Theoretical Foundations and Teaching Reform Strategies for Local Internationalization in Business English Programs: A Case of Longyan University

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Abstract: This article advances a systems model for "local internationalization" in Business English at regional teaching-oriented universities. Combining IaH, ICC, and an educational-ecology lens, we identify curricular, faculty, structural, and campus-climate barriers and propose a four-pillar pathway — curriculum, faculty, campus, community. Using Longyan University as a conceptual case, we link inputs and incentives to course-embedded tasks and multi-method ICC assessment. Emphasizing glocal industry alignment and virtual collaboration (e.g., COIL), we offer an evaluation toolkit and sustainability levers to deliver equitable participation and measurable ICC gains without outbound mobility.

Keywords: Internationalization at Home (IaH), Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), educational ecology, business English, local internationalization, curriculum reform, faculty development

1. Introduction

China's higher-education agenda prioritizes global competence under initiatives such as the Double First-Class Plan. For teaching-oriented regional universities like Longyan University—where few students study abroad—internationalization must occur on campus. Internationalization at Home (IaH) offers an inclusive route via intentionally internationalized curricula and co-curriculars[1].Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) specifies outcomes beyond language—knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness [2]. An educational-ecology lens links micro (classroom), meso (institution), and macro (policy/community) levels, with sustainable change emerging from their alignment [3][4]. Recent work underscores this integration, highlighting the combined effects of curriculum, resources, and support on IaH, and promoting assessment-oriented, task-based, and virtual/COIL approaches to building ICC [5][6][7][8][9].

Against this backdrop, we integrate IaH, ICC, and educational ecology to propose a systems model for "local internationalization" in Business English. Using Longyan University as a conceptual case, we outline internally aligned reforms—curriculum, faculty, campus, and community—that cultivate globally competent graduates without reliance on outbound mobility.

Research questions. (1) How can IaH, ICC, and educational ecology be integrated into a coherent systems model? (2) What strategies enable local internationalization in Business English at regional universities? (3) How can multidimensional ICC outcomes be validly assessed within regular courses?

Contributions. A glocally anchored systems model; a four-pillar implementation playbook (curriculum, faculty, campus, community); and an assessment toolkit aligning course tasks with ICC indicators.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Internationalization at Home (IaH)

IaH reframes internationalization from outbound mobility to purposeful, campus-based integration of international and intercultural learning for all students[1]. Core levers include embedding global perspectives across required courses, leveraging informal/co-curricular learning (including virtual activities), and intentionally using campus diversity to enrich learning. In China, IaH aligns with recent policy emphases on broadening global competence through domestic learning environments [4].

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

ICC is a primary outcome for language-related programs. In Byram's framework, intercultural speakers integrate attitudes (openness), knowledge (of self and other cultures), skills (interpreting/relating; discovery/interaction), and critical

cultural awareness as an ethical, reflexive stance[2]. For Business English majors, ICC underpins appropriate, effective participation in international business communication and aligns with national goals for globally competent graduates [4].

2.3 Educational Ecology Perspective

An ecological lens treats internationalization as a multi-level system spanning classroom practice (micro), institutional supports and incentives (meso), and external partnerships/policies (exo/macro).Alignment across levels—e.g.,globalized curriculum + faculty development + industry/community links—amplifies and sustains IaH while deepening ICC [3] [4].

3. Challenges in Pursuing Local Internationalization

Local internationalization is an attainable yet complex agenda for regional, teaching-oriented universities. The case of Longyan University exemplifies four major and interrelated constraints—curricular, pedagogical, structural, and environmental—that collectively limit the depth and sustainability of Internationalization at Home (IaH) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) development.

3.1 Curricular Constraints

Many Business English programs remain language-heavy, with limited global perspectives, intercultural themes, or comparative cases[4]. Courses such as Business Correspondence and International Trade English prioritize transactional forms over intercultural negotiation and ethical reasoning. Program outcomes rarely specify ICC indicators — openness, cultural knowledge, interpretive/relational skills — creating a gap between content and competence[9]. Across non-metropolitan Chinese universities, "internationalization" is often additive rather than transformative: foreign content is inserted without linking global contexts to local employability [5].

3.2 Faculty Capacity

Effective IaH hinges on faculty readiness. Many instructors have strong language pedagogy but limited experience with intercultural teaching, outcome-based assessment, or global industry practice [6]. Heavy loads and scarce professional development dampen innovation. Even when ICC is valued, teachers often lack tools to embed intercultural tasks, manage classroom diversity, or assess reflective learning, making IaH symbolic rather than substantive [7].

3.3 Resources and Institutional Structures

Sustained internationalization requires stable mechanisms — funding, incentives, and coordination — often weak in regional universities[4]. Budget limits constrain virtual exchange and overseas partnerships [8]. Fragmented governance (international offices, teaching units, departments) creates misaligned priorities. Without workload credit, micro-grants, or promotion recognition, faculty-led innovation is hard to sustain, exposing meso-level fragility [3].

3.4 Campus Environment

A largely homogenous campus limits natural intercultural contact; few foreign faculty or exchange students reduce everyday interaction[4]. Learning thus depends on intentional design rather than exposure. Digital and virtual exchange can mitigate gaps but need reliable infrastructure and administrative backing [8]. Building a durable intercultural climate requires both symbolic change (policies, values) and everyday practices (multilingual signage, inclusive activities).

4. Discussion

4.1 IaH–ICC Synergy

Internationalization at Home (IaH) creates structured opportunities for intercultural learning, while Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) provides measurable outcomes. When integrated, IaH offers the context and ICC defines the learning targets, forming a chain from internationalized tasks to demonstrable gains in attitudes, knowledge, and skills [1] [2]. Genuine synergy depends on coherence among course aims, pedagogy, and assessment; superficial inclusion of "global content" without ICC-based evaluation leads to limited learning impact.

4.2 Contextualization ("Glocal" Fit)

Aligning international content with Fujian's regional economy—such as ASEAN supply chains and overseas Chinese networks—enhances authenticity and local transferability [4][10]. Integrating English-medium and Chinese-language materials through translanguaging deepens understanding of business and cultural systems, balancing international vision with local relevance.

4.3 Implementation Strategies

A staged approach is recommended: pilot select courses with volunteer faculty, gather evidence on ICC outcomes, and expand progressively[4]. Institutional incentives—course release, micro-grants, and recognition in promotion—are essential. Under resource constraints, virtual collaboration and co-teaching represent cost-effective means of scaling IaH.

4.4 Assessing ICC

ICC assessment should reflect its multidimensional nature, combining attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral indicators [2]. Multi-method tools—scenario tasks, reflective journals, and e-portfolios—enable authentic evaluation. Feedback from assessments should inform curriculum design and faculty development for continuous improvement.

4.5 Sustainability and Transferability

Compared with mobility-based models, IaH ensures equity and sustainability by engaging all students [4]. Monitoring participation intensity and differentiated learning gains prevents nominal internationalization. The proposed IaH × ICC × ecological framework is transferable to similar teaching-oriented institutions, provided outcome standards are maintained while allowing contextual adaptation [1][10].

5. Conclusion

Local internationalization in Business English is both necessary and feasible. A system that purposefully internationalizes curricula, equips faculty, cultivates intercultural campus life, and aligns policies can deliver robust ICC outcomes without heavy reliance on mobility. The Longyan University case provides a transferable template for similarly positioned institutions.

Acknowledgments

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