma" or "nirvana").	3.20	1.13	64%	Usually
Mean score		3.45	1.15	69.0%	Usually
Philosophical/Religious Barriers					
5	The rules of monastic life (e.g., restrictions on interacting with women) cause misunderstandings with foreign visitors.	3.47	1.04	69.4%	Usually
6	It is difficult to explain complex Buddhist teachings (e.g., non-attachment, karma) in simple English.	3.13	1.10	62.6%	Generally
Mean score		3.30	1.07	66.0%	Usually
Cultural Barriers					
7	Foreign visitors seem to misunderstand my cultural and religious practices.	3.27	1.23	65.4%	Generally
8	I find it difficult to adapt to different cultural norms (such as greetings or eye contact).	2.83	1.17	56.8%	Generally
Mean score		3.05	1.2	65.4%	Generally
Pragmatic Considerations					
9	I have limited time to deeply engage with foreign visitors during conversations.	3.00	1.11	60%	Generally
10	I struggle to use technology (e.g., translation tools or digital platforms) when communicating with foreign visitors.	2.50	1.14	50%	Generally
Mean score		2.75	1.13	55.0%	Generally
Overall Mean score		3.14	1.14	62.8%	Generally

Table 1 presents the intercultural communication barriers encountered by Thai Buddhist monks when interacting with foreign audiences. These barriers are categorized into four main groups: Language Barriers, Philosophical/Religious Barriers, Cultural Barriers, and Pragmatic Considerations. With an overall mean score of 3.14 ("Generally"), the findings indicate that monks frequently experience challenges in intercultural communication. A detailed analysis of each category is provided below.

**Language Barriers** received the highest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 3.45$ ), indicating that linguistic challenges were the most significant issue for the monks. The most prevalent difficulty was pronouncing certain English words ( $\bar{x} = 3.60$ , "Usually"), highlighting that monks often struggle with clear articulation when speaking with foreigners. Additionally, understanding different foreign accents and grammar mistakes both had a mean score of 3.50, suggesting that monks frequently encounter difficulties in both comprehending speech and forming grammatically correct sentences when explaining religious concepts. The lowest-rated issue in this category was limited vocabulary for complex religious terms, such as karma, with a mean score of 3.20 ("Generally"). This finding implies that, while monks can communicate in English, they sometimes struggle to express intricate Buddhist concepts due to a lack of precise terminology.



**Philosophical/Religious Barriers** also posed significant challenges, with an average mean score of 3.30. The most problematic issue in this category was rules of monastic life ( $\bar{x} = 3.47$ ), indicating that monastic restrictions, such as limited physical interaction with women, often lead to misunderstandings with foreign visitors. Another major challenge was difficulty explaining complex Buddhist teachings, which received a mean score of 3.13. This suggests that abstract religious concepts are often difficult to convey in simple English, making effective intercultural communication more challenging. These findings highlight how the complexity of Buddhist philosophy, coupled with monastic traditions, can limit the depth of engagement between monks and foreign visitors.

**Cultural Barriers** were also notable, with a mean score of 3.05. Among the various cultural issues, the most frequently reported problem was foreign visitors' misunderstandings of Buddhist cultural and religious practices ( $\bar{x} = 3.27$ ). This suggests that many tourists are unfamiliar with monastic customs, leading to potential confusion or misinterpretation. On the other hand, difficulty adapting to different cultural norms (e.g., greetings or eye contact) received the lowest score in this category ( $\bar{x} = 2.83$ ), indicating that, while monks do face some challenges in adjusting to different social behaviors, they appear to be somewhat more adaptable in this aspect compared to the other barriers examined.

**Pragmatic Considerations** had the lowest overall mean score ( $\bar{x} = 2.75$ ), though certain obstacles were still present. The most significant issue in this category was limited time for deep engagement with foreign visitors ( $\bar{x} = 3.00$ , "Generally"), suggesting that monks often have brief interactions that do not allow for meaningful discussions. Additionally, difficulty using technology for communication, such as translation tools or digital platforms, had the lowest score ( $\bar{x} = 2.50$ ). This indicates that, while some monks struggle with digital communication, this barrier is less significant compared to language and cultural challenges.

In summary, the findings reveal that language barriers and philosophical/religious barriers were the most significant challenges, while pragmatic considerations were less prominent. These results underscore the need for targeted language training to enhance pronunciation and vocabulary, as well as simplified approaches to explaining Buddhist teachings in English. Furthermore, increasing cultural awareness among both monks and visitors could help minimize misunderstandings and promote more effective intercultural communication.

## 1.2 Qualitative Results from Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview responses reinforced the quantitative findings, confirming that language barriers, philosophical/religious barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and pragmatic considerations were the most significant intercultural communication challenges faced by Thai Buddhist monks when speaking English with foreign visitors. These qualitative insights provide a deeper understanding of the specific difficulties monks encounter and the contextual factors influencing their communication experiences.

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was language barriers, particularly pronunciation difficulties, limited vocabulary, and grammar issues. Many monks expressed that their English pronunciation was unclear to foreign visitors, making it difficult to convey Buddhist concepts effectively. Additionally, the lack of equivalent English words for certain Buddhist terminology further complicated communication.

As seen in Excerpt 1, Monk 1 described his struggles with vocabulary and pronunciation, especially when explaining Buddhist teachings. Similarly, in Excerpt 2, Monk 2 highlighted the difficulty of translating complex Buddhist terminology into English, as some concepts lack direct equivalents. Finally, Excerpt 3 presents Monk 3's discussion on pronunciation challenges, emphasizing how certain English sounds and past tense forms are particularly difficult for Thai speakers.

These findings underscore the linguistic challenges monks face in intercultural communication and highlight the need for targeted language training programs that focus on pronunciation, vocabulary expansion, and simplified explanations of Buddhist teachings to improve their ability to communicate with foreign visitors effectively.

**Excerpt 1 (Monk 1):** *The main obstacle in communicating with foreigners is language limitations, especially technical Buddhist terms, which make communication less fluent.*

**Excerpt 2 (Monk 2):** *Translating abstract Buddhist terms like 'Satipatthana' into English with accurate meaning is extremely challenging.*

**Excerpt 3 (Monk 3):** *Yes, I struggle with pronouncing certain English words, especially past tense verbs with -ed ending.*

These findings align with the quantitative data, where pronunciation difficulties received the highest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 3.60$ , "Usually"), followed by grammar mistakes ( $\bar{x} = 3.50$ , "Usually") and difficulty understanding foreign accents ( $\bar{x} = 3.50$ , "Usually"). Monks also reported struggling with limited vocabulary ( $\bar{x} = 3.20$ , "Generally"), particularly in articulating Buddhist concepts.

In summary, the qualitative findings confirmed that language barriers, religious challenges, cultural misunderstandings, and pragmatic constraints were the main difficulties Thai Buddhist monks faced when communicating with foreign visitors. Monks struggled with pronunciation, vocabulary, and translating Buddhist concepts, while monastic precepts and cultural customs were often misunderstood. Limited time and environmental distractions further hindered communication, emphasizing the need for better language training and cultural awareness programs to enhance intercultural interactions.

## **2. To identify IC strategies utilized by Monks when speaking English with foreigners about Buddhism at an International Buddhist Center.**

### **2.1 Quantitative Results from Questionnaires**

This section presents the intercultural communication strategies that Thai Buddhist monks employ when engaging with foreign visitors. The findings are based on both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) data, which provide insights into how monks manage language barriers and cultural differences in their interactions. The data reveal that monks use a variety of strategies to overcome communication challenges, categorized into three main types: Verbal Strategies, Interactive Strategies, and Non-Verbal Strategies.

**Table 2** Demography of Part II: Intercultural Communication Strategies

Verbal Strategies		$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Percentage	Interpretation
1	Self-Rephrasing/Self-Repair	3.90	0.92	78%	Usually
2	Message replacement	3.83	1.18	76.6%	Usually
3	Asking for Repetition/Clarification	3.77	1.04	75.4%	Usually
4	Circumlocution/ Paraphrase	3.73	0.94	74.6%	Usually
5	Approximation	3.73	1.06	74.6%	Usually
6	Use of all-purpose words	3.73	0.98	74.6%	Usually
7	Word coinage/ Foreignizing	3.67	1.061	73.4%	Usually
8	Message reduction	3.67	1.06	73.4%	Usually
9	Literal Translation (Transfer)	3.63	0.96	72.6%	Usually
10	Code Switching	3.50	1.11	70%	Usually
11	Message abandonment	3.40	1.10	68%	Usually
	<b>Mean score</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>1.04</b>	<b>73.75%</b>	<b>Usually</b>
<b>Interactive Strategies</b>					
1	Own-Accuracy Check	3.73	0.87	74.6%	Usually
2	Interpretive Summary/Comprehension Check	3.43	0.82	68.6%	Usually
3	Direct Appeal for Help	3.33	0.88	66.6%	Usually
4	Guessing/Expressing Non-Understanding	3.33	0.99	66.6%	Usually
	<b>Mean score</b>	<b>3.46</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>69.1%</b>	<b>Usually</b>
<b>Non-Verbal Strategies</b>					
1	Mime (Non-Verbal Strategies)	3.67	1.06	73.4%	Usually
2	Use of Fillers/Self-Repetition	3.63	1.10	72.6%	Usually
3	Use of Similar Sounding Words	3.50	1.14	70%	Usually
4	Mumbling/Omission	3.43	1.01	68.6%	Usually
5	Over-Explicitness (Waffling)	3.40	1.13	68%	Usually
	<b>Mean score</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>70.54%</b>	<b>Usually</b>
	<b>Overall Mean score</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>0.98</b>	<b>71.13%</b>	<b>Usually</b>

Table 2 presents the intercultural communication strategies used by Thai Buddhist monks when interacting with foreign visitors. These strategies are categorized into Verbal Strategies, Interactive Strategies, and Non-Verbal Strategies. With an overall mean score of 3.56 ("Usually"), the findings indicate that monks frequently employ these strategies to facilitate effective communication in intercultural settings.

Among the three categories, Verbal Strategies had the highest mean score ( $\bar{X} = 3.69$ , "Usually"), suggesting that monks primarily relied on spoken techniques to overcome communication difficulties. The most frequently used verbal strategy was Self-Rephrasing/Self-Repair ( $\bar{X} = 3.90$ , "Usually"), indicating that monks frequently adjusted or corrected their speech to improve clarity. Similarly, Message Replacement ( $\bar{X} = 3.83$ , "Usually") and Asking for Repetition/Clarification ( $\bar{X} = 3.77$ , "Usually") were widely used, reflecting monks' proactive approach to ensuring mutual understanding during conversations.

Interactive Strategies received a mean score of ( $\bar{X} = 3.46$ , "Usually"), showing that monks often engaged in interaction-based techniques to facilitate communication. The most commonly used interactive strategy was Own-Accuracy Check ( $\bar{X} = 3.73$ , "Usually"), demonstrating that monks actively monitored their speech for errors. In contrast, strategies such as Direct Appeal for Help and

Guessing/Expressing Non-Understanding were used less frequently ( $\bar{x} = 3.33$ , "Usually"), suggesting that monks preferred self-correction over directly asking for assistance.

Non-Verbal Strategies had a mean score of ( $\bar{x} = 3.53$ , "Usually"), highlighting the importance of body language in communication. The highest-rated non-verbal strategy was Mime ( $\bar{x} = 3.67$ , "Usually"), indicating that monks often relied on gestures to aid comprehension. Additionally, Self-Repetition and Fillers ( $\bar{x} = 3.63$ , "Usually") were commonly used to maintain conversational flow and improve understanding.

Overall, the findings suggest that Thai Buddhist monks actively employ a combination of verbal, interactive, and non-verbal strategies to manage intercultural communication challenges. While verbal strategies were the most frequently used, interactive and non-verbal techniques also played a crucial role in facilitating effective communication with foreign visitors. These results underscore the monks' adaptability and suggest that structured training programs focusing on language enhancement and intercultural communication skills could further improve their ability to engage in meaningful cross-cultural interactions.

## 2.2 Qualitative Results from Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview findings confirmed that Thai Buddhist monks use a variety of **verbal, interactive, and non-verbal communication strategies** to overcome language barriers when interacting with foreign visitors. The most frequently reported **verbal strategies included self-rephrasing, message replacement, asking for repetition, and circumlocution** (paraphrasing or using approximate words). As seen in Excerpt 10, Monk 9 described how he modifies complex words and sentences to make them easier for foreigners to understand. Similarly, Excerpt 11 shows Monk 6 replacing difficult words with simpler alternatives to ensure clarity. Additionally, Excerpt 12 highlights how Monk 10 frequently uses paraphrasing when explaining Buddhist concepts, making abstract ideas more relatable for visitors.

**Excerpt 10 (Monk 9):** *The language strategy I use most often is changing difficult or complex words into simpler ones that are easier to understand.*

**Excerpt 11 (Monk 6):** *I change or replace difficult words with easier ones so that foreigners can understand more easily.*

**Excerpt 12 (Monk 10):** *I use easier words instead of difficult ones, or I change long and complex sentences into shorter ones.*

These qualitative findings align with the quantitative results, where self-rephrasing/self-repair ( $\bar{x} = 3.90$ , "Usually"), message replacement ( $\bar{x} = 3.83$ , "Usually"), and paraphrasing ( $\bar{x} = 3.77$ , "Usually") emerged as the most frequently used verbal strategies. Monks also employed interactive strategies to confirm comprehension and seek clarification.

In summary, the qualitative findings reinforce the statistical results, demonstrating that Thai Buddhist monks rely on verbal, interactive, and non-verbal strategies to overcome intercultural communication barriers. They frequently rephrase, replace words, and paraphrase when speaking English. Additionally, monks use self-checks, follow-up questions, and comprehension checks to ensure understanding. Finally, gestures, visual aids, and translation apps play an essential role in supporting

communication. These findings highlight the importance of training programs to enhance monks' linguistic confidence and intercultural communication skills when engaging with foreign visitors.

## Discussions

### 1. Intercultural Communication Barriers

The findings of this study highlight the complex intercultural communication barriers faced by Thai Buddhist monks when engaging with foreign visitors. The most significant challenges include language barriers, cultural differences, pragmatic considerations, and religious or philosophical misunderstandings.

Language-related difficulties are among the most significant challenges in intercultural communication between Thai Buddhist monks and foreign visitors. These difficulties include limited vocabulary, pronunciation issues, and grammatical errors, aligning with previous research on second-language acquisition challenges in religious contexts (Chowdhury & Hossain, 2021). The complexity of Buddhist terminology further exacerbates these challenges, as many core Buddhist concepts lack direct English equivalents. For example, terms such as “anattā” (non-self) and “samsāra” (cycle of rebirth) carry profound philosophical depth that may not be easily conveyed in simple English (Phongsiri, 2017). Additionally, comprehension challenges arise due to monks' limited exposure to diverse English accents, a barrier also identified in Chaityasit's (2018) study on non-native English speakers' struggles with cross-cultural communication.

Cultural barriers further complicate monks' interactions with foreign visitors, particularly differences in social norms, body language, and hierarchical relationships. Thai Buddhist monks occupy a position of high social status, and their interactions are governed by strict monastic codes, such as avoiding physical contact with women. These norms are often misunderstood by foreigners from more egalitarian cultures, leading to unintended disrespect or discomfort (Tangpathomwong, 2021). Despite these cultural differences, Thai Buddhist monks are gradually adapting their communication approaches to align with the realities of an increasingly interconnected world while maintaining strict adherence to the Dharma and Vinaya. Many temples, such as those participating in the Monk Chat Program, have implemented structured language and cultural training programs that equip monks with skills to manage intercultural exchanges effectively (Varasayananda & Prakrai, 2020). Misinterpretations of non-verbal cues, such as bowing to Buddha images or maintaining physical distance, align with research by Liu (2022), which emphasized the impact of cultural misalignment on communication. To bridge such gaps, some monastic institutions have incorporated modern intercultural communication strategies, including structured discussions, storytelling techniques, and digital engagement platforms, allowing monks to convey Buddhist teachings to a global audience while respecting monastic discipline (Vachiramano et al., 2021). Stereotyping and ethnocentrism also present obstacles, as foreign visitors may impose their own cultural frameworks onto Buddhist practices, reducing the depth of religious exchanges. This corresponds with Tahir et al.'s (2020) argument that intercultural dialogues often fail when one party perceives the other through a narrow, preconditioned lens.

Pragmatic barriers, including time constraints, technological limitations, and environmental disruptions, further hinder meaningful dialogue. Monks often lack sufficient time for in-depth discussions

with visitors at International Buddhist Centers (IBCs), leading to superficial conversations that fail to address visitors' deeper spiritual inquiries. Similar constraints have been documented in studies on religious tourism, where brief interactions between clergy and visitors limit the effectiveness of intercultural religious exchanges (Smith, 2024). Additionally, while some monks attempt to use translation applications to bridge language gaps, limited digital literacy remains a challenge, a trend also noted in studies on technology use in non-Western religious education (Pralahad, 2015). Expanding technological training and digital resources may enhance monks' ability to engage with foreign visitors more effectively.

Religious and philosophical barriers present unique challenges, as Buddhist teachings often contain abstract concepts that are difficult to translate into simple English. Core doctrines such as non-attachment, karma, and mindfulness are frequently misinterpreted by foreign visitors, especially those from secular or non-Buddhist backgrounds. This issue is consistent with Larbprasertporn et al.'s (2021) findings that Buddhist philosophy requires contextual understanding, which is often absent in short-term intercultural exchanges. Furthermore, variations within Buddhism, such as differences between Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions, add another layer of complexity, leading to misunderstandings about core teachings. Visitors' expectations for simplified, digestible spiritual insights also align with Tangpathomwong's (2021) study on the commercialization of religious tourism, where deep spiritual teachings are often reduced to surface-level experiences for international audiences. To ensure the accurate transmission of Buddhist teachings, monks must develop effective intercultural communication strategies that help them adapt their explanations to diverse audiences while remaining faithful to Buddhist principles.

## 2. Intercultural Communication Strategies

Despite these challenges, the study also identified several effective communication strategies employed by monks to overcome these barriers. Verbal strategies such as message replacement, circumlocution, and simplification enable monks to adapt their speech when explaining complex Buddhist concepts. This aligns with research on communicative competence in second-language acquisition, which highlights the importance of paraphrasing and approximation in overcoming lexical limitations (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Monks also rely on non-verbal strategies, including gestures, facial expressions, and mime, to enhance comprehension. Studies on non-verbal communication in religious contexts emphasize that body language can be as effective as verbal explanations in conveying meaning (Gregersen et al., 2014). For example, demonstrating meditation postures rather than merely describing them helps foreign visitors grasp their significance more intuitively.

Interactive strategies, such as asking for clarification, summarizing visitors' statements, and checking for comprehension, further facilitate communication. These techniques reflect findings from Gass and Varonis (1991), who assert that interactive feedback mechanisms enhance mutual understanding in intercultural exchanges. Additionally, monks' ability to adapt their speech based on the listener's proficiency level aligns with Zhu's (2020) research on the importance of adjusting communicative efforts to match audience comprehension in multilingual settings. Some monks also incorporate technology, such as translation applications, to aid communication, although their



effectiveness is limited by monks' digital literacy, a challenge similarly noted in recent studies on digital tools in religious education (Smith, 2024).

Overall, the study's findings suggest that while Thai Buddhist monks face significant intercultural communication barriers, they employ a range of adaptive strategies to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. These results contribute to broader discussions in intercultural communication, religious education, and second-language acquisition, reinforcing the need for enhanced language training, cultural awareness, and technological support in Buddhist monastic education. Addressing these challenges will not only improve monks' ability to communicate with international visitors but also ensure the effective transmission of Buddhist teachings in an increasingly globalized world.

### Originality and Body of Knowledge

This study makes several contributions to the existing body of knowledge regarding intercultural communication, specifically within the context of Thai Buddhist monasticism. While previous research may have touched upon some of these aspects, this study offers a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the barriers and strategies employed by Thai Buddhist monks when interacting with foreign visitors. The originality of this work lies in its combined methodological approach and its specific focus on the intersection of language, culture, and religious practice.

### Conclusions

This study identified four key intercultural communication barriers: language, cultural, pragmatic, and philosophical/religious barriers. Monks struggled with pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and cultural misunderstandings, while time constraints and environmental distractions further complicated interactions. To overcome these challenges, monks used verbal, non-verbal, and interactive strategies. These included self-rephrasing, message replacement, mime, visual aids, and comprehension checks to enhance communication. Their adaptability and resourcefulness highlight the need for targeted language training and cultural awareness programs. Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of improving monks' intercultural communication skills. The next chapter will explore the implications of these findings and suggest future research and practical applications.

### Recommendations

#### 1. Policymaking Recommendations

To improve Thai Buddhist monks' English proficiency and intercultural communication skills, policymakers should integrate structured language training into monastic education, focusing on practical English use, pronunciation, and religious discourse. Role-playing exercises and real-world conversation practice can further enhance monks' confidence in engaging with foreign visitors. Expanding Monk Chat programs and language immersion initiatives through funding and partnerships with universities and cultural organizations will provide monks with sustained English exposure. Additionally, digital tools such as online courses, translation apps, and interactive learning platforms should be introduced, alongside digital literacy training to ensure effective use. A standardized English training framework in Buddhist universities with formal language assessments will help monitor progress and maintain consistency.



These policies will better equip monks for intercultural dialogue, ensuring the accurate transmission of Buddhist teachings while promoting cross-cultural understanding.

## 2. Recommendations for Future Research

This study on Thai Buddhist monks' experiences in temples may not fully represent those in other regions, such as Isan (Northeastern Thailand) or Southern Thailand, where cultural and linguistic dynamics differ due to regional languages, tourism levels, and local customs. Future research should expand to temples across diverse regions and include a larger sample size from urban, rural, and tourist-heavy areas to capture variations in communication experiences with foreign visitors.

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