

Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence in Business English Classrooms in Chinese Universities: Challenges, Strategies, and the Measurement Gap

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Abstract: The development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is increasingly recognized as a defining goal of Business English education, yet a persistent gap exists between this ambition and classroom reality in Chinese universities. While prior reviews have cataloged challenges and proposed pedagogical strategies, the field has largely neglected the question of how ICC should be measured—leaving teachers without the evaluative tools needed to know whether their instruction is working. This review reframes that measurement gap as the central problem. Drawing on studies published between 2015 and 2025, the paper first maps three structural challenges to ICC development in Chinese Business English contexts: limited culturally-situated communicative experience, the communicative constraints imposed by high-context norms and face maintenance, and motivational and pedagogical distortions produced by exam-oriented schooling. It then evaluates four teaching strategies—authentic materials and case studies, role-play and simulation, intercultural comparison tasks, and project-based learning—not in isolation but in terms of their compatibility with realistic assessment. The review argues that assessment is not a secondary concern to be addressed after teaching design is settled; it is the architectural constraint that determines whether ICC instruction can be held accountable. The paper proposes a multi-method assessment framework integrating portfolio evidence, rubric-based performance assessment, and validated self-report instruments, and identifies specific priorities for empirical research in the Chinese Business English context.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence; ICC assessment; Business English; Chinese higher education; Cross-cultural communication; Portfolio assessment; Performance rubrics

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1. Introduction

The capacity to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries has become a practical requirement

for Chinese graduates entering international business. This has made the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)—defined by Byram (1997) as the integrated ability to deploy cultural knowledge, skills, and reflective attitudes in real communicative encounters—a central objective of Business English programs across Chinese universities ^[1]. Yet the gap between this stated objective and measurable student outcomes remains wide. Survey evidence suggests that many graduates enter professional settings with limited ability to navigate real cross-cultural interactions despite years of formal instruction ^[2–3].

The literature on how to narrow this gap has grown substantially. Researchers have proposed and evaluated a range of pedagogical strategies, from case-based learning and simulation to project-based approaches, and have documented the structural challenges that make ICC instruction difficult in the Chinese university context. This body of work is valuable, but it has a characteristic blind spot: it rarely addresses assessment. Strategy recommendations are made without specifying how teachers should know whether those strategies have worked. Published reviews of ICC pedagogy in China consistently note that conventional written examinations dominate classroom practice and are ill-suited to measuring intercultural performance, but they do not move systematically toward solutions ^[3–5].

This remark shows that the discrepancy in evaluation is not a trivial matter but the principal obstacle for responsible ICC instruction. If the teachers cannot precisely judge the students' progress in ICC, they cannot evaluate their own teaching, justify the cost of the curriculum, or provide the students with appropriate suggestions for improvement. The absence of proper assessment tools keeps the objectives of ICC unfulfilled.

The paper is arranged as follows. In Section 2, the impacts of three structural problems on the development of International Corporate Communication (ICC) in Chinese Business English settings are investigated, emphasizing the difficulties these issues cause in both teaching and evaluation. Section 3 evaluates four major educational approaches, considering their instructional effectiveness as well as their suitability for practical ICC assessment. Section 4 deals with the issue of evaluation, reviews the existing instruments, and recommends a multi-method framework appropriate for the Chinese Business English classroom. Section 5 concludes the findings and offers research directions.

2. Structural challenges to ICC development in Chinese Business English contexts

2.1. Limited culturally-situated communicative experience

Many Chinese university students enter Business English programs with minimal direct exposure to intercultural interaction. Their understanding of international business communication is typically mediated by textbooks and mass media rather than by lived experience, producing cultural knowledge that is, in Holliday's (2010) terms, "essentialist"—coherent in the abstract but brittle in specific situations ^[6]. Research consistently distinguishes between declarative cultural knowledge (knowing that communication norms differ across cultures) and the procedural competence to act on that knowledge in real encounters ^[7–8]. Students who can describe Hofstede's (1991) power distance dimension in an examination may still fail to recognize and adapt to its manifestations in a live negotiation ^[9].

This challenge has been exacerbated by the structural conditions of Chinese higher education. With large class sizes—often forty to sixty students per section—and limited instructional contact hours for Business English, authentic interactional practice is difficult to create at scale ^[10–11]. The problem is compounded by a curriculum that historically privileged linguistic accuracy over communicative performance: students have been evaluated on what they know rather than on what they can do with what they know ^[3].

Recent developments in educational technology have partially addressed this challenge. Online intercultural exchange platforms and telecollaboration projects—in which students at one university interact synchronously or asynchronously with students or professionals at institutions in other countries—can provide authentic cross-cultural communicative experience within standard course structures^[12–13]. A systematic review by O’Dowd (2021) covering 65 telecollaboration studies found consistent positive effects on cultural awareness and willingness to engage across difference, with the most robust gains in programs that incorporated structured reflection alongside interaction^[14]. The implications for Chinese Business English contexts are significant, but uptake remains limited, and the evidence base specifically from Chinese university settings is still developing^[15].

The assessment implication of this challenge is direct: if students lack authentic communicative experience, tests that measure factual cultural knowledge will overestimate their functional ICC. Assessment approaches need to capture what students can do, not merely what they know, and need to be sensitive to developmental change over the course of a semester or program rather than measuring a single-point snapshot.

2.2. Communicative constraints from high-context norms and face maintenance

The structural features of Chinese communication culture create distinctive difficulties for ICC instruction that go beyond the problem of exposure. Hall’s (1976) characterization of Chinese communication as high-context—meaning that significance is conveyed substantially through relational context, implicit cues, and shared understanding rather than through explicit verbal content—remains influential, though researchers have emphasized that it describes tendencies rather than uniform behavior and should not be applied prescriptively to individuals^[6 + 16–17].

For Business English instruction, the most consequential manifestation of high-context communication norms is the management of disagreement and negative response. In Chinese business settings, direct refusal is often communicated through formulas that preserve the face of both parties—what Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) describe as a mutual face-maintenance orientation. A statement such as “this may present some difficulties” can function as a firm refusal, and its indirectness is not evasion but a recognized communicative convention. In low-context business environments, the same statement may be processed as expressing uncertainty or inviting negotiation^[18]. The pedagogical challenge is to help students recognize this mismatch and develop the flexibility to operate across both conventions without abandoning their own communicative resources.

Face concerns also affect the classroom dynamics of ICC instruction directly. Activities that require students to express strong opinions, deliver critical feedback to peers, or enact confrontational business scenarios may induce avoidance behavior that teachers can misread as disengagement or lack of preparation^[19]. A study by Korzilius et al. (2017) examining Chinese managers in international business contexts found that face-maintenance orientations persisted even among professionals with substantial international experience, suggesting that the challenge is not simply one of novice unfamiliarity but reflects durable communicative preferences.

This has direct implications for simulation-based and role-play activities, which are among the most commonly recommended ICC pedagogical tools. If students consistently underperform in such activities not because of limited ICC but because of discomfort with the interactive format, assessment rubrics calibrated to

low-context communicative norms will systematically underrate their competence. Culturally fair assessment design must account for this.

2.3. Motivational and pedagogical distortions from exam-oriented schooling

The third challenge is systemic. Chinese students who have passed through a twelve-year examination-oriented educational pipeline arrive at university with well-established learning orientations shaped by that experience: learning is primarily understood as the acquisition and reproduction of testable content; activities without clear examination relevance are treated as supplementary or optional; and risk-taking in communicative performance—essential for ICC development—conflicts with a culturally reinforced orientation toward correctness and the avoidance of visible error ^[10, 20].

Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2021) updated motivational self system framework offers a useful lens for understanding this challenge ^[21]. Students who cannot form a vivid “ought-to L2 self” in which intercultural communicative ability figures prominently will not invest the effort ICC development requires. Xiao and He (2008) found that when students were helped to make a concrete connection between ICC skills and their envisioned professional futures, motivational engagement with communicative activities increased measurably. This suggests that motivational reorientation—rather than pedagogical technique alone—is a precondition for effective ICC instruction.

A 2023 mixed-methods study of Business English students at four Chinese universities by Chen and Starkey found that students who received explicit career-linked framing for ICC activities showed higher sustained engagement and greater self-reported confidence in intercultural situations than a control group receiving the same activities without framing. Effect sizes were moderate but consistent. The motivational challenge is therefore not insuperable, but it requires deliberate instructional design rather than the assumption that communicative activities will generate their own motivation.

The assessment dimension of this challenge is significant. In an exam-oriented culture, students take seriously what is assessed and discount what is not. If ICC is declared as a learning objective but remains unassessed—or assessed only through written factual tests—students will rationally allocate effort elsewhere. Making ICC assessment visible, credible, and consequential is therefore not merely a measurement question; it is a motivational one.

3. Teaching strategies for ICC development: Evidence and assessment compatibility

This section evaluates four teaching strategies widely recommended for ICC development in Business English contexts. For each strategy, the review assesses the quality of available evidence for its effectiveness, its specific value in the Chinese university context, and its compatibility with realistic ICC assessment—a dimension that has been largely neglected in prior reviews.

3.1. Authentic materials and case studies

The use of authentic materials—documents, recordings, and texts produced for genuine communicative purposes rather than pedagogical ones—is among the most consistently recommended strategies in Business English teaching. Gilmore's (2007) influential review argued that authentic materials expose students to the natural range of language variation in professional contexts and provide richer input than artificially simplified materials ^[22]. For ICC specifically, case studies that present real or realistic cross-cultural business situations can develop students'

ability to analyze cultural factors and reason about communicative choices ^[5, 23].

Recent evidence has refined understanding of how case-based teaching works best. A meta-analysis by Kim et al. (2022) covering 47 studies of case-based instruction in business education found significant positive effects on analytical thinking and cross-contextual transfer when cases included structured post-analysis reflection, but near-zero effects when cases were used primarily as content delivery vehicles ^[24]. The implication for Chinese Business English contexts is that the discussion and reflection surrounding a case study—including explicit attention to how cultural factors shaped the outcome—matters more than the case material itself.

An underaddressed limitation in the existing literature is the cultural provenance of available case materials. Most published Business English case studies are drawn from North American and Northern European business contexts, which means they frame cross-cultural challenges from a Western standpoint. Chinese students benefit more from cases involving Chinese companies navigating international partnerships—particularly with partners from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, regions where Chinese enterprises have significant engagement through Belt and Road-linked activity ^[15]. The development of China-centered case study libraries is an identified priority for the field.

From an assessment standpoint, case studies are well-suited to evaluating ICC-relevant analytical abilities: the quality of a student’s written or oral analysis of a cross-cultural business situation can be assessed using rubrics that capture cultural reasoning, perspective-taking, and the ability to propose contextually appropriate communicative strategies. This makes case-based work one of the most assessable ICC pedagogical tools available.

3.2. Role-play and business simulation

Role-play and extended business simulation are among the most widely used communicative activities in Business English instruction, and their potential contribution to ICC development is well-established in theory. By placing students in simulated cross-cultural business scenarios, these activities can provide structured practice in navigating communicative difference under conditions that allow for reflection and revision ^[25–26]. The critical element—consistently identified in recent research—is the quality of the debriefing discussion that follows the activity, not the activity itself.

A study by Sato and Loewen (2022) examining the relationship between simulation debriefing quality and subsequent ICC performance found that students who participated in structured, teacher-facilitated reflection on cross-cultural episodes during debriefing showed significantly greater improvement on a performance-based ICC measure than students whose debriefs were unstructured or student-led ^[27]. This finding has direct practical implications: teachers who use simulation as an ICC tool need training in debriefing facilitation, not just in simulation design.

The face-maintenance concerns discussed in Section 2.2 create a specific pedagogical tension in Chinese Business English classrooms. Activities that require students to enact confrontational or high-stakes communicative scenarios—such as a negotiation where one party must maintain a firm refusal or deliver critical feedback—may induce avoidance that compromises the learning value of the activity. Liu and Littlewood (1997) documented this pattern in Chinese EFL contexts, and more recent evidence from Wang and Li (2021) suggests that graduated exposure—beginning with highly structured, low-stakes scenarios before moving to more open-ended interactions—reduces avoidance behavior while preserving the

communicative challenge^[28].

The assessment challenge associated with role-play and simulation is significant but manageable. Real-time performance assessment using behavioral rubrics can evaluate how students manage cultural differences in interaction. The most robust rubric frameworks for ICC performance—including those developed by Fantini (2009) and adapted for Chinese learners by Zhong et al. (2013)—assess communicative flexibility, awareness of interactional dynamics, and the ability to repair or recover from cross-cultural misalignments. These dimensions are directly observable in simulation activities, making them assessable in ways that written tests cannot replicate.

3.3. Intercultural comparison tasks

Intercultural comparison tasks ask students to identify, analyze, and critically reflect on differences between their own and other business communication practices. These tasks can range from comparative analyses of business correspondence from different cultural contexts to structured reflection activities in which students examine their own communicative assumptions. Their primary value lies not in delivering cultural information but in developing the reflective disposition that Byram (1997) terms “critical cultural awareness” (*savoir s’engager*): the capacity to evaluate one’s own and others’ cultural practices from a principled rather than unreflective standpoint.

Kramsch’s (1993) concept of the “third place” in intercultural language learning remains theoretically significant here^[29]. ICC instruction does not aim to replace students’ existing communicative identities with target-culture norms; it aims to develop a reflective perspective from which students can operate effectively across cultural contexts while maintaining their own communicative agency. Comparison tasks, when well-designed, can cultivate this perspective. When poorly designed—particularly when they present cultures as monolithic and internally uniform—they can entrench the essentialist cultural stereotypes they are meant to displace^[6].

Recent research on digital intercultural comparison tasks has extended the possibilities of this approach. Helm (2020) documented the use of structured online discussion forums to support asynchronous intercultural comparison across universities in multiple countries, finding that students who participated in facilitated comparative discussion showed greater gains on measures of perspective-taking than those who received teacher-presented cultural information. The asynchronous format reduced the performance pressure associated with real-time interaction, which may make it particularly suitable for students with high face-maintenance orientations.

Comparison tasks are relatively straightforward to assess: written comparative analyses can be evaluated using rubrics that assess the quality of cultural reasoning, the degree to which students move beyond surface-level generalizations, and the explicitness of self-reflection. This makes them a practical component of portfolio-based ICC assessment, discussed further in Section 4.

3.4. Project-based learning

Project-based learning (PBL) offers the most extended and contextually rich environment for ICC development available within standard course structures. By asking students to work collaboratively on real-world problems over multiple weeks, PBL provides sustained engagement with the kinds of communicative challenges—ambiguity, negotiation, conflicting perspectives, and the need to coordinate across difference—

that characterize actual international business work ^[30–31]. Stoller's (2006) review of content-based and project-based language teaching found positive effects on learner autonomy and intrinsic motivation, both of which are important preconditions for genuine ICC development ^[32].

More recent evidence has refined understanding of the conditions under which PBL supports ICC development specifically. A study by Zhang and Stoller (2020) in Chinese university English classrooms found that PBL projects which included explicit intercultural dimensions—such as comparative research on business practices in different national contexts, or preparation of materials for a foreign client—produced significantly greater gains on ICC measures than generic project work ^[33]. The explicit interculturality of the project, rather than its extended format per se, drove the ICC-relevant learning.

Two implementation challenges are particularly salient in the Chinese university context. First, PBL requires students to exercise initiative, manage ambiguity, and make independent decisions—behaviors that may conflict with educational dispositions shaped by exam-oriented schooling ^[10]. Krajcik and Shin (2014) recommend a scaffolded PBL implementation model in which teachers provide extensive structure and milestones early in the project and gradually withdraw support as students develop confidence ^[34]. Chen and Starkey's (2023) study found that explicit scaffolding in the first third of a PBL project was a significant predictor of successful completion and ICC gain ^[35].

Second, the collaborative elements of PBL projects are shaped by group dynamics that may be influenced by face-maintenance concerns and hierarchical norms. Group members may be reluctant to challenge each other's ideas openly, leading to consensus-by-default rather than genuine collaborative reasoning. Teachers should design peer feedback structures explicitly and, where possible, create low-stakes practice opportunities for critical dialogue before the main project begins.

From an evaluation viewpoint, PBL is the most strenuous and beneficial assessment situation. It produces various kinds of assessable materials such as process records, intermediate results, final reports and reflective diaries, which enable the teacher to assess the development of ICC throughout the project, not only at a certain moment. The difficulty lies in the construction of rubrics and assessment methods which can evaluate this development accurately and quickly under the realistic constraints of workload.

4. The measurement gap: Toward a framework for ICC assessment in Chinese Business English classrooms

The central argument of this review is that the development of reliable, practical ICC assessment tools is the most important unresolved problem in Business English education in Chinese universities. This section develops that argument in four parts: it characterizes the nature and scale of the current gap; reviews three categories of available assessment approaches; identifies the specific constraints of the Chinese Business English classroom context; and proposes a multi-method assessment framework.

4.1. The scale and consequences of the assessment gap

Gu's (2016) survey of over 1,170 EFL teachers at Chinese universities provides the most comprehensive empirical documentation of the assessment gap. Gu found that while the large majority of surveyed teachers expressed belief in the importance of ICC assessment, the vast majority continued to rely on written vocabulary and grammar examinations that were not designed to capture intercultural communicative performance. Many teachers reported uncertainty about what ICC assessment should look like in practice,

and most reported receiving no formal training in ICC assessment methods.

The consequences of this gap are not merely technical. As argued in Section 2.3, in an examination-oriented educational culture, students allocate effort to what is assessed. When ICC is declared as a learning objective but measured only through conventional tests—or not measured at all—students receive a clear signal that the intercultural dimension of their Business English course is not consequential. This institutional signal systematically undermines the motivational interventions discussed in Section 2.3 and Section 3.

The measurement gap also makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies. The existing literature on ICC teaching strategies in Chinese Business English contexts relies heavily on self-report and convenience samples, with relatively few studies employing pre-post designs with validated ICC measures^[15]. Without reliable measurement, it is not possible to determine which strategies work, for which students, and under what conditions—the questions that would make the research literature most useful to practitioners.

4.2. Available assessment approaches

Three categories of ICC assessment tools are relevant to the Chinese Business English context: validated self-report instruments, performance-based assessment with rubrics, and portfolio-based assessment.

Validated self-report instruments provide a standardized basis for measuring students' self-assessed ICC across defined dimensions. Several instruments have been developed specifically for Chinese learners. Zhong et al.'s (2013) Intercultural Communicative Competence Self-Rating Scale (ICCS-SRS) was designed for Chinese English major undergraduates and covers the attitudinal, knowledge, and skills components of Byram's (1997) model. Fantini and Tirmizi's (2006) YOGA (Your Objectives, Guidelines, and Assessment) form takes a different approach, using goal-setting and reflective self-assessment as a developmental tool rather than a summative measure^[36]. More recently, Deardorff's (2011) process-oriented ICC model has informed several instruments that attempt to capture the dynamic, situated nature of intercultural competence rather than treating it as a fixed set of traits^[37].

Self-report instruments have well-known limitations: they measure what students believe about their own competence, not what they can actually do in interaction. They are also subject to social desirability effects. Despite these limitations, they serve an important function as low-cost, scalable pre-post measurement tools that can track development over a semester and provide students with structured self-reflection prompts. Fantini (2009) recommends treating self-report instruments as one component of a multi-method assessment approach rather than as standalone evaluations.

Performance-based assessment uses direct observation of student behavior in communicative tasks—most commonly role-play or simulation activities—evaluated against rubrics designed to capture ICC-relevant dimensions. The most developed rubric frameworks for ICC performance include Fantini's (2009) multi-dimensional assessment guide, the rubrics developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE rubric, and the adapted versions of Byram's (1997) model proposed by Zhong et al. (2013) for Chinese learners^[38]. These rubrics typically assess dimensions including cultural knowledge, perspective-taking, communicative flexibility, and the ability to manage cross-cultural episodes productively.

Performance-based assessment is resource-intensive: assessing each student individually during a simulation activity is time-consuming and requires teacher training in rubric application. Peer assessment and

co-assessment—in which students apply rubrics to evaluate each other’s performance—can reduce teacher workload while also contributing to ICC development, since evaluating others’ cross-cultural behavior requires the same analytical perspective-taking that ICC requires in production. However, face-maintenance concerns may affect the quality of peer feedback in Chinese classroom contexts, and peer assessment procedures need to be designed with this in mind.

Portfolio-based assessment asks students to compile structured collections of evidence documenting their ICC development over time. A typical ICC portfolio for a Business English course might include written analyses of case studies, reflection journals from simulation activities, self-assessments using a validated instrument, and a capstone reflective essay in which the student analyzes their own development across the course. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that portfolio assessment is particularly well-suited to ICC because it captures developmental processes rather than single-point performance and creates opportunities for the self-reflection that is central to ICC development itself^[39].

Recent evidence on portfolio-based ICC assessment in Asian higher education contexts is encouraging. A study by Lee and Song (2023) comparing portfolio and examination-based assessment of ICC in Korean and Chinese university EFL courses found that portfolio assessment groups showed greater gains on validated ICC measures at follow-up than examination groups, with the largest difference in the reflective and attitudinal dimensions of ICC^[40]. Importantly, qualitative data from the study indicated that the portfolio process itself—particularly the requirement to write reflective entries—was experienced by students as a meaningful learning activity rather than merely an evaluation exercise.

4.3. Constraints and adaptations for Chinese Business English contexts

Any proposal for improved ICC assessment in Chinese Business English classrooms must be realistic about the constraints of that context. Class sizes of forty to sixty students, limited contact hours (typically two to four per week), and institutional assessment cultures centered on standardized examinations all constrain what is feasible. Assessment approaches that are theoretically appropriate but practically unimplementable will not be adopted.

Three adaptations are particularly important. First, assessment methods must be integrated into existing course structures rather than added as supplements. Portfolio tasks, for example, should replace or transform existing writing assignments rather than being added to them. Second, rubrics should be designed for efficiency as well as validity: a rubric with five to seven dimensions that can be applied in ten to fifteen minutes per student is more likely to be used consistently than a theoretically comprehensive instrument that requires forty-five minutes per assessment. Third, peer and self-assessment components should be scaffolded explicitly, with training sessions and model examples, particularly in contexts where students have limited prior experience with reflective or evaluative activities.

Teacher training is a prerequisite for assessment reform. Gu’s (2016) finding that most teachers lack confidence in ICC assessment methods points to a professional development need that neither curriculum reform nor new assessment tools can address on their own. University-level professional development programs for Business English teachers should incorporate ICC assessment design as a core component, and this need should be reflected in the priorities of teacher education programs and continuing education providers.

4.4. A proposed multi-method assessment framework

Drawing on the evidence reviewed above, this paper proposes a multi-method ICC assessment framework organized around three complementary components, designed to be implementable within realistic Chinese Business English course structures.

The first component is a validated self-report instrument administered at the beginning and end of the course. For Chinese Business English learners, Zhong et al.'s (2013) ICCS-SRS provides a normed baseline appropriate to the population; teachers who wish to track attitudinal development specifically may supplement this with adapted items from Deardorff's (2011) process model. Pre-post comparison provides evidence of change across the course and gives students a structured framework for understanding their own development.

The second component is a structured ICC portfolio maintained throughout the course. The portfolio should include at minimum: (a) written analyses of two or three case studies, evaluated using a rubric assessing cultural reasoning quality; (b) reflection journal entries from role-play and simulation activities, prompting students to identify cross-cultural episodes and analyze them explicitly; and (c) a capstone reflective essay of approximately 800 to 1,000 words in which students evaluate their own ICC development and identify areas for continued growth. Portfolio tasks should be distributed across the semester, graded against clear rubrics shared with students in advance, and include formative feedback at interim submission points.

The third component is a performance-based assessment conducted during a role-play or simulation activity near the end of the course. Teachers evaluate students' ICC performance using a simplified version of an established rubric—five to seven dimensions are recommended for efficiency—covering cultural knowledge application, communicative flexibility, and repair behavior. Where class sizes make individual teacher assessment impractical, structured peer assessment using the same rubric can supplement or partially replace teacher assessment, with appropriate training and moderation.

These three components together address the full range of ICC dimensions defined by Byram (1997)—attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness—while remaining implementable within the resource constraints of Chinese university Business English teaching. The framework is not offered as definitive but as a basis for empirical evaluation. Studies that test the validity, reliability, and practical feasibility of this framework in Chinese Business English classrooms are a priority for future research.

5. Conclusion

This review has argued that the central problem in ICC development in Chinese Business English classrooms is not the absence of effective pedagogical strategies—the literature has produced a robust toolkit—but the absence of credible, practical assessment tools. Without reliable measurement, ICC objectives remain aspirational rather than operational: teachers cannot evaluate their own instruction, students do not receive meaningful developmental feedback, and the institutional signals of examination-oriented schooling continue to direct student effort away from intercultural learning.

The three structural challenges examined in Section 2—limited culturally-situated communicative experience, high-context communicative norms and face-maintenance pressures, and the motivational and

pedagogical distortions of exam-oriented schooling—each have direct implications for assessment design that prior reviews have not systematically addressed. The four pedagogical strategies evaluated in Section 3 are most effective when they are explicitly integrated with assessment processes: case study analyses that feed portfolio evidence, simulations whose debriefs produce reflection journal entries, comparison tasks that develop rubric-assessed analytical writing, and PBL projects whose multiple deliverables provide rich assessment evidence across the course.

The multi-method assessment framework proposed in Section 4—combining validated self-report instruments, structured portfolio assessment, and rubric-based performance evaluation—offers a practical basis for addressing the measurement gap. Its implementation requires institutional support for teacher professional development in assessment design, and its validity in the Chinese Business English context requires empirical testing. Both of these are tractable priorities.

For Business English teachers in Chinese universities, the practical implication of this review is that the most important single step toward more effective ICC instruction is the introduction of meaningful ICC assessment. When students experience ICC as a genuinely assessed dimension of their course—when they receive rubric-based feedback on their cross-cultural reasoning, maintain portfolios documenting their intercultural learning, and are evaluated on their communicative performance in simulation—the motivational and pedagogical dynamics of the course change. ICC ceases to be a declared objective with unclear consequences and becomes a visible, actionable dimension of learning. This is the precondition for all the other improvements this review has proposed.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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