

Research Paper

## **Intercultural Communicative Competence Learning Outcomes in EAP: A Tool for Supporting Post-secondary Students with Life On and Off Campus**

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### **Abstract**

The ongoing trend of internationalization at Canadian post-secondary institutions has led to a growing need for support for plurilingual students using English as an additional language (EAL). English for academic purposes (EAP) programs are one support offered in a wide range of contexts across post-secondary institutions in Canada. However, there has been little research to date related to the efficacy of intercultural learning objectives in these programs. Drawing on a wider study into student views on the inclusion of asynchronous online intercultural learning outcomes in an EAP program in British Columbia within a theoretical framework that included literature on additional language socialization, EAP in Canada, and intercultural communicative competence (ICC), qualitative research methods were used to generate data from online questionnaires, student e-Portfolios, focus groups, and individual interviews with students and instructor participants. Meaningful units of text in the data were coded, and the codes were gathered together into themes. A major theme identified in the data in connection to EAL development and additional language socialization was that of life on and off campus, particularly in terms of academic transitions, friendships, and community engagement. The findings point to the benefits of including intercultural learning outcomes in EAP.

### **Introduction**

The importance of retaining adaptability and cultural sensitivity during intercultural interactions, while effectively managing one's conduct and communication, has long been recognized as a crucial skill and a fundamental aspect of the future (OECD, 2019; Wright, 2003). As a result, there have been growing calls for the inclusion of components of intercultural education to equip all learners with cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to interact with diverse others (UNESCO, 2013). In post-secondary settings in British Columbia and across Canada, fostering such competencies is particularly important due to internationalization, which entails the provision of educational opportunities aimed at aiding students in the development of intercultural competencies and international awareness essential for navigating diverse environments both on and off campus (Knight, 2004; Knight, 2008). In Canada, the push for post-secondary institutions to internationalize has led to a significant increase in the number of international undergraduate students with diverse backgrounds who utilize English as an additional language (EAL) in universities where English serves as the medium of instruction and administration (Macdonald, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2016, Universities Canada, 2014).

For many of these students, their pursuit of undergraduate studies in Canada signifies a profound moment of transformation, bringing not only linguistic challenges but also broader life challenges. English for academic purposes (EAP) programs are one form of support available to

these learners to support their transformation. Generally speaking, EAP programs frequently set their objectives on fostering students' EAL proficiency and equipping them with effective learning techniques for post-secondary studies (Hyland, 2006; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Despite this support, EAP learners who are still developing their intercultural competence may encounter difficulties when participating in group activities and applying critical thinking skills, which can potentially negatively impact their self-efficacy (a sense of competence) and academic progress (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Martin, 2016). These negative impacts might result in difficulty for them to transition into post-secondary academic environments (Douglas et al., 2022; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). Furthermore, these students may grapple with difficulties when participating in intercultural interactions, both within and outside the classroom context (Keefe & Shi, 2017; Zhang & Zhou, 2010; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). As a result, they may experience homesickness, feelings of isolation, and cultural disparities (Zhang & Zhou, 2010; Zhou & Zhang, 2014) as well as social detachment (Douglas et al., 2022). Consequently, there has been growing recognition of the significance of supporting EAP students in developing both their linguistic and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) skills to help them participate in meaningful and authentic engagement within diverse campus and local communities in Canada (Douglas et al., 2022; Zhang & Zhou, 2010; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). In particular, the ability to draw upon ICC skills is regarded as particularly valuable for EAP students' additional language socialization as it can play a pivotal role in enhancing their capacity to integrate into local communities should they choose to do so (Okuda & Anderson, 2018). Moreover, ensuring that these students acquire the intercultural communication skills to enhance their self-efficacy and join and contribute to their campus and local communities means providing affordances for them to develop linguistic and intercultural competencies.

Informed by a theoretical framework that drew on literature related to the processes of additional language socialization, EAP in Canada, and ICC, the primary aim of the larger study (Landry, 2023) from which this paper reports one key finding was to gain insights into the effects of online asynchronous ICC learning outcomes in a credit-bearing EAP program on the development of EAL skills and the social integration of undergraduate student participants within their campus and local communities at a university in British Columbia. To do so, the study employed qualitative case study research design (Duff, 2008; Yin, 2009) to illuminate the potential impacts of the online asynchronous ICC learning outcomes on EAL development and the student participants' socialization into campus and local communities during and after their EAP program. The major overarching theme presented in this paper connected to how studying in online ICC modules impacted the student participants' EAL development was life on and off campus.

## Literature Review

### Additional Language Socialization

Broadly speaking, additional language socialization theory can serve as a framework for studies seeking to illuminate the development of linguistic, cultural, and communicative competence through interactions with others and the utilization of diverse language resources. The extent of access, acceptance, or accommodation that learners of an additional language encounter within their new communities can vary greatly from one individual to another (Duff, 2007).

Furthermore, learners navigate the process of additional language socialization in distinct and individualized manners, each harbouring their own ideal aspirations regarding proficiency and participation. Consequently, while some learners may effortlessly integrate into new communities, others may find it challenging. Enhanced access and acceptance within these new communities can be facilitated through guided assistance and structured support offered by instructors, peers, and members of their personal networks. In addition, individuals may also feel less motivated to engage with these communities if they fail to see the benefits it holds for their current or future lives (Duff, 2020; Duff & Talmy, 2011; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). Hence, the process of additional language socialization does not merely result in learners adopting specific target practices or values. Instead, it may lead to the emergence of hybrid practices or a complete rejection of certain norms, as learners grapple with accommodating or challenging the language and cultural standards of their target groups. Moreover, an individual's willingness to invest in new communities can vary, depending on the perceived value of these communities in shaping their future paths, or due to practical and logistical considerations, such as time constraints or commitments to other communities (Duff, 2007; Norton, 2010). Thus, processes related to additional language socialization often involve personal agency and the creation of new modes of thinking and behaviour, which may ultimately give rise to hybrid or intricate identities in response to evolving cultural and societal contexts in which they find themselves (Duff, 2012; Duff, 2020; Lee & Bucholtz, 2015). Moreover, these identities often continue to evolve as individuals experience new things (Duff et al., 2019). In particular, they may choose to draw on their knowledge of context and culture, sense of agency, and resourcefulness as they interpret the verbal and non-verbal cues of others and adapt their speech to that of others in situ as they work towards their goals (Duff & Anderson, 2015).

### **EAP in Canada**

EAP programs in Canada are diverse (Corcoran et al., 2022; Douglas & Landry, 2021) and unique in their approach to program delivery (Douglas & Landry, 2021; MacDonald, 2016). A recent systematic review encompassing 63 public universities in Canada unveiled that there was a total of 50 institutions offering 74 EAP programs at the time of the study (Douglas & Landry, 2021). Across their various forms, these programs strive to enhance research methodologies, impart specific rhetorical expertise, instill foundational disciplinary concepts, instruct various citation styles, cultivate intercultural competencies, and promote critical thinking abilities (BC TEAL, 2013). A common facet of EAP instruction and learning often involves the adoption of content-based instruction, including variations like theme-based instruction. Content-based instruction (CBI) is seen as conducive to additional language development because it intertwines the teaching of subject matter with language learning objectives (Brinton et al., 2004; Lyster, 2017; Snow, 2014).

Research has consistently reported numerous advantages and outcomes associated with EAP programs. Studies have indicated noticeable enhancements in writing, listening, speaking, and vocabulary skills (Crossman, 2018; Keefe & Shi, 2017; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). Literature on EAP programs has also linked learning outcomes to broader academic gains (Fox, 2005; Dyck, 2013) and heightened engagement with the local educational culture and study methodologies (Fox et al., 2006; Fox et al., 2014). For instance, students experience improvements in an array of essential skills such as goal setting, planning, communication, and

effective learning strategies (Fox et al., 2014; Landry, 2019) and the development of study skills and familiarity with academic culture (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Ranson, 2016).

Additionally, EAP programs can play an important role in facilitating students' socialization and transition into higher education (Crossman, 2018; Van Viegen & Russell, 2019). The literature has also emphasized the impacts of EAP on students' social networks (Lee & Wesche, 2000), socio-cultural growth (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Ranson, 2016), and the cultivation of heightened motivation, self-assurance, and overall satisfaction among students (Keefe & Shi, 2017; Raymond & Des Brisay, 2000). A study conducted by Keefe and Shi (2017) suggested that EAP programs have contributed significantly to the establishment of support networks among students, particularly in terms of forging friendships that bolster their academic progress. Tweedie and Kim (2015) have also observed that EAP students often have the opportunity to form friendships within their classes, especially with peers hailing from diverse countries and cultures.

Notwithstanding the many advantages presented above, EAP students encounter a multitude of challenges in post-secondary educational environments. Regarding academic literacies, these challenges encompass areas such as vocabulary development, academic reading proficiency, and assessment (Tweedie & Kim, 2015). Douglas et al.'s (2022) investigation also highlighted that EAP students may grapple with feelings of isolation, exacerbated by uncertainties about how to navigate social interactions beyond the confines of the EAP classroom. In particular, some students in this study expressed a sense of inadequacy in their social skills, particularly when it came to communicating with local students, leading to a perceived missed opportunity for meaningful engagement with others. Moreover, these lower levels of oral interaction in particular may result in fewer opportunities to build cross-cultural friendships (Ranta & Meckelborg, 2013).

The literature has underscored students' perceptions that EAP programs sometimes fall short in cultivating the intercultural competencies necessary to understand the local culture and actively participate in the broader university community and local communities (Myles & Cheng, 2003; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). This apparent deficiency in sociocultural curriculum content seems at odds with the identified need, as articulated by Raymond and Parks (2002), for EAP programs to align their learning outcomes with the realities of students' academic and social contexts in post-secondary settings. In the case of ICC, the alignment of these learning outcomes to the intercultural interactions in a variety of contexts on and off campus may serve to prevent some of the often cited challenges faced by EAP students, including students' feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction in these environments both during their studies (Cheng & Fox, 2008) and after they have completed their EAP programs (Keefe & Shi, 2017).

### **Intercultural Communicative Competence**

On its own, intercultural competence typically involves affective, behavioural, and cognitive factors (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2009; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Two models of intercultural competence that informed this current study were Deardorff's (2004) pyramid model of intercultural competence and Deardorff's (2006) process model of model of intercultural competence. The pyramid model is compositional in nature, highlighting

hierarchical order to various motivational, cognitive, and skill-related aspects that contribute to intercultural competence, with elements at the lower end of the model enhancing the higher levels to help build intercultural competence (Peña Dix, 2022). The process model seeks to capture the relationships between these aspects. In particular, attitudes facilitate intercultural competence (i.e., appropriateness and effectiveness), including respect, openness, and curiosity. Knowledge (cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness) enhances the motivation and skills (listening, observing, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, relating) components (Deardorff, 2006).

The concept of ICC entails “the ability of an individual to interact with a member of a different social group in another language” (Byram, 2021, p. 19). To conceptualize ICC, Byram (1997, 2021) introduced a compositional model. Byram’s model consists of three language-oriented components: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence. These components are complemented by intercultural elements (*savoirs*) encompassing knowledge, education, attitudes, and skills. In terms of language, linguistic competence pertains to the learner’s ability to employ the standard form of the target language. Sociolinguistic competence involves creating and interpreting meaning during interactions. Discourse competence entails the ability to employ strategies for interpreting and producing various forms of language in real-world usage while being attentive to and adhering to the cultural conventions of the target community, or negotiating conventions when creating intercultural texts.

Byram (2021) has also acknowledged that ICC is a developmental process, positioning it as a model for the acquisition of ICC within an educational context. Moreover, his model incorporates delineations of three locations of learning (Byram, 2021). These learning settings encompass opportunities provided by i) classroom instruction featuring dialogues between teachers and learners, ii) fieldwork assignments given by teachers and carried out by learners, and iii) independent study initiatives undertaken by learners in their daily lives beyond the classroom (Byram, 2021). Through active engagement with diverse cultures, learners are encouraged to critically assess the varying perspectives presented and contemplate how these representations influence their comprehension of various topics and concepts (Risager, 2007).

With regards to fostering ICC, a fundamental aspect of instructional strategies for developing ICC highlighted in the literature involves the simultaneous teaching of both cultural content and methodologies for coping with intercultural interaction (Byram, 2021; Risager, 1991; Singh & Doherty, 2004). Key strategies for supporting learners with ICC development include providing opportunities for them to work with roleplays and critical incidents (Byram, 2021; Hiratsuka, et al., 2016; Kumaravidavelu, 2008; Snow, 2015), facilitated encounters, or scaffolded opportunities for diverse communities to come together (Bhowmik & Chaudhuri, 2021; Douglas, 2015; Douglas et al., 2022; Garson, 2017; Jund, 2010), ethnographic approaches (Roberts et al., 2000; Senyshyn, 2019; Urban, 2012), online intercultural exchanges (Çiftçi, 2016; Galante, 2015; Lee & Song, 2019; Lewis & O’Dowd, 2016; Wu & Li, 2019; Zhang & Zhou, 2019), and ongoing critical reflection (Kramsch, 2009; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

## ICC in EAP in Canada

Although ICC in EAP has been under-researched in Canada (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018), studies investigating the experiences of EAP learners in the Canadian context have underscored the demand for more sociocultural content and highlighted the necessity for EAP programs to create opportunities for students to engage with ICC learning objectives and cultivate intercultural competencies through increased intercultural interactions during their EAP studies (Douglas et al., 2022; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). This preparation is vital to equip them for dynamic and diverse academic and non-academic contexts in Canada (Galante, 2015; Keefe & Shi, 2017; Tweedie & Kim, 2015). For example, the students in Galante's (2015) study who participated in an intercultural digital literacy project and created and shared videos of critical incidents that commonly occur in intercultural interaction seemed to demonstrate higher levels of cultural sensitivity which could help enhance their ability to adapt and integrate into new cultures. Such understandings imply that program providers and instructors should dedicate more space to ICC development in EAP. In particular, Bhowmik et al. (2020) have advocated for EAP instructors to act as "culture brokers for learners" and assist learners with grasping the expectations of academic assignments in new academic cultures through consciousness-raising activities (p. 21).

Despite the above calls for increased ICC learning outcomes in EAP, there are three main challenges to including more ICC learning outcomes that have been cited in the literature. Firstly, not all language educators may feel personally comfortable addressing some of the more politically charged aspects of language and culture teaching (Byram, 2021). Secondly, finding adequate time within the syllabus without overwhelming students can be a daunting task (Bickley et al., 2014; Byram, 2021; Young & Sachdev, 2011). Thirdly, instructors may grapple with a lack of clear guidance on what to incorporate and how to effectively implement elements of intercultural educational outcomes (Bickley et al., 2014; Young & Sachdev, 2011).

## Research Questions

In light of the above, this current study aimed to build on existing research into understanding the processes which occur during undergraduate plurilingual students' socialization into a new academic setting and life in the local community. The overarching research question of this study explored the relationship between ICC and learning EAL in a post-secondary EAP setting and a supporting question asked: What are students' perspectives on how these ICC modules influence their additional language socialization and participation in the wider campus and local community, both during their EAP studies and after, as they continue with their undergraduate programs?

## Methods

### Study Setting

The study was conducted within an EAP program situated in a rapidly growing urban area in British Columbia that has been experiencing rising rates of migration from various parts of Canada and across the globe. The objectives of the program extend beyond enhancing the English language skills of the learners. In particular, the program aimed to help the learners

engage in campus life and become active members of the local community. To do so, the program employed a combination of synchronous classroom instruction, asynchronous online learning, individual tutoring sessions, and access to language labs, with the modules described in this study representing a portion of the asynchronous online learning outcomes. In addition, the program consisted of two levels: Level 1 and Level 2. However, the scope of this study specifically concentrated on students enrolled in Level 2. The students who entered Level 2 had attained a level of English proficiency corresponding to IELTS scores ranging from 6.0 to 6.5 or TOEFL iBT scores between 80 and 89. Each semester within the EAP program encompassed roughly 240 hours of comprehensive programming. In the context of EAP Level 2, students were engaged in a weekly schedule comprising 20 hours of EAP programmatic content. In an academic week, there were 12 hours of weekly classroom instruction that followed a paired-skills approach, including reading and writing classes (6 hours weekly) and listening and speaking classes (6 hours weekly). Additionally, there were 3 hours per week allocated to online asynchronous learning that consisted of two modules: i) Campus Life Skills and ii) ICC. Each of these modules entailed 1.5 hours of self-directed study. Furthermore, the program dedicated 3 hours to language labs.

The ICC modules were grounded in Byram's (1997, 2021) locations of learning for ICC development and the principles of content-based language instruction. The curriculum for the ICC modules was structured around a set of predefined learning outcomes that closely corresponded with the five dimensions of intercultural communication outlined in Byram's (1997) ICC model, in addition to the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and outcomes as delineated in Deardorff's (2004; 2006) pyramid model and process model of intercultural competence. The modules were designed to deliver classroom instruction via online input and exercises accessible through the university's learning management system. Each module integrated tasks aimed at prompting students to engage in fieldwork and contemplate their independent learning experiences. There were a total of five modules, with each module spanning two weeks. Each week, the students dedicated approximately 1.5 hours to asynchronous learning tasks. Two graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) served as tutors for the module. In addition to releasing the content on the learning management system, the tutors provided support across various touch points, both in person in labs and during office hours as well as virtually within the modules or via email, as a way to guide learning and generate buy-in for the modules. The introduction of these modules took place during the students' orientation of their program, and the students completed the modules between Weeks 1–11 of the 12-week program.

## Participants

The student participants were selected from the two groups of EAP Level 2 students ( $n=36$ ). An overview of the linguistic profile of the student participants is presented below in Table 1. The recruitment of student participants took place at two distinct points within the academic year. The initial recruitment phase was conducted in November 2021 and included students who had successfully finished EAP Level 2 along with the ICC modules during the Fall Semester spanning from September to December 2021. The second recruitment phase took place in March 2022 and comprised students who had completed EAP Level 2 and the ICC modules in the subsequent Spring Semester from January to April 2022. Additionally, the two GTAs ( $n=2$ )

responsible for facilitating the ICC modules during both semesters of the 2021–22 academic year were also recruited as participants to help triangulate the data and provide pedagogical insights.

**Table 1**

*First Language of the Student Participants*

<b>First Language</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
Chinese/Mandarin	17	8	25
Japanese	1	1	2
Spanish	1	1	2
Portuguese	2	0	2
Russian	2	0	2
Thai	0	1	1
Cantonese	1	0	1
French	1	0	1
Total	25	11	36

**Data Collection**

The data for this study were generated using qualitative questionnaires, focus groups, individual interviews, and document analysis, specifically the analysis of student e-Portfolios. This multifaceted data collection approach, informed by the concept of triangulation proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), aimed to enhance the validation of findings and bolster the overall trustworthiness of the study by enriching the thematic understanding of the participants' experiences with the modules, shedding light on the complexity inherent in their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Duff, 2020; Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Furthermore, the qualitative questionnaire, e-Portfolios, and focus groups were administered near the end of the EAP program, yielding proximal findings related to the students' module experiences. In contrast, individual interviews with student participants were conducted after they had completed the EAP program and an entire semester of undergraduate studies, with the aim of providing insights into potential distal impacts. The interviews with the GTAs were conducted after the students had completed their EAP program.

**Data Analysis**

The data sets were analyzed using thematic analysis in a manner that combined elements of Saldaña's (2013) conceptualization of coding and Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) approach to thematic analysis. Moreover, the analysis of the data was further informed by other studies that employed a thematic approach to data analysis (Douglas, 2015; Douglas, 2020; Douglas et al., 2020; Douglas et al., 2022; Pilin et al, 2020; Riley & Douglas, 2016). In addition, the approach to analyzing media such as posters and images that constituted the student participant e-Portfolios drew on the work of Sillars (2022). In particular, signs within the imagery that could communicate meaning were identified to illuminate individual meanings of texts, signs, and symbols and their possible connections between these elements across the larger representation of the data item. Presented in the form of qualitative narrative accounts, the results aimed to

provide a rich description of the research site as well as the findings related to the research questions. In the accounts, participants are identified with numbers to preserve their anonymity, but also to distinguish between different participants' representative quotes. Some minor edits have been carried out in the representative quotes (e.g., removing repeated words and hesitation markers) for ease of readability.

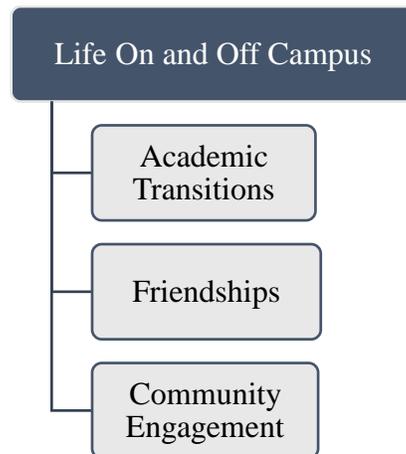
## Results

### Life on and Off Campus

A major overarching theme connected to the research question regarding how the student participant's experiences in the ICC module impacted their additional language socialization and participation in the wider campus and local community, both during their EAP studies and after their EAP program, identified in the data was the theme of Life On and Off Campus. As shown below in Figure 1, this overarching theme contained the supporting themes of Academic Transitions, Friendships, and Community Engagement.

**Figure 1**

*Overarching Theme and Supporting Themes*



### *Academic Transitions*

In connection to the student participants' lives on and off campus, the students in the study appeared to indicate that the ICC modules impacted their academic transitions. First, the modules appeared to provide opportunities for the students to realize they were not alone in facing challenges connected to their academic transition. Participant 34 wrote that it was "really interesting to get to know people that are going through an assimilation process similar to yours (international students) but have different approaches in lifestyle, food and way of perceiving things due to their cultures." Similarly, Participant 33 wrote in their letter from their future self in their e-Portfolio that "with ICC, I got to know that all the concerns and worries I had had in my first year, everyone had them once before too."

Also evident in the data was the potential role the modules played in contributing to the student participants' academic readiness. For instance, Participant 20 wrote on their questionnaire that they "helped me get used to the university." Reflecting on their experiences and transition, Participant 34 wrote on the questionnaire that the modules "helped me to reinforce my English skills and to practice intercultural communication to people from other cultures. So, I feel ready." Participant 14 cited useful knowledge gained in the modules writing that "we learn to manage our time, to use a specific type of language, and question ourselves on different topics which is an important part in our academic years in university." In addition, becoming familiar with a variety of academic genres was seen as important to their academic transition. In particular, Participant 24 wrote on their questionnaire that they "learned how to present presentations and how to write citations, so professors will not put me a bad grade." These feelings were shared by some focus group participants. In particular, Participant 22 commented during the first focus group that:

I think everything I learned through ICC modules now help me a lot in Term 2 since I'm taking five courses now. And, yeah, I feel more confident compared to when I just came to here. Yeah, I feel more confident.

Commenting on the preparedness of the students, GTA 2 seemed to indicate that the students in the study had an advantage over other undergraduate students due to the content and skills they learned in the module, reflecting on the value of having a space to develop ICC on a multicultural campus and stating:

We've become so normalized to it. We forget certain things. And, it would be really great to sort of share these different nuances between these different cultures because we have so many international students in our university who don't go through this program.

In addition, for some, it seemed that the modules acted as a space to afford them some adjustment time. Namely, Participant 18 wrote that "it helps me to adjust and adapt to the rhythm of the class, is a good transition." A member of the second focus group (Participant 33) also highlighted the value of learning about direct and indirect communication styles stating "because we will use in the future and through this task, it help me to better adapt and improve my communication skills I think." During her individual interview, Participant 22 reflected back on what she had learned in the modules, increased self-efficacy, and current academic transition said:

Before I came to Canada, before I started my university life, I was kind of worried, and I would say I was kind of shocked when I like received an email saying that I had to take like EAP because like that means my English was not good enough to study in university. But actually, EAP and ICC modules have helped me a lot in university because I was able to learn how to write essays and how to have small talk. And, I was able to develop my critical thinking skills and stuff. So, it was like really valuable I think. EAP including ICC modules provided me lots of great opportunities.

In the students' letters from their future selves in their e-Portfolios, Participant 33 commented on their transition, they reflected, "the [EAP] program assisted me in better

preparing for my university life at [name of university], whether it was with my English skills, socialization skills, or others” while another student wrote:

Thinking back to the days in the [EAP] program, I’m happy and glad to be part of it. With additional and focused lessons, I see huge improvements in my English skills. With the Campus Success Skills and Intercultural Communication Skills sections, I was able to acquire essential university skills and found them very useful in my following years at the university.

Some students in the study outlined specific elements of the modules that supported their transition. During the second focus group, Participant 34 highlighted the knowledge of cultural symbols saying:

There were modules that we had to identify the use of symbols in order to be part of a community as well as they identified visible and invisible aspects of culture. So, I believe those for me were the most important in order to transition to academic lifestyle and all that because it provided me the skills to do that. So, I got to practice. I got to learn. And also, I started to know more information about the campus itself.

Participant 22 also spoke about similar aspects of growth during her individual interview. She maintained that:

The online modules helped me learn more about how university settings are, for example how to write, ... critical thinking skills, how to analyze things, and how to compare and contrast different cultures. Especially, I want to major in international relations. And, now I’m taking some courses related to my major. So, I was able to develop my critical thinking skills through online modules in EAP. And, I think that has helped me a lot like here in [university].

In one of the focus groups, two members commented on how the modules directly impacted other courses. For example, Participant 22 commented on leveraging their knowledge of aspects of Indigenous culture:

Yeah, especially now, I’m taking Indigenous studies. And then, it’s a very new experience for me to learn about Indigenous cultures. So, now I can like compare and contrast my culture and then their culture and stuff. Because in Japan, there are also Indigenous people, but actually I didn’t learn about them in school. And, I’ve never learned about Indigenous people, not just in Japan but Indigenous people in general. So, yeah, it’s been a great experience for me. And then, ICC modules definitely it helped me with Indigenous studies.

Participant 21 also mentioned during the focus group how the module content helped him connect to discipline-specific concepts and contribute to group work. He noted:

I’m currently take Geography [number] course, and there’s a workshop in the course and it’s ask us to talk about the, actually I forgot the English word exactly, it’s about the

placelessness and the placeness. And for the Modules 5, that is about talking about four different group of people and how they help or like let people get into the local environment since we are international students to Canada. So, for in this case, for that effect, I think the module helped me a lot for talking about those topics with the groupmates in the workshop. Also, it helped me a lot with the further assignment around those topics.

However, not all of the student participants appeared to be able to immediately transfer their experiences in the modules to their other credit-bearing courses, especially those facilitated completely online. During the second focus group, Participant 32 commented:

To be honest, it didn't affect cause I took Math first term, and Com Sci for this term. And, both of them can be taken online, so I don't really have to talk to people. It's a single task stuff. So yeah to be honest it didn't affect that. But, I think it will in the future.

A final important facet related to the supporting theme of academic transitions seemed to connect to student participants' understandings of the importance of multiculturalism and diversity at the university. Many of the students appeared to perceive developing ICC as a strategy to cope with multicultural environments on campus. For instance, Participant 18 responded on the questionnaire, writing, "since [this] is a universal university, there are lots of people from all over the world, so it's important to be sensitive about different peoples' culture." Another student who participated in a focus group commented (Participant 28) that "I think, after I learned the ICC, I know how to communicate with international students because I think this campus, like the demography, is like have a lot of different cultures' people combined on this campus." Similarly, another participant in the same focus group (Participant 32) stated, "On campus, there are so many people from different countries. So, I guess I learn the way to communicate to be respectful against their cultures and against their opinions as well."

Some students in the study appeared to feel that adjusting to multicultural environments on campus was a universal challenge. Participant 33 wrote on the questionnaire that "everyone have culture shocks when arrive to a new places even though they are local students." Similarly, Participant 9 commented during the first focus group comments on the importance of learning ICC in all language classes stating:

It's for all the people who is learning another language. Like when you're not only for English, but for all the languages, they're connected with different cultures. And, every different culture they have some different aspects or something. Like, you never want to get in touch with something bad like saying some dirty words or something impolite to people. It's for all the language learners.

In a similar vein, one student closed the second focus group by stating the importance of ICC for everyone on campus:

I think ICC shouldn't be only limited to international students, but it should be compulsory for every university student because I believe it's not our only international students' job to adapt other peoples' like culture. But, it's also important for local

students to acknowledge international students' culture. That will be creating a more welcoming community for everyone.

### *Friendships*

The supporting theme of friendships was also identified in the data. In particular, the ICC skills development in the module seemed to support the participants' ability to make friends. For example, Participant 29 felt that understanding communication styles was "one of the most important skills to get a new friend." Participant 31 maintained that noticing cultural symbols of particular groups "helps me a lot to make friends in particular groups." Notably, Participant 31 expressed a further desire to build their intercultural awareness because they wanted to "know more, so I can make more friends." Participant 8 commented that "I know how to make friends and interact with them." Finally, Participant 13 reflected on the value of ICC writing "in my opinion, I think this can let each other to know and make friends with each other. Which is the best choice." Participant 5 exemplified this stating "because I started to talk to different people from all around the world and make me proud to say I consider them friends." In a letter from their future self, Participant 32 wrote that they "made some new friends who you have not seen yet. My friends are from many different countries, which I think is one of the privileges of studying at [name of university]."

In addition to leveraging ICC to make friends, the students in the study also seemed to use their ICC to maintain friendships. Participant 9 shared on the questionnaire, "I think I'm doing pretty well in connecting with my roommates." Participant 28 commented on their ability to maintain friendships writing, "using English to communicate with my friend, who is in a different cultural feels so nice." Expressing a similar sentiment, Participant 25 wrote, "I have made friends from different countries, such as Koreans, Japanese, and Vietnamese. And, I realized that their daily behaviours are different, so I was trying to respect our cultural differences." One member of the first focus group (Participant 4) highlighted the relevance of ICC to managing relationships stating that it "helps you avoid the problems. I don't know how to describe it. It helps."

Finally, there seemed to be some evidence that these friendships also helped the students further adjust to life on and off campus. For example, Participant 24 commented on how they built their intercultural awareness via their friendships writing, "I found some friends from Asia, right now I know a little bit about national food, music, language." During the first focus group, Participant 9 mentioned the academic benefits of their friendships saying:

It's also not about academic things, but it's like daily life. So for me, ... I have three roommates. And, we do have some homework, like asking you to get a video and choose someone to talk about something. I choose my roommate to help me finish the homework. I also go to my roommate to see if I can [get] some different opinions.

Participant 32 commented on the questionnaire about the impact of friendships on their ICC development writing, "talking to friends and sharing was the way I gained my intercultural communication skills." During the second focus group, Participant 34 seemed to echo these impacts of the ICC modules and stated:

I believe so and even not really intercultural but I got to improve my conversational skills with my own friends and listening to their ideas and body language, like all the components that we got to learn in the modules, I actually put it into work with my own friendships here.

While some students focused on the benefits acquired from their friendships, other students highlighted what they contributed to their friendships after completing the modules. For instance, Participant 19 highlighted the importance of being an empathetic listener, commenting on the questionnaire that “when my friends share their stories with me, I can be a good listener to listen with their experience.” Similarly, Participant 31 seemed to comment on serving as a cultural and intellectual resource, “I can help some of my friends on their English.”

### *Community Engagement*

Finally, community engagement was also a major supporting theme related to the participants’ lives on and off campus. In particular, the students in the study seemed to be empowered to join the campus community via clubs. For example, Participant 33 wrote that they were engaging in “club and some campus activities.” Participant 21 wrote, “I feel fun and I can participate.” According to Participant 19, joining clubs was seen as a way of expanding their network on campus. They wrote on their questionnaire that they “like to join the different activities in University because I can make a lot of friends.” Some clubs that students seemed to target were sports clubs like “going to the gym” and the “basketball” and “badminton” clubs. Cultural communities like the “Chinese Student Union” also seemed to be popular avenues for the students to engage on campus. The overall feeling of feeling empowered to join communities was encapsulated by Participant 17 who wrote, “No matter clubs or campus events, I am no longer afraid to join.”

There was also a feeling amongst the student participants that their ICC development helped them participate in the local community. While Participant 9 still experienced some difficulty saying “still a little bit difficult to integrate,” other students seemed to have leveraged their ICC to engage in the wider community. For instance, Participant 27 responded on the questionnaire that they could “join in the local community.” Despite mentioning experiencing challenges integrating into local communities, Participant 9 still mentioned in the first focus group that they were now applying ICC and viewed it as helpful to the process of joining communities. The participant commented that “sometimes you can’t just realize [you’re using it] when you’re chatting with some local people.” They continued to explain that you can use ICC “to chat with your roommates with local people and get more information back.” More specifically, Participant 9 felt that it played a role when shopping, saying “definitely use for like shopping and that kind of stuff. Like, we’re not going to town so many times. Like every time go there just for the shopping, like for the food.” Similarly, Participant 17 seemed to feel that it helped them leverage interaction stating “Yes, that is a good point for me to understand local people and get close to the local communication.” Participant 24 highlighted how one’s ability to leverage the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with ICC can impact the interlocutors stating, “People will be nicer to you if they one time recognize that you know at least something about their culture.”

However, individual agency also seemed to play a role in the students' levels of engagement in their local communities. Some students in the study expressed no desire to participate, with Participant 16 writing, "I'm not interested," and Participant 27 commenting, "I don't feel like joining." In addition, for some, the biggest hurdle to students joining campus communities appeared to be the workload connected to their studies. When asked about their ability to join campus and local communities, Participant 20 wrote, "I focus a lot in my courses." Other students expressed a similar sentiment, with Participant 4 referring to "too many course work and getting used to the environment here," and Participant 6 commenting that they "do not have sufficient time" to join clubs and communities.

In relation to shaping the communities around them, one of the e-Portfolio assignments asked students to share with the university ideas for how to enhance the experiences of international students at the university. These responses were shared online via the university's Wiki as a way to help shape the community. The students were asked to summarize their ideas in a graphic. Figure 2 below from one participant contains many of the common ideas identified in the data regarding actions each stakeholder can take to help the socialization of international students at the university.

**Figure 2**

*Participant e-Portfolio Submission (Module 5.2 Shaping Communities Assignment)*

<p>Local students and residents</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hold parties and welcome international students to join.</li> <li>2. Related events and activities on campus or in residences</li> <li>3. Try to make friends who them.</li> </ol>	<p>University Administrators</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hold events and activities for international students.</li> <li>2. Visual or in-person discussion groups or services for international students.</li> <li>3. Extra aid services for international students.</li> </ol>
<p>Professors</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support international students academically for extra office hours.</li> <li>2. Give extra time on exams and assignment submissions.</li> </ol>	<p>International students</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clubs or student unions for international students.</li> <li>2. Weekly or monthly activities or in community.</li> </ol>

The participants' submission in Figure 2, along with others shared in the study by the student participants, seemed to point to the different ways each group plays a role and shares responsibility in influencing international undergraduate students as they socialize into the university and local community. One interesting insight was shared by Participant 3, who commented on their poster for the same e-Portfolio assignment that international students should aim to "share similar difficulties" and "become the staunchest emotional backing of each other."

Participant 32 also seemed to echo this call for international students to contribute to local communities and the university by “sharing their niche skills.”

### Discussion and Implications

The processes related to the socialization of international EAP students into campus and local communities can be challenging. Therefore, this study explored the impact of online asynchronous learning outcomes in EAP on the student participants' EAL development and socialization into campus and local communities. In terms of supporting the students with their transition into various communities on and off campus, the asynchronous ICC learning outcomes appeared to have a significant impact on the participants' academic transitions, friendships, and ability to engage in the campus and local community.

The findings of this study align with previous research (Lee & Wesche, 2000; Keefe & Shi, 2017; Ranson, 2016; Raymond & Des Brisay, 2000) that indicated positive links between EAP and students' confidence in their ability to succeed in English-speaking university settings. For instance, Ranson's (2016) study demonstrated that students can improve their language and time management skills while gaining familiarity with university environments in EAP programs. In this current study, many participants seemed to utilize the ICC modules as a sandbox to practice and refine specific skills and to explore the visible and invisible aspects of culture. This phenomenon resonates with Cheng and Fox's (2008) conceptualization of EAP programs as a supportive sanctuary, as students in both studies expressed similar reflections about the role of EAP programs in aiding their transition to university life in Canada. The findings suggest that incorporating similar ICC learning outcomes into other EAP programs could further enhance students' overall academic readiness by providing opportunities to develop multiple transferable skills simultaneously within a comfortable environment, given the demonstrated correlation between ICC, critical thinking, and group work engagement (Martin, 2016).

The asynchronous ICC learning outcomes also seem to have a significant impact on the participants' social networks. This finding echoes earlier studies that have also suggested that EAP programs can assist in building social networks (Lee & Wesche, 2000). This current study extends these understandings by demonstrating how providing students with opportunities to develop ICC skills can aid in both the establishment and maintenance of friendships. Specifically, many participants applied observation and noticing skills to understand cultural differences and show respect for these distinctions. Additionally, they appeared to hone their skills to engage with others by leveraging their cultural knowledge. In alignment with findings from other studies (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015), the student participants in this study both received and provided support within these networks of practice, benefiting them academically and emotionally, which further facilitated their socialization on campus and in broader communities. The findings of this current study are encouraging as many international students desire to have lasting relationships with local students and individuals from diverse backgrounds (Zhou & Zhang, 2014).

The asynchronous ICC learning outcomes also appeared to boost community engagement among the participants, shedding light on their integration into the community. First and

foremost, students felt empowered to become part of campus communities, with school clubs being frequently mentioned examples. These findings align with those from Ranson's (2016) study and underscore how the modules contributed to the students' overall sense of belonging in the educational setting. They effectively applied the ICC skills acquired in the modules, as indicated by their statements that they would instinctively use these skills in various contexts, demonstrating their ability to transfer this knowledge and develop automaticity. Additionally, comments alluding to locals being more receptive when the students displayed cultural knowledge, for example, it was interesting that Participant 4 felt this knowledge in interaction could result in people being nicer to them and how Participant 9 felt that such knowledge resulted in them getting more information back from their interlocutors, suggest that the students effectively utilized their semiotic resources to position themselves in interactions to some extent. Nevertheless, workload emerged as a significant limiting factor limiting engagement.

The findings of this study have implications for integrating ICC outcomes into EAP learning objectives for scholars and practitioners. Firstly, since EAP programs often grapple with questions regarding the overall efficacy of incorporating ICC into their already packed curriculum, the findings of this current study make the case for EAP programs to consider making ICC a fundamental learning outcome within their curriculum. More specifically, the findings of this current study indicate that using online asynchronous modules can help programs efficiently carve out space for ICC outcomes without detracting from other essential skills.

The study's findings also align with the recommendations of previous inquiry (Douglas & Landry, 2021; Douglas et al., 2022) that has advocated for EAP programs to assist students in balancing their workload and work-life equilibrium. The online asynchronous modules at the centre of this investigation represent one approach that a post-secondary EAP program employed to offer students access to cultural knowledge through meaningful interaction while simultaneously addressing conventional EAP elements via in-person instruction. Nevertheless, given the students' concerns regarding workload, the students' comments seem to give voice to the findings of an earlier study (Douglas et al., 2022) which advised EAP programs to impose limitations on the total number of hours and embrace a less-is-more approach, concentrating on a reduced number of activities that encourage richer learning experiences. For example, programs might choose to follow the model outlined in this study, allocating 1–1.5 hours of asynchronous online study each week, with this time reallocated from other aspects of the curriculum that may not address key sociocultural skills.

A final implication relates to the students' expressed desires to connect with peers from diverse backgrounds, including local students, despite time constraints. These findings echo the results from earlier studies (Douglas et al, 2022) that suggested EAP programs should consider offering opportunities for EAP students to engage in cultural exchanges with other members of the broader student community. These initiatives can take various forms, such as encouraging students to participate in mentorship programs or promoting extracurricular activities like cultural events, club activities, or service learning. However, it is essential for programs to ensure that these efforts are not tokenistic in nature. For example, even though Participant 17 mentioned feeling less afraid to engage in new campus clubs and communities, as other studies (Boye & Byram, 2018; Hua & Kramersch 2016) have recommended, program providers should critically assess these services and partnerships to guarantee the active participation of students

from outside the EAP program and avoid reinforcing power imbalances in interactions. Consequently, programs should complement these services with instructional support before and after each event, focusing on functional language and communication strategies that empower students to position themselves appropriately in these interactions (Boye & Byram, 2018).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The present study explored how online asynchronous ICC modules within an EAP program influenced language development and additional language socialization at a university in British Columbia. This study contributes to understanding how ICC outcomes impact processes of additional language socialization in the Canadian context by revealing the multifaceted role the ICC modules played in assisting students with their transition into various academic and community contexts.

Despite these valuable insights, it is essential to recognize a number of limitations in its design. One limitation relates to the study's limited sample size which restricts the generalizability of its findings to contexts beyond the one under investigation. An additional limitation pertains to the absence of interactional data. A lack of detailed analysis of discourse interactions prevents a comprehensive understanding of ICC development and how the students used these skills in interaction. Furthermore, the study's reliance on self-reported data, lacking quantitative assessments, precludes the measurement of ICC development. A fourth limitation concerns the study's timeframe, constrained by the author's doctoral program, which limited data collection to the first year of student participation, precluding an exploration of the long-term effects of ICC modules. Extending the research period to encompass subsequent years could shed light on the enduring nature of language learning, ICC development, and language socialization processes, as well as their potential impact on individual trajectories over time.

This study aimed to shed light on the connections between online asynchronous ICC learning outcomes in post-secondary EAP programs and additional language socialization, offering potential advantages and mixed findings. To advance this research, there are several avenues for future exploration. Firstly, researchers could expand the study by investigating the impact of similar learning outcomes across different delivery methods and learning contexts. For example, future studies could delve more deeply into exploring the impact of synchronous versus asynchronous delivery on the development of ICC. A future study might explore which version (synchronous vs. asynchronous) might have more impact. This expansion could also involve conducting research across multiple sites to identify trends or contradictions. Additionally, future studies could gather more interactional data to better understand how ICC development unfolds in real-life situations. Furthermore, given the potential for individuals to over- or underestimate their intercultural competence, larger-scale studies with mixed-methods or quantitative designs, using established instruments such as Hammer et al.'s (2003) Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), could yield more nuanced findings. Future inquiries might also focus on specific aspects related to friendships. Understanding how these profound relationships shape their academic, personal, and professional journeys may be an intriguing avenue for future research. Lastly, research into ICC in EAP could contribute to teacher development by investigating how completing similar ICC modules might influence EAP instructors' perspectives and practices.

## Conclusion

The reported findings in this paper draw from a larger study, carried out as part of a doctoral research project, aiming to investigate the impact of asynchronous online modules containing ICC learning outcomes on the language development and socialization of student participants in EAP programs both during and after the EAP programs (Landry, 2023). The findings recounted here help to expand the literature on ICC in EAP by uncovering how these modules supported participants' lives on and off campus by contributing to the student participants' academic transitions, social networks, and engagement within different communities. Despite some limitations, the findings suggest that online asynchronous delivery of ICC learning outcomes is valuable to EAP students, providing both proximal and distal benefits. In programs grappling with already packed curricula, these findings underscore the advantages of employing context-specific, ICC learning outcomes through asynchronous online modules to support students' EAL development and additional language socialization.

## Acknowledgements

This article reports findings from my Ph.D. dissertation project (Landry, 2023). I wish to thank the project participants, my graduate supervisory committee, and the anonymous reviewers for helping me to bring this article to publication.

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