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EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE OF DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract

This study examines the educational practices for developing intercultural communication competencies in higher education institutions within the context of unprecedented global interconnectedness. Contemporary higher education environments, characterized by increasing international student mobility and digital connectivity, present both significant opportunities and challenges for intercultural engagement. The research investigates pedagogical approaches that facilitate effective intercultural communication skills acquisition among university students, analyzing their impact on cultural identity formation and preservation. Through a mixed-methods approach combining survey data from master's students (n=44) and theoretical framework analysis, this paper identifies key challenges in cross-cultural educational settings and proposes evidence-based interventions. Findings indicate that establishing dedicated intercultural communication centers, implementing culturally responsive teaching methodologies, and developing comprehensive assessment criteria significantly enhance students' intercultural competence. The study contributes to the scholarship on educational innovation by demonstrating how structured pedagogical practices can foster intercultural skills while simultaneously preserving cultural diversity. This research has implications for curriculum development, institutional internationalization strategies, and educational policy in multicultural higher education contexts.

Keywords: intercultural communication, higher education pedagogy, cultural identity, educational innovation, globalization, assessment criteria, intercultural competence.

Introduction. Cultural identity has been a focal point in social sciences, especially within the fields of communication and social psychology. Extensive research has explored cultural identity, both directly and indirectly, providing diverse perspectives on its impact on intercultural contexts and inspiring methods for its study. Cultural identity, a multifaceted construct encompassing shared beliefs, values,

traditions, and practices, plays a pivotal role in shaping individual and collective identities within societies (Schildkraut, 2011). The researcher Schildkraut (2011) also believed that it evolves through time and interactions with others while being influenced by historical, social, and environmental factors. Intercultural communication, on the other hand, involves the practice and exchange of ideas, information,

and cultural practices among individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Chen & Starosta, 2000). These exchanges occur through various channels, including face-to-face interactions (whether in-person or online), media, and digital platforms, facilitating encounters that transcend geographical boundaries.

As societies' diversity is becoming more complex and affecting all aspects of life, understanding how intercultural communication impacts individuals and groups' cultural identities is paramount. With the influence of critical intercultural communication and the introduction of global DEI in international education, it is also important to include the role played by historical discrimination and social justice in intercultural interactions.

Intercultural communication is often perceived and studied from a positive lens including cultural awareness, promoting empathy towards different cultural perspectives, and encouraging the integration of diverse cultural elements into individuals' identities (Browne, 2014) in opposition to division and isolation. However, teaching intercultural communication also presents challenges and misunderstandings. Challenges such as cultural dilution, identity conflicts, and the rise of power imbalances, highlighting the need for strategic approaches for learning to navigate these complexities effectively (Appadurai, 1996; Jackson, 2016). The other aspect that is often disregarded are the cultural frameworks used to teach intercultural communication such as Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory, re-actualized by Molinsky (2013) and Meyer (2014) focus on dominant white and/or national cultures leaving asides all the counter cultures that also contribute to the richness of the national cultures.

This article spans current research to inform the ways in which intercultural communication influences cultural identity in a globalized context. By exploring both theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, we aim to provide insights into how our societies can harness the positive aspects of intercultural communication while addressing its challenges to promote and expand globally inclusive

cultural exchanges while nourishing the richness of cultural diversity. Specifically, it seeks to explore the question of "How does intercultural communication impact individual cultural identity?" The examination of current practices, challenges, and opportunities, provides valuable insights and practical strategies for anchoring intercultural competence in global DEI.

Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptualizations

Intercultural communication is framed within various theoretical perspectives that explore its implications for cultural identity (individual and collective). One prominent framework is the cultural identity theory, which posits that identity is shaped through interactions with others and is fluid rather than fixed (Schildkraut, 2011). Identity negotiation theory emphasizes the dynamic process individuals undergo when reconciling multiple cultural affiliations and identities in diverse social contexts (Kim, 2001).

The study of intercultural communication and its impact on cultural identity is a critical area of inquiry in contemporary social sciences. Intercultural communication theories such as Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity or Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Critical Intercultural Communication are worth to mention here. However, it is important to share that these theories are voices representing the global north focusing on dominant, white and/or national cultures. Hofstede's theory revamped by Molinsky (2013) or Meyer (2014) is only focusing on the dominant national cultures omitting counter-cultures that are guiding the formation and consolidation of marginalized and historically oppressed groups. Bennett's model, although useful to understand and assess our individual cultural journey, also views culture through national dominant lenses encouraging the individuals surveyed to evolve through intercultural competence stages anchored in western standards.

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Milton J. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) describes the stages individuals progress through as they develop intercultural competence. The model

is divided into ethnocentric and ethnorelative stages, which reflect increasing sensitivity to cultural differences. Bennett's DMIS is widely utilized to understand how individuals' perceptions of cultural differences evolve and affect their intercultural communication skills and cultural identities (Bennett, 2013).

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, although questionable through a global DEI lens, has been foundational for understanding how cultural values of dominant cultures shape behavior and communication. Hofstede identified six dimensions that distinguish cultures:

- Power Distance: Degree to which power inequality is accepted.
- Individualism vs. Collectivism: The importance of individual versus group goals.
- Masculinity vs. Femininity: Distribution of gender roles.
- Uncertainty Avoidance: Comfort with ambiguity and uncertainty.
- Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation: Focus on future rewards versus past and present.
- Indulgence vs. Restraint: The degree to which gratification of desires is allowed.

Hofstede's framework analyzes how cultural values impact communication styles and identity formation. For example, in high power distance cultures, hierarchical communication patterns can significantly influence individuals' cultural identities (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Critical Intercultural Communication

Critical Intercultural Communication examines the power dynamics and socio-political contexts that influence intercultural interactions. This approach challenges traditional methods by emphasizing the importance of power relations, historical contexts, and social justice in the study of intercultural communication. It argues that cultural identity is fluid and constantly negotiated through interactions shaped by power and inequality. (Li, 2015)

Furthermore, critical intercultural scholars advocate for approaches that understand cultural differences while addressing issues of oppression, privilege, and marginalization.

This perspective offers a more nuanced understanding of how cultural identities are formed and reformed in intercultural contexts (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010).

Recent studies have continued to expand and refine these theoretical frameworks. For example, research by Deardorff (2016) emphasizes the importance of intercultural competence in global education, highlighting how the development of intercultural competence can lead to more effective intercultural communication and a more profound understanding of cultural identity. Additionally, Spitzberg and Changnon (2020) have explored the role of intercultural communication competence in mitigating conflict and fostering positive intercultural relationships.

In the context of Hofstede's dimensions, recent analyses by Beugelsdijk, Kostova, and Roth (2017) have revisited and critiqued the framework, suggesting modifications to better reflect contemporary cultural dynamics. Similarly, advancements in social identity theory have been discussed by Hornsey (2008), who explores the theory's application in diverse cultural settings and its implications for understanding intercultural communication.

Above mentioned theoretical frameworks such as Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Critical Intercultural Communication provide comprehensive insights into the complex interplay between intercultural communication and cultural identity from a western perspective. These frameworks underscore the dynamic nature of cultural identity, emphasizing adaptation, negotiation, and transformation in intercultural contexts. By leveraging and rethinking these theories from various lenses, educators and scholars, and practitioners can better navigate and facilitate intercultural communication, fostering a more inclusive and culturally sensitive environment.

Materials and Methods. Cultural identity encompasses the shared beliefs, values, norms, and practices that define a group or community. It is a dynamic construct shaped by historical, social, and personal factors, continually evolving through interactions within and beyond

one's cultural boundaries (Schildkraut, 2011). Individual, group, and generational traumas that are transmitted from one generation to the next are also included. Globalisation and the development of communication technology have made it easier for people from many cultural backgrounds to share ideas, information, and cultural practices. This phenomenon is known as intercultural communication. (Ting, S.T. & Chung, L.C., 2012).

Intercultural communication plays a pivotal role in shaping cultural identity amidst global diversity. Ron Darvin and Tongle Sun (2024) emphasized the significance of understanding how individuals position themselves and are positioned by others in intercultural encounters, highlighting the discursive construction of identity through various lenses such as social psychological, poststructuralist, and critical perspectives.

Effective intercultural communication is essential for sharing information, ideas, and emotions across diverse cultural backgrounds, ultimately influencing language learning processes and reshaping communication norms in a globalized world (Süleyman Gün & Yavuz, 2023). Studies stress the need to preserve cultural identity by intervening through educational strategies to mitigate cultural homogenization and prevent the loss of minority groups' cultural identity (Zhu et al., 2022).

Furthermore, exploring cultural factors in language teaching, such as Chinese courses, can enhance students' understanding and appreciation of different cultures, fostering a sense of shared humanity and community. (Zhu et al., 2022). Additionally, analyzing the representation of cultural identity in intercultural communication among political science students underscores the dominance of cultural identity over ethnocentric views, showcasing the influence of stereotypes and biases in intercultural interactions (Kotova et al., 2024).

Research has shown that the positive impact of intercultural communication on cultural identity. Kraftl (2013) and Chen & Starosta, (2000) discussed cultural awareness and appreciation. Kraftl (2013) claimed that people are exposed to a variety of cultural viewpoints

through intercultural communication, which develops empathy and compassion for other lifestyles. Intercultural communication exposes individuals to diverse cultural perspectives, fostering empathy and understanding towards different ways of life. According to Chen & Starosta (2000) Such exposure can foster respect for the cultures of others while also enhancing people's appreciation of their own cultural history.

The concept of identity enrichment through hybridity was examined by Browne (2014). According to him, crosscultural interactions arise when cultural components come into contact and transform into new hybrid identities with a variety of influences. In addition to enhancing and broadening people's cultural awareness, cultural hybridity fortifies their sense of self. Deardorff (2016) stated that navigating cultural differences in a sensitive and respectful way can also result in effective intercultural interactions and communication and that such ability supports the understanding of multicultural environments mitigating cultural divides.

Appadurai (1996), on the other hand, investigated cultural dilution and loss through intercultural communication. He argued that globalization and ubiquitous intercultural communication can potentially lead to the dilution or loss of traditional cultural practices and languages. A concern he directed to younger generations who may prefer the adoption of dominant cultural norms over the ones of their communities.

Another concern is identity negotiation and conflict. Intercultural communication can lead to identity conflicts. Indeed, Jackson (2016) pointed out that navigating multiple cultural environments or experiencing a variety of cultural expectations can challenge their sense of self. Such conflicts highlight the complex nature of cultural identity formation in diverse social and cultural contexts.

Hall (1990) explored power dynamics and marginalization. He indicated that unbalanced power relations in intercultural interactions can lead to the marginalization of minority cultures reinforcing dominant cultural norms and potentially impoverishing cultural diversity

and limiting opportunities for equitable cultural exchange.

To effectively navigate and mitigate the challenges of intercultural communication on cultural identity, several strategies can be employed, drawing upon insights from recent research and scholarly literature.

First, promoting cultural understanding and sensitivity are crucial. By enhancing individuals' awareness of cultural differences and encouraging an open and empathetic approach towards diverse perspectives, can result in the creation of environments where cultural identities are respected and valued (Deardorff, 2006). Training programs and workshops that emphasize cultural awareness and effective communication strategies can equip individuals with the skills needed to navigate intercultural interactions sensitively and respectfully (Chaudhary, 2022).

Secondly, fostering inclusive practices and policies is also important to establish equitable power between cultures, consequently reducing the risk of cultural marginalization. Implementing inclusive policies that focus on cultural diversity within organizations and communities encourages a sense of belonging among individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Jackson, 2016). Creating platforms for diverse voices to be heard and actively involving marginalized groups in decision-making processes is another tools to empower individuals to express their cultural identities authentically while promoting equitable cultural exchange. (Chaudhary, 2022).

Lastly, promoting intergroup contact and collaboration can facilitate mutual understanding and bridge cultural divides. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) research indicates that creating opportunities for groups to engage in positive interactions can reduce prejudice and promote intercultural harmony. They added that Encouraging cross-cultural collaborative projects with shared goals between diverse communities can foster meaningful relationships. Such initiatives not only enhance cultural understanding but also contribute to the preservation and enrichment of cultural identities in a globalized world.

By implementing these strategies, societies can proactively address the challenges of intercultural communication on cultural identity, creating inclusive environments where diversity is celebrated, and cultural heritage is preserved.

Intercultural Communication in the Context of Globalization in Kazakhstan

Globalization has had a deep impact on shaping intercultural communication around the world, and Kazakhstan is no exception. As a country situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Kazakhstan has experienced increasing global interactions while undergoing profound changes in its social, economic, and cultural landscapes. With a population comprising ethnic Kazakhs, Russians, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, and various other groups, Kazakhstan has long been a center of intercultural exchanges. The Soviet era further shaped its cultural dynamics by promoting Russian language and culture, while post-independence efforts have emphasized the revival of Kazakh language and traditions (K. Dzhunushaliev, 2019).

Economic development, media and technological advancement, and educational mobility have intensified cultural exchanges impacting intercultural communication in Kazakhstan.

M. Kenzhebekov and A. Mukhambetkaliyeva (2021) examined Kazakhstan's economic development highlighting that the influx of multinational corporations and foreign investments has led to increased interaction between Kazakhs and people from various cultural backgrounds. The resulting opportunities for cross-cultural business communication and collaboration also introduced challenges in managing cultural differences (Kenzhebekov M. & Mukhambetkaliyeva A., 2021).

Abdykarimova (2020) noticed that the proliferation of digital media and communication technologies. A growth that facilitated global communication, allowing Kazakhs to engage with other cultures and ideas more intuitively while posing the risk of cultural homogenization and the erosion of local traditions.

Mukhametova (2018) explore students mobility underscoring, the growth of student exchange between Kazakhstan and the rest of

the world and the crucial role of educational institutions in fostering intercultural understanding.

The listed intercultural benefits need to be evaluated along with the multifaceted intercultural communication challenges in Kazakhstan. Despite the country’s official Kazakh and Russian bilingualism, language differences can still create obstacles in business and educational settings (Omarova, 2017). Cultural norms and practices are also at the heart of misunderstandings and conflicts, reinforcing the need for individuals and organizations to develop their cultural understanding (Nazarbaev, 2019). Moreover, globalization’s influence on cultural exchange raises concerns about preserving Kazakh cultural identity and heritage (Aytzhanova, 2022). The national challenge is to accommodate global influences while preserving and nurturing local traditions.

Effective intercultural communication can be achieved through several strategies. First, implementing cultural training programs for individuals and organizations is crucial, as these programs enhance intercultural competence and improve communication across cultures (Kassenova, 2021). Second, encouraging multilingualism and providing language training are essential for bridging communication gaps and facilitating smoother interactions (Tulegenova, 2019). Third, promoting cultural awareness through initiatives that foster appreciation of diverse cultures further contributes to creating a more inclusive and harmonious intercultural environment (Samatov, 2020). These combined approaches collectively support the navigation and improvement of cross-cultural exchanges.

Globalization intensifying intercultural communication in Kazakhstan, offers both

opportunities and challenges. To benefit from these intercultural interactions and enhance Kazakhstan’s global engagement while leveraging its diverse heritage, it is crucial to address language barriers, develop cultural sensitivity, and preserve cultural identity. Solutions could be a greater focus on education and training intercultural awareness.

This study examines how intercultural communication impacts cultural identity. The survey population involved forty-four master’s students from non-linguistic majors. A central theme of this study is the effect of cultural identity within a globalized environment, as well as the encouragement and enhancement of inclusive cultural exchanges that enrich cultural diversity.

The primary tool for data collection in this research was a survey designed for the purpose of this research. This survey features Likert-scale questions with six response options (ranging from 1 to 6), (Table 1). Additionally, we included three open-ended questions: 1) What measures do you think can help improve intercultural communication and global diversity management? 2) Do you feel that intercultural communication enriches your cultural identity? 3) What measures do you think can help improve intercultural communication and global diversity management? We administered this survey to master’s students to assess whether existing practices, challenges, and opportunities can yield valuable insights and practical strategies for promoting intercultural competence within a diverse global context. The findings from the survey will allow researchers to investigate whether cultural interactions are increasing and how they can be understood as intercultural communication.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of the survey*

Questions	# of responses	Mean	Min	Max	Std. Deviation
1. How often do you interact with people from other cultures in your daily life?	43	1.84	0	4	1.06
2. To what extent does intercultural communication affect our cultural identity?	43	1.57	0	3	0.82
3. Do you feel that intercultural communication enriches your cultural identity?	44	2.15	0	4	1.13

4. What aspects of your cultural identity do you think have changed due to cross-cultural communication?	44	1.00	0	2	0.75
5. In your opinion, what is the importance of preserving cultural identity in the context of global diversity?	44	1.31	0	2	0.52
6. Have you ever encountered difficulties in cross-cultural communication? If so, what were the difficulties?	44	1.50	0	3	0.91
7. What measures do you think can help improve intercultural communication and global diversity management?	44	1.00	0	2	0.75
8. What is your experience in participating in intercultural projects or even events?	44	2.03	0	3	0.83
9. How would you rate your willingness to work in a multinational team?	44	1.89	0	3	0.83

Discussion. The data collected suggest that many participants experience significant difficulties in navigating interactions across different cultures. By addressing these issues, we aim to enhance intercultural communication skills, which are essential for fostering understanding and collaboration in a diverse global environment. Implementing these recommendations could lead to improved outcomes in both personal and professional contexts, ultimately enriching the experiences of individuals engaging in cross-cultural exchanges.

Consequently, this study provides recommendations for engaging with people from different cultures, particularly for those who do so infrequently in their daily lives, as well as for those who may have a moderate willingness to collaborate in multinational teams. (Zhu et al., 2022). These recommendations are proposed in response to the challenges encountered in cross-cultural communication, as indicated by the mean score of 1.50 and a standard deviation of 0.91. Firstly, establishing an intercultural communication centre is a crucial step toward the university's goals of internationalization and enhancing student experiences (Kurmanayeva & Tazhitova, 2024). This centre can play a significant role in fostering understanding and collaboration among various cultural groups. By emphasizing education, research, and community involvement, the centre can contribute to creating a more inclusive society that appreciates and celebrates cultural diversity.

Secondly, teachers should create a positive atmosphere for teaching to effectively integrate the cultural identity of the material with the

cultural identity of the students to improve the educational objectives (Zhu, et al., 2022).

Thirdly, establishing assessment criteria for teaching intercultural communication is essential, as understanding one's own culture and that of the "other," along with cultural awareness, significantly affects the effectiveness of intercultural communication and fosters intercultural competence (Kotova et al., 2024). These criteria offer several advantages. Clearly, effective assessment enhances master's students' learning and aids their comprehension of the course's key objectives. Furthermore, these criteria serve as the framework through which we, as educators, evaluate students' progress. Effective assessment not only enhances student learning but also deepens their understanding of the fundamental goals of Intercultural Communication courses. Finally, these assessment criteria provide a structured approach for us as teachers to measure student learning outcomes effectively.

Conclusion. The findings of this study highlight the pressing need to address the challenges faced in cross-cultural communication. The significant difficulties reported by participants underscore the importance of enhancing intercultural skills to facilitate better understanding and collaboration in our increasingly diverse global environment. By implementing the proposed recommendations, we can create an educational framework that supports individuals in navigating cultural interactions more effectively. Establishing an intercultural communication centre is a pivotal step in this endeavor, aligning with

the university's internationalization objectives while enriching the student experience. This centre can serve as a hub for education, research, and community engagement, fostering a culture that values and celebrates diversity. Moreover, creating a positive learning atmosphere is crucial for integrating cultural identities into the curriculum. This approach not only enhances the educational objectives but also helps students feel more connected and engaged with the material.

Finally, the development of clear assessment criteria for teaching intercultural communication is essential. These criteria will not only aid in evaluating student progress but will also deepen their understanding of the course objectives and improve overall learning outcomes. By focusing on these areas, we can train a generation of students who are well-equipped to thrive in multicultural settings, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and harmonious society. However, the present study is limited in

several ways. The sample was limited to only one institution, and consequently, the results may not be generalizable to other institutions. Nonetheless, these findings are valuable for the institution itself, as they can help in maintaining, developing, or creating intercultural programs for students. Additionally, as the study relied on self-reported answers from participants, there are inherent biases that could have affected the results. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. The findings of this study reveal that while intercultural communication is recognized as an important aspect of cultural identity, many students perceive it as having a limited impact on their own cultural experiences. The data highlight areas for potential development, particularly in enhancing the understanding and skills necessary for effective intercultural communication. Further research may explore specific challenges and effective strategies to foster deeper engagement in this critical area.

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