



## Beyond Academic Support: Peer-Assisted Learning and Intercultural Engagement in Thai Business Education

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### Abstract

This study examines Peer-Assisted Learning as a context for intercultural engagement within Thai undergraduate business education, addressing increasing expectations for graduates to communicate effectively and collaborate across cultural boundaries in globally interconnected professional environments. While PAL has traditionally been positioned as an academic support mechanism, its intercultural potential within business-related disciplines remains underexplored. Using a quantitative research design, the study involved 30 Thai first-year undergraduates majoring in finance and investment, accounting, and aviation and transportation business management who participated in structured PAL sessions facilitated by international peer mentors over a 10-week period at RSU Global!, Rangsit University. Data were collected through an English proficiency pretest and post-test and a validated 30-item questionnaire measuring interaction and communication, intercultural awareness, personal development, and overall satisfaction. Descriptive statistics summarized students' perceptions, followed by multiple regression analysis to examine predictive relationships among key variables. Results indicate that PAL sessions functioned as low-hierarchy, interactionally supportive environments that facilitated intercultural communication, enhanced awareness of cultural differences, and contributed to students' perceived communication confidence and professional readiness. Regression findings showed that interaction and communication quality was the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction, followed by personal development outcomes. Although English proficiency gains were modest, observed improvements occurred despite a decline in overall PAL attendance, suggesting that interactional quality remained pedagogically meaningful. The study contributes empirical evidence to PAL and Internationalization at Home scholarship by demonstrating how structured, campus-based peer learning initiatives can embed intercultural engagement within undergraduate business education.

**Keywords:** *Peer-Assisted Learning; Intercultural Engagement; Business Education; Internationalization At Home; Thai Higher Education*

### 1. Introduction

Contemporary business education is increasingly positioned within globally interconnected professional contexts shaped by cross-border mobility, culturally diverse learning and work environments, and the growing demands of operating within international economic, institutional, and organizational networks (Calma et al., 2024). As a result, universities are increasingly expected to prepare graduates with intercultural competence (henceforth IC) that enables them to navigate cultural differences, communicate effectively across cultural boundaries, and collaborate productively in diverse and international contexts (Goh et al., 2024). While technical accounting expertise remains a foundational requirement, empirical evidence from public sector management accounting indicates that interpersonal skills, personal adaptability, and the ability to engage with multi-disciplinary perspectives are perceived as more critical components of professional competence than purely technical skills (Budding et al., 2022). These expectations have called for intercultural learning to be embedded more explicitly and systematically within undergraduate education (Kuffuor et al., 2024).



In response, many universities have intensified internationalization efforts by prioritizing intercultural learning and competence development as core institutional objectives across academic and professional contexts (Kuffuor et al., 2024). Thailand illustrates this broader internationalization trajectory, as the number of international students enrolled in Thai higher education institutions has increased steadily over the past decade, with students drawn from a wide range of countries and business administration or international business emerging as the most popular fields of study among international enrolments (Jampaklaya et al., 2022). Despite this demographic diversity, however, meaningful intercultural engagement among domestic and international students remains uneven, as access to and participation in internationally oriented activities are shaped by persistent structural and individual barriers rather than occurring uniformly across the student population (Di Pietro, 2023). Merely placing students from different cultural backgrounds together does not automatically result in sustained interaction, mutual understanding, or the development of IC without intentionally designed learning structures that promote reflection and guided engagement (Van Rompay-Bartels & Watkins, 2025). Empirical evidence indicates that intercultural collaboration is frequently constrained by communication anxiety, language-related difficulties, and coordination challenges, particularly during the initial stages of interaction, unless participation is supported through intentionally structured experiential learning environments (Taras, 2016).

These challenges are particularly salient within business-related fields such as management accounting education, where traditional emphases on technical competencies have been shown to inadequately address gaps in interpersonal, personal, and appreciative skills that are increasingly viewed as critical for professional practice (Budding et al., 2022). Students majoring in finance, accounting, and aviation or transportation management are frequently trained through content-heavy curricula that prioritize analytical skills, regulatory knowledge, and procedural competence. While such training is necessary, it often leaves limited space for structured interpersonal engagement or experiential learning that foregrounds intercultural interaction. Consequently, opportunities for developing intercultural awareness in higher education have traditionally been concentrated in study abroad and other mobility-based initiatives that are pursued by only a small proportion of students due to financial, structural, and institutional constraints, thereby limiting broad and equitable access to intercultural learning experiences (Custer & Tuominen, 2017). Within contemporary higher education, Internationalization at Home (henceforth IaH) has gained prominence as an approach that embeds international and intercultural learning within curricula, teaching practices, and campus activities, thereby enabling students to develop global competencies without participating in physical study-abroad mobility (Feng et al., 2025; Knight, 2008). However, evidence suggests that the development of IC within higher education is contingent upon the intentional design and implementation of structured pedagogical practices, as intercultural potential does not emerge from institutional or demographic diversity alone but from purposefully constructed intercultural educational spaces embedded across curricula and learning activities (Pryshliak et al., 2020).

Peer-Assisted Learning (henceforth PAL) has most commonly been implemented in higher education as an academically-oriented support mechanism, with prior research primarily evaluating its effectiveness in terms of subject knowledge development, academic performance, and learner satisfaction, while giving comparatively less attention to broader developmental or contextual learning outcomes (Bacon et al., 2021; Skjærseth et al., 2025). In business and management programs, PAL is commonly associated with tutoring, exam preparation, or skill reinforcement in quantitatively demanding subjects. Yet, emerging evidence suggests that peer learning environments extend beyond academic support to encompass social, emotional, and developmental dimensions, including confidence building, relational support, emotional regulation, and personal growth, although these affordances have historically received comparatively limited empirical attention (Bacon & Maneerutt, 2024; Snapp et al., 2022). Through sustained PAL characterized by reciprocal learner–supporter roles and low-hierarchy interaction, students engage in dialogic meaning-making

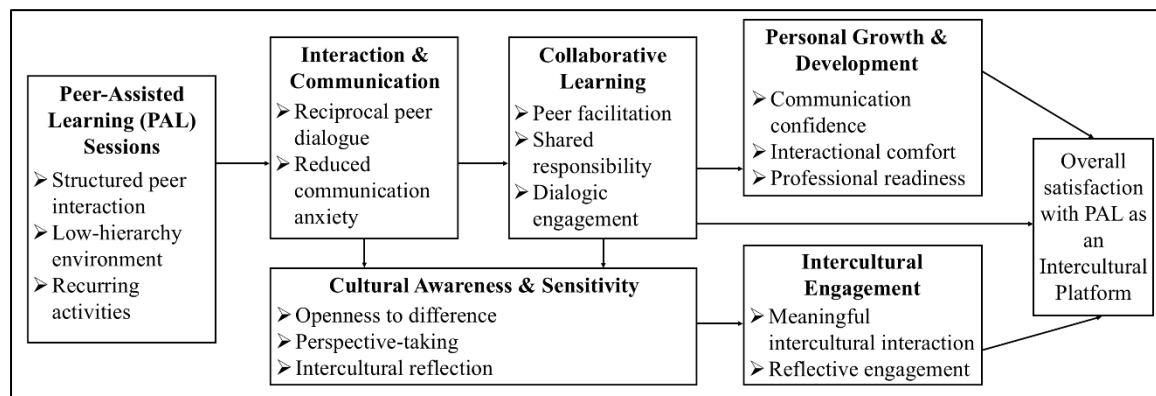


that promotes communication confidence, interpersonal awareness, and adaptive engagement with diverse perspectives (Bacon & Torremucha, 2025a; Zhang & Maconochie, 2022). Taken together, evidence suggests that PAL can function as a promising site for intercultural engagement by enabling sustained, reciprocal peer interaction, relational safety, and community formation, particularly in educational contexts where formal, lecture-based instruction affords limited opportunities for ongoing dialogic exchange and peer-mediated meaning making (Bacon & Torremucha, 2025b; Slabbert et al., 2023).

Recent scholarship indicates that peer-based learning and peer teaching environments can extend beyond academic skill development to support broader developmental outcomes, including confidence building, social integration, psychological safety, and identity formation through sustained peer interaction and facilitative roles within structured learning contexts (Bacon et al., 2021; Skjærseth et al., 2025). However, empirical research examining PAL explicitly as a context for intercultural engagement within business education remains limited, particularly in Southeast Asian higher education. Existing PAL scholarship has concentrated primarily on language education and professionally oriented domains such as health sciences and applied design contexts (Bacon & Torremucha, 2025b; Slabbert et al., 2023), with comparatively limited empirical attention given to business-related disciplines. This gap is notable given that graduates of international business and management programs are routinely involved in professional roles that require working in multicultural teams, engaging with diverse and international clients, and navigating globally interconnected business environments (Calma et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates PAL as a context for intercultural engagement among Thai undergraduate students enrolled in business-related disciplines, specifically finance and investment, accounting, and aviation and transportation business management. Rather than treating PAL solely as an academic support mechanism, this study conceptualizes PAL sessions as recurring social encounters in which intercultural interaction, communication practice, and personal development may emerge through sustained peer engagement. By examining students' perceptions of interaction, cultural awareness, personal growth, and satisfaction, the study seeks to illuminate how PAL contributes to intercultural engagement within everyday business education contexts.

By focusing on campus-based PAL rather than mobility programs or formal intercultural coursework, this research contributes to ongoing discussions surrounding IaH and the role of informal learning spaces in higher education. In doing so, it extends existing PAL scholarship by foregrounding its intercultural dimensions and by situating the analysis within business education, a domain in which IC is increasingly indispensable yet often insufficiently addressed. The findings aim to offer both empirical insight and practical implications for educators and institutions seeking to integrate intercultural learning more meaningfully into undergraduate business programs through scalable and contextually responsive pedagogical approaches.



**Figure 1** Theoretical framework of the study

Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework guiding the study, illustrating how participation in structured PAL sessions is theorized to facilitate interactional processes, intercultural awareness, and personal development outcomes that contribute to students' overall satisfaction with PAL as an intercultural platform.

## 2. Research Objectives and Questions

The specific research objectives of the study are to:

- 1) Examine how PAL sessions facilitate intercultural interaction and communication between Thai students and international peer mentors within business education contexts.
- 2) Investigate the extent to which participation in PAL sessions contributes to Thai students' intercultural awareness and sensitivity, including their understanding of and openness toward diverse cultural perspectives.
- 3) Explore Thai students' perceptions of personal development outcomes associated with intercultural engagement in PAL sessions, particularly in relation to communication confidence, interactional comfort, and professional readiness.
- 4) Assess Thai students' overall satisfaction with PAL sessions as a platform for intercultural engagement and identify factors perceived as contributing to the effectiveness of these sessions.

Guided by these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do Peer-Assisted Learning sessions facilitate intercultural interaction and communication between Thai students and international peer mentors in business-related disciplines?
- 2) To what extent does participation in Peer-Assisted Learning sessions influence Thai students' intercultural awareness and sensitivity?
- 3) How do Thai students perceive the personal development outcomes associated with intercultural engagement in Peer-Assisted Learning sessions?
- 4) What factors predict Thai students' overall satisfaction with Peer-Assisted Learning sessions as a platform for intercultural engagement?



### **3. Materials and Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine Thai undergraduate students' intercultural engagement through participation in PAL sessions. The design was selected to allow a systematic examination of students' perceptions of intercultural interaction, cultural awareness, personal development, and satisfaction, as well as the relationships among these constructs.

Data were collected following sustained participation in PAL sessions over a 10-week academic period. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize response patterns, followed by regression analysis to examine predictive relationships among PAL-related variables and key intercultural outcomes.

#### **3.2 Research Context**

The research was conducted at RSU Global! at Rangsit University, which serves as the institution's official PAL center. The center offers structured, voluntary PAL sessions facilitated by trained international peer mentors. Sessions emphasize collaborative learning, peer interaction, and student-led discussion rather than direct instruction.

PAL sessions were offered regularly throughout the academic term and typically lasted a minimum of 30 minutes. In addition to academic support, the sessions provided repeated opportunities for Thai students to interact with international peers in a supportive, peer-mediated environment, creating a context conducive to intercultural engagement.

#### **3.3 Participants**

During the academic term, approximately 2,000 undergraduate students from across the university attended PAL sessions, representing a wide range of academic majors. From this broader PAL-attending population, the present study focused on a purposive sample of 30 Thai undergraduate students majoring in Finance and Investment, Accounting, and Aviation and Transportation Business Management.

All participants in the study were first-year students enrolled in a General Education English course and voluntarily attended PAL sessions over the 10-week study period. Attendance records were used to confirm that participants had meaningful and sustained exposure to PAL activities prior to completing the research questionnaire.

The selected participants demonstrated English proficiency levels ranging from beginner to intermediate and came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and all ethical procedures related to informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were strictly followed.

#### **3.4 Description of PAL Learning Sessions**

PAL sessions were structured as small-group, collaborative learning environments in which students engaged in discussion, problem-solving activities, and peer-supported practice. International peer mentors functioned as facilitators rather than instructors, guiding interaction and encouraging reciprocal participation among students.

Unlike formal classroom instruction, PAL sessions emphasized informal dialogue, shared responsibility, and active peer engagement. These features were intended to reduce communication pressure and support sustained interaction across linguistic and cultural differences, integrating academic support with opportunities for intercultural engagement.



### 3.5 Research Instruments

Two research instruments were employed in this study: an English proficiency pretest and post-test and a structured questionnaire.

#### 3.5.1 English Proficiency Pretest and Post-test

An English proficiency pretest and post-test were administered to examine changes in students' formal English performance over the duration of the PAL program. The pretest was administered prior to participation in PAL sessions, and the post-test was administered following completion of the 10-week program. The tests assessed general English proficiency and were used to explore whether participation in PAL sessions was associated with changes in language performance.

#### 3.5.2 Questionnaire

A 30-item questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data on students' perceptions of intercultural engagement in PAL sessions. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire was organized into five constructs:

- 1) Interaction and communication
- 2) Cultural awareness and sensitivity
- 3) Collaborative learning
- 4) Personal growth and development
- 5) Overall satisfaction and recommendations

The questionnaire was administered online via a QR code displayed at the PAL center following students' final PAL session. No personally identifiable information was collected.

### 3.6 Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review by three university lecturers specializing in education and second language pedagogy. The Item Objective Congruence (henceforth IOC) method was used to assess alignment between questionnaire items and the study's research objectives. All items met acceptable IOC criteria.

Instrument reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency. Pilot testing with undergraduate students not included in the main study yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.964, indicating excellent reliability.

### 3.7 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place at the conclusion of the 10-week PAL program. Students who attended PAL sessions were invited to complete the questionnaire on a voluntary basis using a QR code provided at the International Language Center. The English proficiency post-test was administered immediately after completion of the program.

All procedures were overseen by the principal investigator. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed that declining or withdrawing would have no academic consequences.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages.

First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize students' responses across all questionnaire constructs. Measures of central tendency and dispersion, including means and standard deviations, were used to provide an overview of students' perceptions of intercultural engagement, personal development, and satisfaction with PAL sessions.



Second, regression analysis was conducted to examine predictive relationships among key variables. Questionnaire constructs related to interaction, collaborative learning, and cultural awareness were entered as independent variables, while perceived intercultural engagement, personal development, and overall satisfaction served as dependent variables. This analysis enabled identification of factors that significantly predicted students' intercultural and experiential outcomes.

English pretest and post-test scores were analyzed descriptively to compare performance distributions across time. Regression analysis was also used to examine the extent to which pretest performance predicted post-test outcomes, allowing interpretation of language score stability or change over the study period.

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained through the institutional review process at Rangsit University. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. No identifying information was collected, and all data were anonymized and stored securely in encrypted digital files accessible only to the research team. Data will be retained for three years following completion of the study and then permanently deleted.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the four research questions. Consistent with the study's objectives and the theoretical framing outlined in the Introduction, the analysis combines descriptive statistics with regression analysis to examine how participation in PAL sessions relates to intercultural interaction, awareness, personal development, and overall satisfaction among Thai business students. The results are interpreted in light of prior research on IC, IaH, and PAL environments (Bacon et al., 2021; Budding et al., 2022; Di Pietro, 2023; Kuffuor et al., 2024).

### 4.1 Research Question 1

*How do Peer-Assisted Learning sessions facilitate intercultural interaction and communication between Thai students and international peer mentors in business-related disciplines?*

Descriptive statistics indicate that participants perceived PAL sessions as interactionally supportive and communicatively accessible environments. As shown in Table 1, mean scores for items measuring interactional comfort, peer connection, and willingness to share perspectives ranged from 4.00 to 4.16 on a five-point Likert scale, with relatively low standard deviations.

These results suggest that PAL sessions reduced communication anxiety and fostered reciprocal peer interaction, supporting claims advanced in the Introduction that intercultural engagement is facilitated through intentionally designed, low-hierarchy learning environments rather than through institutional diversity alone (Taras, 2016; Van Rompay-Bartels & Watkins, 2025). The findings also align with prior PAL research emphasizing dialogic interaction and relational safety as central mechanisms supporting communication confidence (Bacon & Torremucha, 2025a).

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics for Interaction and Communication

Item	Description	Mean	SD
Q16	I felt comfortable interacting with other students during PAL sessions.	4.11	0.66
Q17	I formed meaningful connections with peers through the program.	4.00	0.82
Q18	The PAL sessions encouraged me to share my ideas and perspectives.	4.16	0.76
<b>Composite</b>	<b>Interaction and Communication (Q16–Q18)</b>	<b>4.09</b>	<b>0.75</b>



#### 4.2 Research Question 2

*To what extent does participation in Peer-Assisted Learning sessions influence Thai students' intercultural awareness and sensitivity?*

Participants also reported positive perceptions of intercultural awareness and sensitivity developed through PAL engagement. As summarized in Table 2, students indicated increased openness toward cultural differences, improved understanding of diverse perspectives, and heightened sensitivity during intercultural interaction.

These findings reinforce arguments presented in the Introduction that intercultural learning outcomes are contingent upon intentional pedagogical design rather than mere proximity between domestic and international students (Pryshliak et al., 2020; Di Pietro, 2023). The repeated, informal interactions embedded within PAL sessions appear to have created conditions conducive to reflective engagement with difference, consistent with IaH-oriented research emphasizing campus-based intercultural learning spaces (Feng et al., 2025; Knight, 2008).

**Table 2** Descriptive Statistics for Intercultural Awareness and Sensitivity

Construct	Mean	SD
Awareness of cultural differences	4.03	0.71
Openness to diverse perspectives	4.07	0.68
Sensitivity in intercultural interaction	3.98	0.74
<b>Composite intercultural awareness</b>	<b>4.03</b>	<b>0.71</b>

#### 4.3 Research Question 3

*How do Thai students perceive the personal development outcomes associated with intercultural engagement in Peer-Assisted Learning sessions?*

In addition to intercultural outcomes, students reported meaningful personal development gains associated with PAL participation. As shown in Table 3, respondents perceived improvements in communication confidence, interactional comfort, and readiness for future academic and professional challenges.

These results extend prior PAL research by empirically supporting claims that peer learning environments contribute to broader developmental outcomes beyond academic performance, including confidence building and identity-related growth (Snapp et al., 2022; Skjærseth et al., 2025). Within business education contexts, where curricula traditionally prioritize technical competence, these findings are particularly salient, as they suggest that PAL may help address gaps in interpersonal and adaptive skill development identified in the literature (Budding et al., 2022).

**Table 3** Descriptive Statistics for Personal Development Outcomes

Construct	Mean	SD
Communication confidence	4.12	0.69
Interactional comfort	4.05	0.72
Perceived professional readiness	3.94	0.78
<b>Composite personal development</b>	<b>4.04</b>	<b>0.73</b>

#### 4.4 Research Question 4

*What factors predict Thai students' overall satisfaction with Peer-Assisted Learning sessions as a platform for intercultural engagement?*

To address the final research question, multiple regression analysis was conducted with overall satisfaction as the dependent variable and interaction and communication, intercultural awareness, and



personal development as predictors. Results presented in Table 4 indicate that interaction and communication emerged as the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction, followed by personal development outcomes. Intercultural awareness also contributed positively, though with a comparatively smaller effect size.

These findings are consistent with the Introduction's argument that sustained, reciprocal peer interaction functions as a central mechanism through which PAL supports meaningful engagement (Bacon et al., 2021; Zhang & Maconochie, 2022). Satisfaction appears to be driven primarily by the quality of interaction and perceived personal growth rather than by exposure to diversity alone.

**Table 4** Regression Analysis Predicting Overall Satisfaction with PAL Sessions

Predictor	$\beta$	p
Interaction and communication	0.48	< .05
Personal development	0.32	< .05
Intercultural awareness	0.21	< .05
<b>Model R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.46</b>	

#### 4.5 English Proficiency Pretest and Post-test Results

Descriptive comparison of English pretest and post-test scores revealed modest overall changes in English proficiency across the 10-week PAL program. While some students demonstrated improvement, gains were not uniformly substantial across the sample.

One plausible contextual explanation for the limited magnitude of improvement is the substantial decline in overall student attendance at the PAL center during the academic year of data collection. Attendance decreased from approximately 4,500 students in the previous academic year to roughly 2,500 students in the most recent academic year, potentially reducing the frequency and density of peer interaction opportunities. Reduced exposure may have constrained measurable gains in formal English performance.

Nevertheless, where improvements in English test scores were observed, these gains occurred in spite of the decline in PAL attendance, suggesting that the quality of peer interaction remained pedagogically meaningful even under less optimal participation conditions. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that language development in peer-mediated environments is influenced not only by exposure quantity but also by interactional quality and communicative engagement (Taras, 2016; Bacon & Maneerutt, 2024).

#### 4.6 Summary of Findings

Taken together, the results demonstrate that PAL sessions at RSU Global! functioned as effective platforms for intercultural interaction, awareness development, and personal growth among Thai business students. Consistent with the literature reviewed in the Introduction, the findings indicate that intentionally structured peer learning environments can support intercultural engagement within everyday academic contexts, even in disciplines traditionally oriented toward technical skill development.

By linking interactional processes, developmental outcomes, and satisfaction, the present study extends existing PAL research and contributes empirical evidence from business education in Southeast Asia, a context that remains underrepresented in the literature.

### 5. Conclusion

This study examined PAL as a site for intercultural engagement among Thai undergraduate students in business-related disciplines. The findings show that PAL functioned not only as academic support but also as a recurring, low-hierarchy interactional space that facilitated intercultural communication, awareness, and personal development. Students perceived PAL as reducing communication anxiety, encouraging reciprocal peer interaction, and fostering openness to diverse perspectives.



Beyond intercultural outcomes, PAL participation was associated with perceived gains in communication confidence, interactional comfort, and professional readiness, addressing competencies often underemphasized in technically oriented business curricula. Regression analysis identified interaction quality as the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction, highlighting the importance of sustained, meaningful engagement over demographic diversity alone. Although English proficiency gains were modest, observed improvements occurred despite reduced PAL attendance (from the previous year), indicating that interactional quality remained pedagogically meaningful under constrained participation conditions.

By situating PAL within a business education context, this study extends PAL and IaH scholarship into an underrepresented disciplinary and regional setting. The findings suggest that structured, campus-based PAL initiatives offer a scalable and inclusive pathway for embedding intercultural learning into everyday undergraduate business education, particularly where access to mobility-based programs is limited.

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