

ENHANCING ONLINE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH AN ONLINE TRAINING PROGRAM FOR THAI UNDERGRADUATES IN THE NEW NORMAL

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Abstract: *The objectives of this study were, firstly, to implement and determine the effectiveness of an online training program designed to enhance the online communication and intercultural communication skills of undergraduate students and, secondly, to investigate the level of satisfaction of undergraduate students towards the program. The participants were 50 international students at a Thai university who were enrolled in the first semester of the 2023 academic year in a course called "Learning and Problem Solving Skills" (Gen 121). The instruments used in the study consisted of a pre-test/post-test of online communication and intercultural communication skills and a satisfaction online questionnaire to determine the level of student satisfaction with the program. Quantitative methods were used to analyze the data. The results were twofold. Firstly, during the implementation of the online training program, the findings showed that the online was effective in enhancing the undergraduate students' online communication and intercultural communication skills, as shown in the pre-test ($\bar{x} = 9.5$) and post-test score ($\bar{x} = 14.3$). Secondly, the overall level of the students' satisfaction toward the program was high. Despite the students' increased awareness of online and intercultural communication skills, the results showed that this awareness was insufficient to change their study habits, particularly when it came to turning on cameras. Thus, teachers ought to provide students with explicit instructions encouraging them to turn on their cameras so that they can study online more effectively.*

Keywords: *general education, intercultural communication skill, online communication skill, online training program, satisfaction*

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Introduction

Communication is the act of transferring information from one person, group, or place to another by writing, speaking, or using a medium that provides a means of understanding. It is an important part of education as it can enhance the learning experience and create a positive atmosphere in class. Communication between teachers and students in the online context is more complicated and difficult than in a face-to-face class. In a face-to-face setting, instructors have the advantage of connecting with and communicating with their students via the use of body language and facial expressions (Alawamleh et al., 2020), which makes communication more effective.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected teaching and learning both globally and locally. As a result, it has led to an immediate change from traditional classrooms and face-to-face learning to emergency online learning (Boonmoh et al., 2022). Schools and universities needed to rapidly shift from onsite to online courses. Although there are many advantages of online learning, a number of students have difficulties with learning online, for a variety of reasons. One important reason is the decrease in the level of communication between the instructors and their students. In fact, the goals of online communication are the same as the goals of face-to-face communication, including bonding, exchanging information, and being heard and understood. Many studies have revealed that a major problem with online learning is the lack of interaction between instructors and students (Alawamleh et al., 2020; Boonmoh et al., 2021; Salarvand et al., 2023). In particular, students in Asian contexts tend to turn off their cameras; consequently, this is one of the important problems that teachers face. Teachers cannot view students' faces and their body language and so cannot ascertain their levels of understanding or attention.

At present, the post-COVID-19 situation in Thailand and in many parts of the world has greatly improved, and the mode of instruction in higher education has switched from 100% online to being physically onsite in many institutions, with some hybrid classrooms being used depending on the situation. As a result, there have been continuous changes toward onsite, online, or hybrid classrooms (Poungjinda & Pathak, 2022). It is possible that more in-person communication between teachers and students is likely to improve the learning experience and foster a healthy learning environment (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017; Grobella, 2015). When traditional classrooms are replaced by online classrooms, teachers and students must communicate online (Renu, 2021). Nevertheless, difficulties remain with online communication for both teachers and students when teaching and learning online after the COVID-19 pandemic. These include weak interaction, engagement, nonverbal language, communication, and intercultural awareness (Xia et al., 2022;

Pansa et al., 2022; Kanchai, 2021; Boonmoh et al., 2021; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Instructors can be faced with silence, and students often turn off their cameras. Furthermore, students in online courses come from a wide range of backgrounds, including various faculties, different regions of Thailand, and even different countries. As students have different cultural backgrounds, when communicating with one another, it is essential for them to be aware of cultural differences. Differences in cultural norms can influence how students behave in the classroom, including how they respond to questions and their perceived role in the learner/teacher relationship. They must learn to adapt themselves to circumstances in order to behave appropriately. In order to develop their intercultural competency, especially in the online context, students should learn about cultural differences. Intercultural communication is a crucial aspect of interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds. It is especially important when two or more people's communication is impacted by culture (Baldwin et al., 2014). Intercultural communication skills are required to reduce misconceptions and avoid communication breakdowns (Thongprayoon et al., 2020). This is beneficial to students, as they are capable of communicating in a variety of cultural and linguistic situations more effectively. There are many studies on the topic of intercultural communication skills development which frequently focus on language learning contexts in traditional classrooms. Little research has emphasized developing online communication and intercultural communication skills, especially in the Thai context.

Therefore, the present study implements and assesses an online training program which was developed based on teachers' and students' perceptions of studying general education (GE) courses in an online environment, as described in Boonmoh & Jumpakate's (2023) research. It is very significant to conduct this research in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the online training program and the satisfaction of learners as well as to obtain valuable comments and feedback. The outcomes obtained will be used to develop a training program that is more appropriate and effective for learners.

The following research questions were postulated:

1. What is the effectiveness of the online training program for enhancing online communication and intercultural communication skills?
2. What are the levels of undergraduate students' satisfaction and their attitudes towards the online training program?

This present study aimed to assess the efficacy of an online training program developed to improve undergraduate students' online communication and intercultural communication skills. Secondly, this study investigated the level of satisfaction of undergraduate students towards the program.

Literature review

In today's globalized society, it is increasingly significant for people to understand diverse cultures and the impact of intercultural communication (Baldwin et al., 2014). Although the COVID-19 situation has improved, online learning is still widespread. For this reason, in order to be effective online teachers and learners, it is essential for them to obtain online communication and intercultural communication skills. The following is a short comprehensive review of previous research on communication and intercultural communication skills of learners.

According to previous studies, intercultural communication competence and netiquette are two specific skill sets that students need in order to succeed in studying online. To understand and reach such skills, the Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) was proposed by Byram (1997) and developed by Deardoff (2006). In Byram's (1997) study, the model consists of 1) intercultural attitudes, which refers to curiosity and openness, together with the readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one's own; 2) knowledge, which refers to the knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction; 3) skills of interpreting and relating, in other words the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own; 4) the skills of discovery and interaction, i.e., the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction; and 5) critical cultural awareness, which is the ability to evaluate, critically and based on explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries. Subsequently, Deardoff (2006) suggested the Model of Intercultural Competence, which is similar to Byram's (1997) work in that it comprises abilities, attitudes, and knowledge and comprehension.

Additional to ICC, netiquette is an essential skill for online learning. Pewnill (2021) described netiquette as a digital etiquette or online communication rule for Thai digital citizens or Thai students to communicate effectively via online tools. Students in this generation are rather proficient in using technology; they are 'digital natives'. Prensky (2001) described the term "digital natives" as the generation that was born into the information age and uses digital platforms and devices for informational and recreational purposes. Despite the fact that students frequently use online content, this does not automatically suggest that they are able to effectively use digital technology for their online learning.

Intercultural communication has been researched in many studies (Haerazi & Nunez, 2022; Higgins & Siritaratn, 2022; Joshi & Varhelaht, 2022; Lee, Ho, & Chen, 2023; Thongprayoon et al., 2020). Joshi and Varhelaht (2022) explored

the experiences of 59 international students in Finland enrolled in a fully online degree program there when they participated in multicultural, multinational online study teams. The findings revealed that students found it important to have training in intercultural communication skills; moreover, it was revealed that teachers should be trained in the use of resources, tools, communication, teamwork, leadership, and organizational and online culture support in culturally diverse online contexts. Pham and Pham (2022) surveyed 336 Vietnamese public and private university students' intercultural competence. The results from the questionnaire indicated that the level of intercultural competence among the students in both types of university was low. The study revealed that they lacked knowledge about the diversity of culture and necessary skills to deal with intercultural situations. Although most students came from a variety of provinces and cities, they were still within the same region, the South of Vietnam, so cultural diversity was limited. When comparing the two types of schools, the students from the private universities were found to hold more positive attitudes towards values, practices, and different cultural perspectives. They also possessed the crucial skills to put into practice in intercultural communication in multicultural settings. It was evident that private universities had provided a more vibrant environment that enabled their students to engage in cross-cultural interactions through a range of extracurricular and club activities. Hofmeyr (2023) investigated 164 first-year Japanese students regarding the effects of cocurricular and extracurricular programs on the development of intercultural competence for one year. The results revealed that while formal programs positively affected the development of intercultural competence development, informal intercultural contact on campus negatively affected students' intercultural attitudes. The results also showed that student perceptions of intercultural competence at the pre-intervention stage affected engagement with intercultural opportunities on campus, suggesting the importance of introducing interventions prior to higher education.

Research on the development of intercultural competency has made use of massively open online courses, or MOOCs. Krishnan, Jin and Calahan (2021) evaluated the impact of including intentional intercultural learning (ICL) activities via massive open online course (MOOC) in an on-campus course on increasing the student cultural competence of 75 undergraduate students in the United States. The findings from the pre-test and post-test revealed that utilizing the MOOC in understanding diversity and inclusion as an ICL activity was an effective means of teaching intercultural competence and led to a significant increase in mean developmental orientation (DO) scores in the intervention group compared to the control group, which did not participate in the MOOC. Moreover, reflection papers written by the intervention group showed that the most significant benefits were greater self-awareness, a larger cultural worldview, and greater openness to diversity exploration. Similarly, Higgins and Siritaratn (2022) developed a teaching module based on conversation

analysis to improve the interactional and intercultural competence of 28 Thai undergraduate aviation students. The results of the questionnaire and interviews with the students regarding the implementation of the teaching module were favorable, demonstrating that the teaching module had a beneficial impact on the students' English proficiency in terms of their intercultural and interactional competence. Furthermore, it was discovered that students' comprehension and awareness of interactional and intercultural competency improved and increased with the number of opportunities which they had to observe real-world interactions in airport scenarios.

In the same year, Chang et al. (2022) surveyed 7,411 Thai junior high school students about the effect of intercultural competence on their resilience, well-being, and attitudes toward reading. The research findings suggested that improved intercultural competency of such students can lead to better resilience. The students were able to adapt better to their environment and to overcome challenges. Furthermore, having good intercultural competence can help students feel relaxed and happy when interacting with people from different cultures, which can create a sense of well-being. Also, the more interculturally competent students are, the more they enjoy reading and learning about different cultures. Another study carried out by Huttayavilaiphan (2022) in Thailand used the CEFR-based online intercultural communication activities to improve Thai students' communicative language competence. The findings revealed that their student participants not only improved their linguistic and communicative skills, but that they were also able to move beyond their comfort zone in using the English language. The interview results found that online communication in English with people from various backgrounds had enhanced the Thai students' linguistic knowledge, such as when they used more complex sets of vocabulary and grammar. Nevertheless, the results of some studies indicated that the online medium can cause complications. Shahini et al. (2020) used online discussions to examine the cultural communication practices that were in use among 3,821 MOOC participants from 148 countries. The findings showed that as the course progressed, only a very limited number of interactions had elements of transcultural awareness, and peer communication also declined. According to these findings, the learners inside the MOOC community might have benefited from a collaborative pedagogical approach.

Subsequently, Boonmoh and Jumpakate (2023) conducted a survey of 10 Thai teachers and 431 Thai and international undergraduate students enrolled in general education (GE) courses to obtain their opinions on the teaching and learning of GE courses in an online setting. The results from the survey and from interviews indicated that online communication skills including netiquette were essential for online learning, particularly GE courses. In addition, students mentioned that they had trouble with intercultural differences, intercultural communication skills, and online communication skills. For future requirements, the findings of this study suggested that both students and lecturers wanted short

workshops and training sessions about online communication and intercultural skills.

Additionally, Boonmoh and Kamsa-ard (2023) investigated the anxiety levels of pre-service EFL teachers regarding online teaching practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that the primary sources of anxiety included concerns about the mode of instruction (online, onsite, or hybrid), stability of the internet connection, and the ability to integrate technology into teaching. This context underscores the need for targeted training to improve online communication and intercultural communication skills, especially during such unprecedented times (Boonmoh & Kamsa-ard, 2023).

As shown by the literature review, intercultural communication is a significant competency in order for learners to develop their understanding of other cultures. Even though numerous studies have been conducted to develop intercultural communication skills, these studies frequently focused on language learning contexts in traditional classrooms. Little research has emphasized developing online communication and intercultural communication skills, especially in the Thai context. At the time of this study, the COVID-19 situation has improved, but online learning persists in many institutions. Hence, it is crucial to carry out this research in order to evaluate the effectiveness of online training programs and the satisfaction of learners, and to obtain insightful comments and feedback. The results obtained will be applied to the development of a training program to make the program more suitable and efficient for online learners.

Methodology

As illustrated in figure 1, the following research framework was implemented throughout the study.

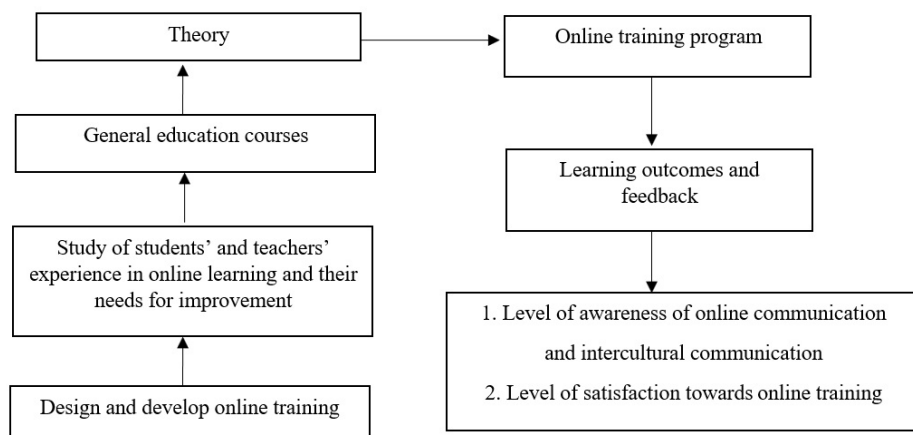


Figure 1. *Proposed research framework.*

The study's participants consisted of 50 international students at a Thai university enrolled in the first semester of the 2023 academic year in the Gen 121 (Learning and Problem Solving Skills) course. This is a compulsory course for first-year students. The participants included 34 Thai students and 16 international students from Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, France, and Denmark. The participants included both male and female students. These students came from a variety of backgrounds, different faculties, different regions of Thailand, and different countries. All the participants were students between the ages of 20 and 21.

The sample group consisted of undergraduate students at a Thai university who were enrolled in Gen 121, and the 50 students in the sample were obtained using the cluster random sampling method. In addition, all the participants consented to participating in the study and to having their data collected by the researchers. The research project has been approved by the KMUTT IRB (Institutional Review Board) with a certificate number, KMUTT-IRB-COE-2023-163.

The training program was part of the Gen 121 course. Although Gen 121 is not an English course, the language of instruction for this international program is English.

Variables

1. Independent variable: This comprises the online training program for enhancing the online communication and intercultural communication skills for undergraduate students
2. Dependent variables: Learning outcomes from, and the level of student satisfaction with, the online training program for enhancing the online communication and intercultural communication skills of undergraduate students.

Research design

In this study, the one-group pre-test-post-test design was utilized.



X = Online training program for enhancing undergraduate students' online communication and intercultural communication skills.

O = Learning outcomes from, and the levels of student satisfaction with, the online training program.

Instruments

1. Online training program and lesson plan: This consisted of three lesson plans for twelve different topics about online communication and intercultural communication skills, over three weeks for one hour per week. The online training program comprised English videos created from a prior survey of teachers and students' needs (Boonmoh & Jumpakate, 2023). There were three modules, and each module was divided into four units:

Module 1: How to prepare for studying. (1 hour)

Unit 1: How to set/prepare yourself in a learning environment. (15 minutes)

Unit 2: How to manage time for studying. (15 minutes)

Unit 3: Useful social media/applications/platforms for studying. (15 minutes)

Unit 4: Useful online communication skills. (15 minutes)

Module 2: How to speak when studying. (1 hour)

Unit 5: Four main intercultural communication skills. (15 minutes)

Unit 6: How to speak your mind. (15 minutes)

Unit 7: How to share ideas with friends in a group. (15 minutes)

Unit 8: How to reflect on your own ideas. (15 minutes)

Module 3: Submitting work, and the manner and demeanor when interacting. (1 hour)

Unit 9: What is netiquette in the classroom? (15 minutes)

Unit 10: How to react to friends when studying through an online platform. (15 minutes)

Unit 11: How to react to teachers when studying through an online platform. (15 minutes)

Unit 12: How to complete and submit tasks/assignments/activities online. (15 minutes)

2. Pre-test and post-test about online communication and intercultural communication skills: The pre-test and post-test are identical with shuffled choices. Each module had a pre-test and post-test consisting of 15 items, making a total of 45 items for the three modules. It was expected that there would be improvement from the pre-test to the post-test due to the training provided.

3. A satisfaction online survey: Forty-five items were divided into four parts: student's background, overall opinion on online training, opinion on the online training for each module, and additional suggestions. The questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in the field in order for it to be more accurate and relevant.

Data collection

- 1) Each week, students were asked to do a pre-test (15 items) before the start of the session about online communication and intercultural communication skills.
- 2) Students were asked to watch one module of the training program each week during class time, making it compulsory. The online training program consisted of three modules, and there were four units in each module. After watching the video each week, they were asked to do a post-test (15 items). Students who missed the class had access to the tests and the video later and could complete them outside of class time.
- 3) Additionally, students were asked to complete an online satisfaction survey after finishing the entire online training program. The survey was conducted one week after the completion of the training program to report their satisfaction and attitudes towards the online training program.

Data analysis

Utilizing the students' test results from the pre-test and post-test, the students' overall performance on the intercultural and online communication abilities was scored using the mean and standard deviation presented in the form of a table.

The questionnaire was used to measure both the students' level of satisfaction and their attitudes towards the online training program. In the first part of the questionnaire, frequency and percentage were used to analyze the demographic information of the participants. In the second and third parts of the questionnaire, 5-point Likert scales were used. The mean and standard deviation were used to specify the students' satisfaction towards the online training program. In addition to analyzing the questionnaire, the mean scores were determined and interpreted following Ruengprapan's (2000) rating scale:

- Mean score of 1.00 to 1.80 = "strongly disagree" or "very low"
- Mean score of 1.81 to 2.60 = "disagree" or "low"
- Mean score of 2.61 to 3.40 = "agree" or "moderate"
- Mean score of 3.41 to 4.20 = "agree" or "high"
- Mean score of 4.21 to 5.00 = "strongly agree" or "very high"

In order to determine the students' attitudes toward the online training program, data obtained from the open-ended question in the fourth part of the questionnaire were analyzed by using the content analysis technique.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the effectiveness of the online training program for enhancing online communication and intercultural communication skills?

To answer this question, a pre-test-post-test achievement test was employed before and after the training in each module so as to analyze the data. In order to investigate the effectiveness of the online training program, the achievement test was utilized to compare how the students’ competencies developed. The results are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of student achievement before and after the online training

Test	N	Pre-test	Post-test
Module 1	50	10.4	14.5
Module 2	45	9.0	14.3
Module 3	50	9.3	14.3
Average		9.5	14.3

The findings suggest an improvement in student achievement from $\bar{x} = 9.5$ to $\bar{x} = 14.3$, respectively. The comparison shows that student achievement after the online training was higher than before. It was evident that following the training program, the students’ understanding of online communication and intercultural communication skills had increased. The results show that the online training had a positive impact on the students’ competency, and that it was effective in enhancing online communication and intercultural communication skills.

Research Question 2: What are the levels of undergraduate students’ satisfaction and their attitudes towards the online training program?

To answer the second research question, the questionnaire was used to measure both the students’ level of satisfaction and their attitudes towards the online training program. The findings regarding overall student satisfaction towards the online training are shown in Table 2. The satisfaction survey was conducted once, one week after the end of Module 3. This timing was chosen to allow students to reflect on the entire program, though it may have influenced their recall of specific topics.

Table 2. Students’ overall satisfaction towards the online training program

No.	Items			
	Overall satisfaction	\bar{x}	SD	Interpreted as
1	I am satisfied with this online course.	4.38	0.69	Very high
2	I obtained knowledge from this online course.	4.26	0.69	Very high
3	The platform of this online course is appropriate.	4.2	0.75	Very high
4	The length of time is appropriate.	4.26	0.69	Very high
5	The content in this online course is appropriate.	4.22	0.76	Very high

No.	Items	\bar{x}	SD	Interpreted as
Knowledge and understanding				
6	I had knowledge and understanding about online communication and intercultural communication skills before the training.	3.48	0.73	High
7	I have knowledge and understanding about online communication and intercultural communication skills after the training.	4.36	0.62	Very high
Application				
8	I have confidence and am able to transfer knowledge to others.	4.2	0.69	Very high
9	I am confident that I can communicate in the classroom.	4.36	0.71	Very high
10	I am confident that I can study online effectively.	4.44	0.75	Very high
Total		4.22		Very high

The results show a very high degree of overall satisfaction with the online training ($\bar{x} = 4.22$). All the elements were determined to be at a 'very high' level, with the exception of prior knowledge and comprehension of online communication and intercultural communication skills. The results indicate that following the training, the participants expressed very high satisfaction with the knowledge, length, and content of the online training. Their knowledge of online communication and intercultural communication skills had both reportedly increased. Students also possessed greater confidence in learning and interacting with others in an online classroom. In addition, the data showed that the participants had more confidence in their ability to study online more effectively.

Table 3. *Student satisfaction towards Module 1 of the online training program: How to prepare for studying*

No.	Items	\bar{x}	SD	Interpreted as
1	The videos from this module can help me to have better awareness about verbal and non-verbal online communication.	4.54	0.54	Very high
2	I am confident that I can prepare myself in a suitable learning environment.	4.36	0.69	Very high
3	I am confident that I can submit my work online on time.	4.32	0.71	Very high
4	I am sure that I can talk to my friends and my teachers in the classrooms.	4.22	0.76	Very high
5	I think I can handle a lot of homework and assignments.	3.92	0.93	High
6	I will use body language more in online classes.	3.90	0.90	High

No.	Items	\bar{x}	SD	Interpreted as
7	I think I can turn on cameras when studying online.	3.74	1.05	High
	Total	4.14		High

Table 3 shows that students possessed high levels of satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 4.14$) with Module 1 of the online training program (How to prepare for studying). The questionnaire items that scored the highest, highlighting the top three central tendencies, were awareness of verbal and nonverbal online communication, preparing oneself in a suitable learning environment, and submitting work online on time. The scores for these items were 4.54 (SD = 0.54), 4.36 (SD = 0.69), and 4.32 (SD = 0.71), respectively. The item with the lowest score ($\bar{x} = 3.74$) regarded switching on cameras while studying online. The results indicated that the participants reported having more awareness about verbal and non-verbal online communication; however, not all of them were likely to turn on cameras when studying online. The possible reason why students sometimes did not want to turn on cameras was their concern for personal appearance and physical surroundings. Fortunately, most reported having the ability to create or arrange a conducive learning environment and to submit work online on schedule.

Table 4. Student satisfaction towards Module 2 of the online training program: How to speak when studying

No.	Items	\bar{x}	SD	Interpreted as
1	I have a good attitude towards communicating with friends from different cultures.	4.46	0.61	Very high
2	The videos from this module showed me how to share ideas within a group.	4.36	0.69	Very high
3	I think I can collaborate with friends in group.	4.34	0.68	Very high
4	I am confident enough to allocate work to each member in group.	4.26	0.72	Very high
5	The videos presented the skills to communicate with friends from different cultures.	4.18	0.79	Very high
6	I am able to present my work/assignments effectively.	4.18	0.82	Very high
7	The training presented ways to share my ideas together with supporting statements.	4.12	0.79	Very high
	Total	4.27		Very high

Table 4 illustrates the extremely high level of student satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 4.27$) with Module 2 of the online training program (How to speak when studying), as all the elements were rated ‘very high’. The items with the highest scores were item 1) having positive attitudes towards communicating with friends from diverse cultures, item 2) knowing how to share ideas within a group, and item 3) working together with friends in a group. This suggests that the participants’ views on communicating with friends from diverse cultures had improved

following the training. They now reported having the ability to collaborate and exchange ideas with classmates.

Table 5 Student satisfaction towards Module 3 of the online training program: Submitting work, manner and demeanor when interacting

No.	Items	\bar{x}	SD	Interpreted as
1	The videos help me to be aware of the benefits of turning on a camera/webcam.	4.46	0.7	Very high
2	I am aware that having sufficient knowledge in English can help me to study better.	4.34	0.8	Very high
3	This module helps increase my awareness of turning on cameras and unmuting the microphone in classes.	4.28	0.8	Very high
4	I will have a good attitude about using English in online classes.	4.26	0.8	Very high
5	I think I know when the turn is to talk with friends and lecturers.	4.20	0.8	Very high
6	I am aware that I have to handle homework and assignments during class time.	4.16	0.8	Very high
7	I am confident that I have enough vocabulary in English to communicate with friends.	4.12	0.8	Very high
	Total	4.26		Very high

As can be seen in Table 5, there was a very high degree of satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 4.26$) among students with regard to Module 3 (submitting work, manner and demeanor when communicating). All the items were ranked 'very high'. However, when examining the items separately, item 1) awareness of the benefits of turning on a camera/webcam) received the highest score ($\bar{x} = 4.46$). The second-highest score ($\bar{x} = 4.34$) was item 2) awareness that having sufficient proficiency in English can aid in studying more effectively. Item 3, which increased awareness about turning on cameras and unmuting microphones in class, received the third-highest score ($\bar{x} = 4.28$). It was rather interesting that the students realized the benefits of turning on a camera; nevertheless, they did not want to turn on a camera while studying online according to the results from table 3.

The findings clearly indicate that, in addition to participants' realizing the benefits of using cameras for online learning, the training also increased their awareness of the need for turning on cameras and unmuting microphones in classroom settings. The results also revealed that they understood how important English proficiency was to their ability to study more effectively.

Discussion

The research findings presented in this study suggest that online training significantly improves the online communication and intercultural communication skills of undergraduate students in Thailand. The results of the

achievement test and students' satisfaction survey both suggest that the online training program had a positive impact on the students' competency in terms of online communication and intercultural communication skills. Moreover, it was evident from their participation in the study that students were more aware of verbal and non-verbal online communication. This finding is consistent with the work of Krishnan, Jin, and Calahan (2021), who mentioned that the most significant benefits of using intentional intercultural learning (ICL) activities via a MOOC include greater self-awareness, a larger cultural worldview, and greater openness to diversity exploration.

The improvement in student achievement was evident from the comparison of results in the pre-test ($\bar{x} = 9.5$) to the post-test ($\bar{x} = 14.3$). This indicates a substantial enhancement in students' online communication and intercultural communication skills after the training. The satisfaction survey results also showed a very high level of overall satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 4.22$) with the online training program, indicating that students found the program beneficial and effective.

Similarly, the finding aligns with the study by Higgins and Siritaratn (2022), who stated that implementing a teaching module based on conversation analysis to promote interactional and intercultural competence could improve students' comprehension and awareness of these competencies. However, this awareness was insufficient to influence changes in their study habits. Students frequently turned on their cameras when interacting with friends virtually; nevertheless, they preferred to avoid using the camera while studying with teachers. This finding is consistent with Boonmoh and Jumpakate (2023), who discovered that most students do not feel confident turning on the camera during online study sessions. It seems plausible that they lacked familiarity with their teachers. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to establish a positive classroom environment and strong relationships with their students. Chaisiri (2023) mentioned that teachers need to establish and maintain a welcoming, stress-free, and encouraging environment in virtual classes where errors are readily and occasionally humorously acknowledged. Moreover, teachers should be mindful of the quantity of assignments, particularly for students with low fluency. Anxiety about using proper grammar in English can detrimentally affect learners' confidence when speaking. Punyaporn and Soontornwipast (2022) discovered that when students perceived their teachers as receptive to new ideas and perspectives, it could potentially bridge the communication gap between them.

Regarding using a camera when studying online, it is sensitive for some students to turn on the camera. Providing students with additional resources, such as the chat option, can motivate them to participate in class discussions. According to Le, Cunningham, and Watson (2018), when students felt they had less social presence, they were more likely to use English naturally in online settings. The

findings suggest that students' willingness to communicate decreased with increasing social presence in the online world. This is similar to the study by Punyaporn and Soontornwipast (2022), who found that when students were given the opportunity to interact with the class through the chat box, they were more eager to talk. Presumably, this is practical and related to issues with saving face in the classroom (Hofstede et al., 2005). It is possible that they are uncomfortable speaking in front of a large group of students in an individual capacity. This is consistent with Toth's (2010) finding that the propensity of certain individuals to avoid oral communication is one of the most researched areas related to communication.

Pedagogical implication

As evidenced by the fact that intercultural and communication skills are critical for learners in today's world, the present study reinforces the fact that educational institutions should incorporate these into their curricula so that students can use them in both their academic and professional lives.

In order to develop intercultural and online communication skills, Boonmoh and Jumpakate (2023) suggested that there should be icebreaker activities in the very first class to make students more familiar with their classmates and also with their instructors, especially in an online class. As a result, students will feel more at ease speaking with their new peers, so communication amongst students from various backgrounds will be easier in subsequent classes. Students who have good attitudes about communicating with friends from different cultures tended to share ideas and collaborate with friends more. Consequently, teachers should assign students to work in groups. Shahini et al. (2020) noted that a collaborative pedagogical approach may interconnect learners well in the MOOC community. Furthermore, peer feedback is an effective strategy for lowering students' anxiety, according to research by Motallebzadeh, Kondori, and Kazemi (2020).

Regarding cameras, teachers may need to design more creative and active tasks to stimulate their students to turn on their cameras. It is essential for teachers to reinforce the message for students to turn on their cameras, for instance by praising and showing their appreciation towards those students. Teachers need to mention and explain the many benefits of camera use in online learning. In addition, they should encourage students to prepare themselves to study in a suitable learning environment such as by having a good seating area and a strong internet connection as well as by studying in a quiet room, as this will increase the chance that they will communicate more in an online classroom.

Finally, this study indicates that in online environments with diverse cultural backgrounds, teachers should receive training in online resource usage, communication, teamwork, and leadership. In particular, educators need to

be compassionate and empathetic toward all their students. It is important for teachers to understand that while they should encourage students to the best of their abilities, they should not put them under excessive pressure in what is for many educational institutions a novel medium: the online classroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of an online training program for enhancing online communication and intercultural communication skills is essential for learners to improve their communication abilities in both online and onsite learning environments. This study has shown that such training programs can significantly enhance students' awareness and proficiency in these skills. When students recognize the importance of online communication and intercultural communication skills, it can lead to changes in their learning behaviors, making them more effective communicators.

Teachers play a critical role in creating a positive classroom atmosphere that fosters efficient online communication and learning. By providing a supportive and engaging environment, teachers can help students feel more comfortable and confident in their online interactions. Additionally, the findings from Boonmoh and Kamsa-ard (2023) highlight the heightened anxiety among pre-service EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the need for effective online communication training to alleviate such concerns. This further supports the importance of our study in addressing these challenges.

However, this study has limitations that must be considered. The small sample size, drawn from a single Thai university, may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, conducting the satisfaction survey one week after the end of the program might have influenced students' recall of the specific topics they were trained on. To better understand the efficacy of online training programs for enhancing communication skills, future research should involve larger and more diverse samples from different regions and countries. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term effects of such training programs on students' communication competencies.

The relevance of this study lies in its contribution to the growing body of research on online education. By demonstrating the positive impact of targeted training programs, this research provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to improve online learning experiences. The findings suggest that integrating online communication and intercultural communication skills into the curriculum can enhance students' overall learning outcomes and better prepare them for a globalized world.

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