

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN USING GPT AI FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE (ICC) COURSE AT UNIVERSITAS LANCANG KUNING

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Abstract

The integration of GPT-based artificial intelligence in higher education has raised important questions about how this technology influences students' intercultural learning, particularly in developing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Although the use of GPT-AI in language learning continues to grow, research exploring students' lived experiences in the Indonesian higher education context remains limited. Therefore, this study aimed to explore students' experiences in using GPT-AI as a learning partner in the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) course at Universitas Lancang Kuning. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five students enrolled in the ICC course. Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, guided by Byram's (1997; 2021) Intercultural Communicative Competence theory and the Technology-Enhanced Learning and Educational AI framework. The findings revealed that students perceived GPT-AI not merely as a technological tool, but as a reflective and collaborative learning partner that supported intercultural understanding. Five key themes emerged: patterns of GPT-AI use in cultural learning, comfort and positive engagement, openness and empathy toward cultural diversity, critical thinking and digital cultural awareness, and GPT-AI as a collaborative learning partner. Among these, the most dominant theme was GPT-AI as a collaborative learning partner, as students consistently described the AI as a dialogic companion that facilitated idea development, intercultural reflection, and autonomous learning. The results indicate that GPT-AI contributed to students' ICC development across cognitive, emotional, and reflective dimensions by fostering empathy, critical cultural awareness, and learner autonomy. In conclusion, when used critically and responsibly, the integration of GPT-AI into ICC learning has the potential to transform intercultural education in higher education into a more reflective, ethical, and human-centered practice.

Keywords : Collaborative Learning Partner, GPT-AI, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Intercultural Reflection, Student Experiences, Technology-Enhanced Learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

By changing how students engage with information, teachers, and cultures, artificial intelligence (AI), especially GPT-based models like ChatGPT, has revolutionized higher education in recent years. AI is now seen as a learning partner that helps students develop ideas, engage in critical thinking, and replicate human-like conversation, rather than only as a technological instrument Kasneci et al., (2023). The integration of AI in the field of English Language Education has opened up new avenues for improving intercultural understanding, critical thinking, and self-reflection, all of which are essential elements of 21st-century education Huang & Li, (2024).

The Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) course, which focuses on students' capacity to comprehend, value, and engage successfully across cultural divides, is one of the most pertinent environments for the use of AI in language learning. Byram, (1997) and Byram, (2021a) states that ICC encompasses not only linguistic competence but also open-mindedness, cultural understanding, interpretation, interaction, and critical cultural awareness. By allowing students to participate in simulated intercultural conversations, analyze cultural variations, and consider their own cultural views in a safe, flexible digital environment, the use of GPT AI enhances these aspects W. Peng et al., (2024). But prior studies have emphasized the potential benefits and drawbacks of intercultural learning facilitated by AI. According to studies by W. Peng et al., (2024), AI can promote intercultural learning by fostering empathy in simulations and engaging in reflective conversations, both of which help students become more culturally aware. Additionally, W. Holmes & Gee, (2023) found that AI systems like GPT have the potential to promote intercultural reflection and emotional connection through interactive discussions. However, Deng & Lin, (2023) warn that GPT-generated material may include cultural prejudices or stereotypes that can skew students' understanding of cultural authenticity.

Furthermore, Zawacki-Richter et al., (2023). emphasize that, while AI customizes learning experiences, it may not completely capture the emotional and ethical aspects of actual intercultural interaction. However, studies examining students' experiences with GPT AI in intercultural learning are still few in the Indonesian context. The majority of current studies are focused on Western educational settings, where digital literacy and cultural dynamics are very different from Indonesia Huang & Li, (2024). As a result, it is still unclear how Indonesian students view and engage with GPT-mediated intercultural learning whether it truly improves their intercultural competence or merely replicates superficial linguistic interactions.

The novelty of this study is in viewing GPT AI as an intercultural mediator a digital partner that promotes empathy, reflection, and meaning-making in intercultural learning, as opposed to just being a language instrument. This research aims to investigate how students at Universitas Lancang Kuning perceive GPT AI's function in fostering intercultural comprehension and reflective thought in the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) course. The researcher interviewed students and ICC professors and made preliminary observations to ensure that the research reflects a real educational setting. These verified that GPT AI technologies like ChatGPT had been used extensively for ICC-related conversations, intercultural simulations, and reflective tasks. As a result, this study is based on a genuine educational environment and seeks to address the research gap by looking at students' lived experiences with GPT AI as a learning partner in the development of intercultural communication competence.

2. METHOD

A. Type of the Research

In order to examine students' use of GPT-AI in the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) course, this research utilized a qualitative descriptive approach. Since the goal of this study was to explain, understand, and interpret the participants' lived experiences, ideas, and reflections in a natural educational setting, this research design was suitable. Qualitative descriptive research enabled the researcher to document participants' perspectives in their own

words and provide a thorough description of how GPT-AI was used as part of the intercultural learning process, without manipulating variables or testing hypotheses Creswell & Poth, (2018).

The qualitative descriptive method was chosen because the study sought to determine how students interacted with GPT-AI and the meanings they derived from those interactions. With this method, the researcher was able to investigate how students reacted cognitively, emotionally, and reflectively to GPT-AI as a learning companion in the ICC course. The study placed a greater emphasis on students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences, which were deemed crucial in analyzing technology-mediated intercultural learning, rather than focusing on outcomes or effectiveness.

Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Theory, the Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) and Educational AI Framework, serve as the theoretical foundation for this study. These frameworks emphasized the significance of engagement, reflection, and meaning-making in education, especially in intercultural and technology-mediated settings. As a result, the qualitative descriptive approach fulfilled the study's goal of providing an in-depth examination of students' experiences with GPT-AI as a reflective and collaborative learning partner in the development of intercultural communicative competence.

B. Setting of the Research

The research takes place at Universitas Lancang Kuning, specifically in the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) course that is part of the English Language Education Program. The context is significant since, as evidenced by preliminary interviews, students in this course have already utilized GPT AI tools during their learning activities and are actively involved in cultural issues, reflective discussion, and intercultural assignments. This environment is also noteworthy because the integration of AI into Indonesian higher education differs greatly across institutions, and Universitas Lancang Kuning serves as a point of convergence for digital literacy, cultural diversity, and pedagogical changes toward AI integration. As a result, the school offers a diverse setting for exploring how GPT AI affects students' intercultural knowledge, participation, and meaning creation.

C. Participants and Sampling

The participants of this study were students enrolled in the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) course at Universitas Lancang Kuning during the 2025 academic year. Since they have a comparable learning environment that incorporates GPT-based AI technologies into intercultural learning activities, they were chosen as ideal candidates for understanding how students experience and interpret the use of GPT AI as a learning partner in the ICC setting. To purposely choose participants who can provide insightful, pertinent, and reflective information about the subject under investigation, this study uses a purposive sampling approach, which is often used in qualitative research Creswell & Poth, (2018). Specific criteria were used to choose participants: they had to be officially enrolled in the ICC course during the research semester, have prior experience using GPT AI (like ChatGPT) in ICC-related tasks or projects, and be prepared to share insightful thoughts about their experiences and take part in semi-structured interviews. There were five individuals in this experiment overall. The focus of qualitative descriptive studies is on the depth and quality of the information rather than the quantity of subjects. A relatively small sample size is adequate, according to Creswell & Poth, (2018), when data saturation is reached and no novel themes arise from the data. As a result, five participants

were deemed sufficient to offer thorough and comprehensive information about students' experiences utilizing GPT-AI in intercultural education.

D. Research Instruments

The researcher served as the main tool for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data in qualitative studies Creswell & Poth, (2018). The researcher actively participated in developing the study methods, carrying out interviews, analyzing participant replies, and extracting meaning from the data gathered. To assist the data collecting process and guarantee a systematic investigation, more equipment was used, including semi-structured interview guides and documentation, which served as complementary tools to improve and validate the study results.

a. Semi-Structured Interview

The primary data-gathering method used to investigate students' cognitive, emotional, and reflective experiences while utilizing GPT-AI during the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) course was semi-structured interviews. The reason for selecting this style of interview was that it gave respondents the freedom to share their ideas, emotions, and interpretations while also maintaining a well-organized structure that ensured uniformity throughout all interviews. As a result of this flexibility, participants were able to elaborate on their personal experiences with GPT-AI, provide insightful examples, and consider how the technology impacted their intercultural education.

The interview guidelines were based on the Educational AI Framework Bates, (2021), Zawacki-Richter et al., (2023) and the Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) and Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Theory. The questions centered on crucial markers like intercultural attitudes, cultural knowledge, interpretive and relational skills, critical cultural awareness, and the function of GPT-AI as a learning companion. Because of this theoretical framework, the interview questions were consistent with the study's goals, and the interviewer was able to methodically collect participants' experiences from both an intercultural and technological standpoint.

b. Documentation

To enhance the credibility and contextual depth of the study results, documentation was utilized as a supporting tool. The materials gathered included students' ICC course assignments, reflective exercises, and learning activities that made use of GPT-AI. This data offered clear proof of how GPT-AI was used in real-world academic activities pertaining to intercultural learning and how it was incorporated into students' learning processes.

The data gathered from the interviews was supported and confirmed by the documentation, which served as additional information. The researcher was able to gain a deeper insight into the learning environment and verify the consistency between participants' verbal descriptions and their real learning behaviors by analyzing their written assignments and reflections. Despite the fact that the main data source was not documentation, it was essential to improving the validity of the interview results by offering contextual information.

E. Data Collection Techniques

Information was gathered via documents and semi-structured interviews. Depending on the availability of participants, the interviews were conducted one-on-one, either in person or

through online communication platforms. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. In order to assure data accuracy, the recordings were transcribed exactly. To back up and confirm what students said in interviews about how they utilized GPT-AI in their learning process, we gathered documentation of their assignments related to ICC. The interview findings were contextually validated using the documentation, not as primary data.

F. Data Trustworthiness (Triangulation)

In this investigation, data triangulation was used to guarantee the accuracy and reliability of the data. Data collected from interviews with students who utilized GPT-AI in their ICC tasks was compared and cross-verified using triangulation. While the interview data captured students' thoughts, reflections, and experiences, the documentation showed real-world examples of how GPT-AI was used in actual learning activities. By confirming that students' reported experiences were backed by documented learning activities, this triangulation increased the validity of the results. By decreasing bias and boosting trust in the interpretations, triangulation improves the trustworthiness of qualitative research, as stated by Creswell & Poth, (2018).

G. Data Analysis Techniques

The qualitative data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation is analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA) as put forth by Braun & Clarke, (2006). Thematic Analysis is a methodical and adaptable method for locating, evaluating, and comprehending trends or themes in qualitative data. Because it allows the researcher to record participants' experiences, meanings, and viewpoints in a systematic but interpretive way, it is especially useful for qualitative descriptive research.

Thematic Analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), entails six main steps that help the researcher go from the raw data to a meaningful interpretation:

1. Familiarization with the Data

To get a thorough knowledge of the participants' stories and contexts, the researcher often reads interview transcripts, field notes, and other relevant materials.

2. Generating Initial Codes

To highlight important themes or recurring patterns pertaining to students' use of GPT AI in the ICC curriculum, significant pieces of data are coded by hand.

3. Searching for Themes

The original codes are grouped under larger themes that capture key facets of the study focus, like ethical consciousness, intercultural reflection, and perspectives on artificial intelligence.

4. Reviewing Themes

To ensure consistency, internal consistency, and relevance to the study questions and theoretical framework, the themes that have been identified are examined and improved.

5. Defining and Naming Themes

To convey the core of each topic and represent particular aspects of students' lived experience, each theme is clearly defined and labeled.

6. Producing the Report

To ensure authenticity and reliability, the researcher uses direct quotes from respondents to support his interpretation of the themes within the context of Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Theory and the Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) Framework.

The researcher uses an iterative and interpretive method of analysis, which involves moving back and forth between data and theory to make sure the themes that emerge actually represent the viewpoints of the participants. Because it corresponds to the goal of comprehending and characterizing students' experiences with GPT AI as a learning partner in intercultural education without turning their stories into numerical data, Thematic Analysis is a good fit for this study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Findings

Theme 1: Patterns of GPT-AI Use in Cultural Learning

The way that students use GPT-AI as a learning aid in the ICC course is the subject of this theme. According to the data, GPT-AI is frequently used to help students comprehend the cultural ideas, values, communication methods, and intercultural concerns addressed throughout classroom instruction. Many respondents claimed to have used GPT-AI to help them comprehend complicated content and to promote their own learning outside of the classroom setting.

Code: Use of GPT-AI for cultural understanding

"I use GPT-AI quite often to understand cultural topics in ICC, especially when the explanation in class feels difficult." (P1)

Code: GPT-AI as a source of cultural knowledge

"GPT-AI helps me learn about cultural values and norms from different countries." (P3)

Code: Cultural comparison through GPT-AI

"I use GPT-AI to compare my culture with other cultures that we discuss in the ICC course." (P2)

These results suggest that GPT-AI is a readily available learning assistance tool that enables students to interact with intercultural material outside of the classroom. Students can clarify difficult material from lectures by using GPT-AI to comprehend cultural notions, values, and contrasts. By offering more instances and explanations that aid students' understanding of intercultural subjects, this indicates that GPT-AI complements traditional teaching methods.

Moreover, students' propensity towards autonomous and self-directed learning is demonstrated by the use of GPT-AI. Instead of depending entirely on lecturers or textbooks, students actively seek information through AI in order to improve their comprehension of ICC topics. This trend shows how learner autonomy is developing, with students using digital resources to meet their academic needs and assume control over their own learning.

This usage pattern is consistent with the acquisition of cultural knowledge (savoirs) in the context of intercultural communication competence. GPT-AI helps students explore a wide range of cultural material, which can help them see the world differently and deepen their comprehension of the intercultural topics covered in the course. However, GPT-AI serves primarily as a supplemental tool rather than a substitute for classroom instruction or cross-cultural interactions.

Theme 2: Comfort and Positive Engagement

Students' emotional comfort and good participation while utilizing GPT-AI to learn intercultural subjects are reflected in this theme. According to the data, engaging with GPT-AI fosters a welcoming and non-judgmental learning atmosphere, which motivates students to engage more actively and confidently in ICC-related learning activities.

Code: Comfort in using GPT-AI for learning

"I feel more comfortable learning cultural topics using GPT-AI because it explains things clearly."
(P4)

Code: Increased confidence in intercultural learning

"GPT-AI makes me more confident when discussing cultural issues, especially in assignments."
(P1)

Code: Positive emotional engagement with AI

"I enjoy using GPT-AI because it feels supportive, not judgmental." (P5)

Students' engagement with intercultural learning is significantly influenced by emotional comfort, according to these data. Users said that they felt more at ease and assured while using GPT-AI because it enables them to ask queries without worrying about making errors or being evaluated. Because it is a welcoming environment, students are able to discuss intercultural issues more freely, even if they may feel delicate or difficult.

A higher level of learning motivation is also aided by the sense of ease that GPT-AI provides. Students are more inclined to actively engage with learning materials and take part in conversations about cultural concerns when they feel secure and supported. This favorable emotional participation implies that GPT-AI has the potential to lower learning anxiety, especially in classes that demand thoughtful consideration of cultural differences and viewpoints.

From an educational standpoint, these results emphasize the function of AI in fostering a psychologically safe learning environment. GPT-AI, on the other hand, adds a supplementary layer of support that might increase students' self-assurance and openness to interacting with intercultural material, even though it doesn't take the place of human contact. The attitudinal aspect of intercultural communicative competence, notably an open and good attitude toward cultural learning, is strongly connected to this emotional aspect of learning.

Theme 3: Openness and Empathy toward Cultural Diversity

This theme emphasizes how students' interactions with GPT-AI might foster their empathy for and acceptance of cultural variety. As GPT-AI helped them develop wider viewpoints and refrain from making rash cultural judgements, participants said they became more accepting of cultural diversity and open-minded.

Code: Openness to cultural differences

“GPT-AI makes me more open to learning about other cultures without judging them.” (P2)

Code: Empathy toward people from different cultures

“I try to understand why people from other cultures behave differently after using GPT-AI.” (P3)

Code: Reduced cultural judgment

“I realize that culture cannot be judged quickly because every culture has its own background.” (P4)

According to the results of this subject, engaging with GPT-AI can aid in fostering pupils' empathy and openness to cultural diversity. Learning about different cultural behaviors and viewpoints through GPT-AI, participants said, made them less judgmental and more open-minded. It seems that students are more likely to reevaluate their preconceived notions and approach cultural distinctions with more comprehension when exposed to a variety of cultural information.

Additionally, the data indicates that by assisting students in comprehending the reasons behind various cultural behaviors, GPT-AI helps them foster empathetic attitudes. Students are better able to connect with individuals from different cultural backgrounds by gaining access to contextual data and explanations. This method promotes the growth of empathy, a crucial component of intercultural communication competence.

These results demonstrate that GPT-AI can serve as an intermediary instrument that promotes intercultural contemplation. GPT-AI offers students an initial forum to explore and reflect on cultural diversity, even if genuine intercultural interaction is what ultimately fosters empathy and openness. Therefore, by fostering tolerance, curiosity, and respect for cultural diversity, GPT-AI aids the attitudinal aspect of ICC.

Theme 4: Critical Thinking and Digital Cultural Awareness

When utilizing GPT-AI for intercultural learning, this subject highlights the students' critical consciousness. According to the data, pupils are not particularly receptive to material produced by artificial intelligence. In contrast, they exhibit reflective thought by asking about the veracity of information, acknowledging the shortcomings of GPT-AI, and comparing AI-generated material to other learning resources.

Code: Awareness of AI limitations

“Sometimes GPT-AI gives general answers about culture, so I don't fully rely on it.” (P5)

Code: Questioning the accuracy of AI-generated content

“I don't always believe GPT-AI completely, especially when it talks about culture.” (P1)

Code: Cross-checking AI information

“I compare GPT-AI answers with materials from class or other sources.” (P3)

This idea demonstrates that when using GPT-AI for intercultural learning, students exhibit critical awareness. Participants showed an awareness of the drawbacks of GPT-AI, particularly in terms of cultural generalizations, and were careful not to blindly believe AI-

generated information. This suggests that pupils are aware that the cultural knowledge given by AI may not accurately reflect the nuances of cultural reality.

In addition, students claimed to have proactively verified the information they received from GPT-AI against course materials or other sources. This behavior demonstrates the growth of digital critical literacy, in which students assess the truth and reliability of data before accepting it. In the context of AI-assisted learning, such practices are crucial because they lessen students' reliance on technology.

When utilized critically, these results imply that GPT-AI may promote reflective learning. A crucial element of critical cultural awareness is shown by pupils when they interrogate AI-generated material and acknowledge its drawbacks. This is consistent with the aims of intercultural education, which place emphasis on critically assessing the data and viewpoints encountered via digital resources as well as comprehending cultural variations.

Theme 5: GPT-AI as a Collaborative Learning Partner

This topic demonstrates how students see GPT-AI as a collaborative learning partner rather than just a piece of technology. Participants characterized their engagement with GPT-AI as conversational and helpful, notably when it came to planning thoughts, considering intercultural issues, and finishing learning assignments on their own.

Code: AI-supported idea development

"GPT-AI helps me brainstorm ideas before I write my assignments." (P2)

Code: Dialogic interaction with GPT-AI

"I interact with GPT-AI like a discussion partner when learning intercultural topics." (P4)

Code: Learner autonomy in AI-supported learning

"GPT-AI supports my learning, but I still decide what is right or wrong." (P5)

The results under this theme demonstrate that students see GPT-AI as more than just a passive technological instrument. According to participants, their engagement with GPT-AI was conversational, with the AI assisting with brainstorming, idea creation, and reflection throughout the learning process. According to this perspective, GPT-AI is viewed as a learning companion that aids pupils in structuring their ideas and interacting more thoroughly with intercultural issues.

Additionally, students retain their independence despite the collaborative aspect of GPT-AI usage. Rather than acting as an authority, GPT-AI is used as a tool to help people maintain control over their learning choices, according to participants. This demonstrates that students can maintain a balance between using AI help and exercising independent thinking, which is crucial for effective education.

The ability of GPT-AI to facilitate collaborative and independent learning at the same time is shown by these results. When learning about the ICC, GPT-AI helps students reflect and develop ideas while maintaining critical agency. The educational objective of encouraging the responsible and reflective usage of AI in academic settings is consistent with the promotion of learner autonomy.

B. Discussion

This chapter offers a thorough discussion of the results in light of the theoretical frameworks covered in chapter II, with an emphasis on Byram, (2021b) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model, the Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) framework, and the Educational AI framework. The discussion seeks to understand how students' interactions with GPT-AI reflect the educational potential of artificial intelligence in higher education as well as the multidimensional growth of intercultural communicative competence.

This research integrates empirical data with these theoretical viewpoints to show that GPT-AI acts as a mediational partner that promotes intercultural learning in cognitive, emotional, reflective, critical, and collaborative areas rather than just being a technological tool. To emphasize both alignment and contribution, the debate is structured around the five topics that were found in the data and compared critically with the current literature.

a. GPT-AI and the Development of Intercultural Knowledge (Savoir)

The results show that throughout the ICC course, students regularly utilized GPT-AI to define cultural norms, values, communication methods, and intercultural case studies. This trend demonstrates that GPT-AI served as a supplementary epistemic resource, broadening students' intercultural understanding outside the classroom setting. Students participated in active knowledge-seeking behavior through AI-mediated inquiry as opposed to just passively absorbing information from professors.

This is consistent with the dimension of savoirs in Byram, (1997) which is defined as knowledge of social groupings, cultural artifacts, behaviors, and the mechanisms of interaction. According to the data, GPT-AI increased exposure to a variety of cultural narratives and explanations, increasing students' cultural repertoires. Students seem to gain confidence while interacting with intercultural issues as a result of this increase in knowledge, as they felt more knowledgeable and well-prepared.

This study, however, emphasizes the experiential process of knowledge creation, in contrast to earlier studies that mostly assessed the efficacy of AI based on learning outcomes Kasneci et al., (2023). Students engaged in meaning negotiation by asking follow-up questions, seeking clarification, and comparing AI-generated material with classroom content. They did not just absorb information. According to this interactive engagement, GPT-AI is a constructivist learning process helper rather than a static source of information. However, the study also points out a significant constraint.

GPT-AI provides cultural knowledge, but that knowledge is still mediated by algorithmic patterns, which might lead to overgeneralization or simplification. As Deng & Lin, (2023) warn, AI-generated material may mirror implicit biases present in the training data. Hence, even if GPT-AI increases access to intercultural information, it does not take the place of genuine intercultural experience or essential pedagogical framework. Its value lies in augmentation, not replacement.

b. Emotional Engagement and Learner Agency (Savoir-être in TEL Context)

The results show that students felt emotionally at ease when using GPT-AI, especially while discussing delicate cultural matters. According to participants, GPT-AI is helpful and non-judgmental, which boosted their confidence and alleviated their worries. Because intercultural

learning frequently entails uncertainty, vulnerability, and anxiety about misunderstanding, this emotional element is important. This pertains to *savoir être*, the attitudinal aspect of Byram's ICC framework that includes openness, curiosity, and a willingness to withhold judgment. Intercultural interaction seems to require emotional security as a prerequisite. Students are more inclined to ask questions, acknowledge uncertainty, and investigate cultural differences without becoming defensive when they feel secure.

This result is consistent with W. Holmes & Gee, (2023), who contend that AI-mediated settings can foster dialogue in a low-risk environment. However, this research expands upon their thesis by demonstrating that emotional comfort not only lowers anxiety but also improves learner agency. Students reported feeling empowered to start their own investigations, demonstrating a shift from passive acceptance to active participation. In a Technology-Enhanced Learning framework Bates, (2021) emotional engagement is a vital but understudied aspect of online teaching. The affective affordances of technology are highlighted in this study, even though it is frequently assessed in terms of efficiency and customization. The prompt and compassionate interaction style of GPT-AI seems to foster motivation and promote greater cognitive engagement. Nonetheless, AI-mediated emotional involvement must continue to complement human interaction. Genuine interpersonal interactions are necessary for empathy and emotional development in intercultural settings. Although GPT-AI can lessen initial anxiety and promote openness, it cannot completely replicate the moral and emotional complexities of human intercultural interactions.

c. GPT-AI and the Cultivation of Openness and Empathy (*Savoir-être & Savoir comprendre*)

The fostering of empathy and openness is a really important discovery. When exposed to AI-generated explanations of cultural differences, students said they became more thoughtful and less judgmental. By putting unfamiliar practices into context, this implies that GPT-AI may help people adopt different perspectives. This growth in Byram's model is a reflection of both *savoir être* (attitudinal openness) and *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating). Students showed evidence of developing intercultural mediation skills by demonstrating their capacity to comprehend cultural customs and connect them to their own cultural experiences. Students started to comprehend cultural differences as contextually based practices instead of seeing them as deviations. Deardorff's (2020) process model of intercultural competence, which highlights empathy and inner change as key results, is consistent with this conclusion. But the majority of earlier research emphasize direct intercultural contact as the main factor in the growth of empathy. On the other hand, this study indicates that AI-mediated conversation can act as a reflective space in preparation for real-world engagement, fostering intercultural sensitivity.

Importantly, empathy in this study was not defined as an immediate acceptance. Rather, it arose via introspective reflection and inquiry. This indicates that GPT-AI assisted cognitive empathy, or the capacity to comprehend other people's viewpoints, rather than merely emotional empathy. Because intercultural competence encompasses both interpretative comprehension and ethical awareness, the distinction is important. As a result, the value of GPT-AI resides in providing a framework for reflective openness. Although it cannot replace real-world intercultural experience, it can begin the internal reflection process that is essential for intercultural development.

d. Critical Reflection and Digital Cultural Awareness (*Savoir comprendre & Savoir s'engager*)

The growth of critical reflection and digital cultural awareness is one of the most intellectually important discoveries. According to pupils, they questioned AI-generated answers, verified facts, and identified possible cultural stereotypes. This conduct indicates sophisticated evaluative engagement rather than technological dependence. According to Byram's ICC model, this is comparable to "*savoir s'engager*," or critical cultural awareness, which is the capacity to assess cultural practices, including one's own, using specific standards. The students' critical perspective of GPT-AI shows that they did not simply accept the algorithmic authority. They practiced epistemic agency instead.

Deng & Lin, (2023) raise the possibility that kids may put too much faith in AI-generated material, which contradicts this result. The participants in this study exhibited cautious involvement, implying that the use of reflective pedagogy alongside AI integration might improve critical thinking rather than diminish it. From a digital literacy standpoint, this shows a growing understanding of the epistemological constraints of AI. Students understood that GPT-AI generates probabilistic results rather than representations that are culturally genuine. In modern education, where AI tools are increasingly used to mediate knowledge production, this kind of awareness is crucial. As a result, the GPT-AI in this experiment served as a catalyst for critical thinking as well as a source of knowledge. Students improve their digital literacy skills and intercultural criticality at the same time as they question AI-generated material.

e. Autonomy and Collaboration in Learning (*Savoir apprendre/faire & AI Co-learning*)

The idea of GPT-AI as a collaborative learning partner is the most prominent theme that arises from the results. According to pupils, dialogic conversations involved brainstorming, idea improvement, and contemplative inquiry that were facilitated by GPT-AI. This implies that rather than being a passive instrument, AI was perceived as a co-participant in the creation of knowledge. This corresponds to *savoir apprendre/faire* in Byram's framework, which places emphasis on the development of skills in discovery, interaction, and application. Students used GPT-AI to practice intercultural communication, analyze interpretations, and improve comprehension. Experiential learning methods, which are in line with constructivist theory Kolb, (2015), are shown by this iterative interaction.

Zawacki-Richter et al., (2023) model of human-AI cooperation, in which AI enhances cognitive processes via co-learning interactions, is consistent with this viewpoint. This research, though, builds on previous frameworks by illustrating how this kind of cooperation functions particularly in intercultural educational settings. Importantly, students maintained evaluative authority. They kept control over decision-making rather than giving AI epistemic dominance. The fact that there is a balance between collaboration and autonomy shows that GPT-AI enhances learner independence rather than weakening it. One of the main accomplishments of this study is the discovery of GPT-AI as a mediating partner. In ICC education, it reframes the integration of AI from a helpful tool to a collaborative discourse on intercultural significance. This reconceptualization may influence how AI is incorporated into postsecondary education's instructional methods in the future.

f. Synthesis and Answer to the Research Question

In conclusion, the results reveal that in the creation of their Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), students perceive GPT-AI as a multifaceted mediating partner. In addition to promoting the development of intercultural knowledge, GPT-AI also fosters openness, empathy, critical awareness, and learner independence across cognitive, emotional, reflective, critical, and collaborative dimensions. Students' perception of GPT-AI as a collaborative learning partner that fosters intercultural meaning-making and dialogic reflection is the most important factor. As a result, in response to the research question, students perceive the use of GPT-AI in ICC learning as a thoughtful, encouraging, and co-constructive process that, when integrated within a guided pedagogical framework, improves their intercultural competence.

4. CONCLUSION

In the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) course, this study looked at how students actually lived when using GPT-AI as a learning partner. The research indicates that students saw GPT-AI as a reflective and helpful partner that helped them with their intercultural learning process, not simply as a technological instrument. They discovered that GPT-AI helped them broaden their intercultural understanding, especially in comprehending the cultural norms, values, and communication strategies covered in the course. Furthermore, students said that interacting with GPT-AI made them feel more at ease and open when talking about intercultural subjects. They discussed how they had become more empathetic and thoughtful about cultural differences, as well as how they had learned to critically assess AI-generated material by analyzing and cross-referencing it. According to these experiences, GPT-AI was thought to have aided with both the cognitive and emotional aspects of intercultural proficiency. The most significant discovery is that students saw GPT-AI as a collaborative learning companion that promoted independent study, idea creation, and dialogue exchange. When implemented within a guided and reflective pedagogical framework, the study finds that the integration of GPT-AI in ICC learning is generally experienced by students as a multidimensional and co-constructive process that promotes intercultural development.

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