

A window to the future of intercultural competence in tertiary education: A narrative literature review

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ABSTRACT

The influence of globalization on education, in particular higher education, has brought to the fore constructs which were kept in the background for a long time. One of such constructs is intercultural competence (IC), which has a wide range of applications for both incoming international students and the admin and teaching staff of tertiary education in the host country. There have been considerable attempts to address the growing demand for IC development in the field, but a wide gap is still felt in the literature due to the complexity of the construct. To move towards a substantial contribution to filling the gap, the present paper examined the status of IC literature and suggested an efficient approach aligned with its existing status. Besides the applicable approach to different contexts, this paper reviewed IC development programs in tertiary education and provided insight into promoting the efficiency and sustainability of their outcomes. It also highlighted the effects of IC on the three elements of teaching and learning: academic, affective, and social outcomes in tertiary education.

1. Introduction

The process of globalisation has underscored internationalisation in a wide range of areas, including education. Attempts to satisfy the growing demand of internationalization directed attention to intercultural competence (IC) as one of the core ingredients of this process, thereby suggesting IC as a research area of paramount importance in the past couple of decades. As a consequence, a great deal of research has been conducted to contribute to the growth of this area of internationalisation.

This paper aims to provide a review of the literature pertaining to IC in tertiary education. Unlike many constructs that remain relatively stable for a period of time after their initial definitions, constituent components and measurement tools have been established, IC is a construct that has undergone continual changes in these areas over the past two decades due, most probably, to its dynamic nature. Like culture, which is an integral component of IC, expert opinion on IC is continually changing (Deardorff, 2006), leading to an array of largely inconsistent definitions, constituents and assessment tools.

As the Council of Europe (2014) claims, individuals can never reach complete IC, but can enrich it by continuing to experience different types of intercultural encounters. IC literature implies that this construct is very much on an evolutionary path with a yet-to-be-seen destination, where a unanimously agreed definition, constituent components and measurement tools could be advanced. However, existing inconsistencies by no means downplay the substantial role played by IC in the internationalization of

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education since the beginning of the 21st century. They substantially contribute to our contextualization of IC for a better understanding of this construct and a more effective application of it across disciplines.

The growth in the number of international students as a result of the internationalization of education has brought one of the challenges involved with this phenomenon to the fore; that of the adjustment process and its associated adverse consequences on international students, particularly during their first year. While the transition might be exciting for some (Andrade, 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), it can be challenging for many (Brunsting et al., 2018), leading to negative outcomes such as depression, stress and low academic performance (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Wang et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2007).

Educators maintain that international students in tertiary education are insufficiently adjusted to the academic and social standards of their host country (Rienties et al., 2011). It is important to focus on the mechanisms that underlie the academic and social integration of international students to assess their performance in the university context (Morrison et al., 2005). Given the call for further understanding of the cultural and academic transition of international students (Sam & Berry, 2010), and the accelerated pace of internationalization of education, a profound understanding of the factors associated with their adaptation to the host country is an essential step.

As an area largely associated with international students and the internationalization of education, IC has witnessed an extended body of literature on student preparation. The development of IC by tertiary-level students, which is closely linked to the internationalization of tertiary education, "is considered crucial for changing prejudiced attitudes, preparing students to live in a global world and empowering them professionally" (Pinto, 2018, p. 1) and maximizing their university experience (Andrade, 2006). The benefits of IC have become so obvious that it is recommended that all students in tertiary education institutions, including those not involved in exchange programs or study abroad programs, be assessed in terms of their IC (Griffith et al., 2016).

While the extensive and thorough literature on IC acknowledges its pivotal role in facilitating adjustment and interaction for international students, its relationship with the three very strong components of teaching and learning namely, academic, social and emotional (Zins et al., 2007; Durlak et al., 2011) needs detailed review to provide a clearer picture of the interactions between these variables and address the call made by Brunsting et al. (2018) who find it "necessary for researchers to further delineate the relationships among variables relevant to international student adjustment" (p. 1489).

This literature review aims to examine the status of IC literature and the three outcomes pertaining to the internationalization of tertiary education with the intention of adding a potential pathway to the exiting pathways for future research.

The paper is structured as follows. The following section provides a review of IC conceptualizations and presents the history and definitions of IC. IC components and a number of prominent IC models are discussed in the subsequent section, followed by a discussion of the role of IC in pedagogy. The penultimate section reviews the relationship between IC and academic, affective and social outcomes in education, and the paper concludes by providing a brief summary of trends and key issues in IC development.

2. Conceptualizations of IC

This section provides a brief history of IC and its definitions in the existing literature.

2.1. History and definitions of IC

The term IC can be traced back to the 1930s (Portera, 2014), with the first attempts of employing it being used to train agents in the spheres of education, business and government, but models and assessment tools for this purpose were rather lacking (Deardorff, 2009). Initial efforts indicated that although *adaptability* was the core concept underlying IC, measuring IC comprehensively required the adoption of a multidimensional approach (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Since the 1990s, some progress has been made in IC measurement based on IC conceptual models (e.g., Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2001; Milhouse, 1993; Precht & Lund, 2007; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). While mainly focusing on the assessment of knowledge and skills (Bradford et al., 2000), these studies, to a large extent, ignored the motivational and affective components that were identified in several other models (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

The complexity of the construct resulted in a plethora of definitions, each from a different perspective. This diversity has led to confusion, which has been compounded by the lack of cross-referencing among the different disciplines studying IC (Arasaratnam, 2014; 2017). As a result of these diverse perspectives, diverse terms are used interchangeably in the study of IC (Cheng, 2012). Fantini (2009) created a long list of terms, with the most commonly used including cross-cultural awareness, multiculturalism, intercultural sensitivity, global competitive intelligence, cross-cultural adaptation, global competence, cross-cultural communication, effective intergroup communication, communicative competence, and multicultural competence.

A number of studies make a distinction between some of these terms. For example, IC is considered as a component of intercultural communication competence (Cheng, 2012) or global competence (Olson & Kroeger, 2001). In a similar vein, Portera (2014) treats multicultural competence and IC as two different constructs with a large degree of overlap, while Lantz-Deaton and Golubeva (2020) make a distinction between IC and cross-cultural competence by associating the former with interactions between people from different cultures and the latter with the comparison and contrast between cultures. For consistency, IC will be adopted in this study.

To arrive at the most appropriate definition, the term IC has been dissected by experts (Deardorff, 2004; Salisbury et al., 2013). It is a complex concept which is not well-understood, primarily because the term *culture* is a dynamic concept (Wahyudi, 2016) and has not been well defined (Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020). *Inter* is defined as meaning *between* in many frequently used dictionaries, such as Longman Advanced American Dictionary (2000). By the middle of the 20th century, a minimum of 160 different definitions for culture had been proposed (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952), and the number of definitions has continued to increase since then (Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020). Among the numerous definitions, Matsumoto's (1996) which embraces many of the elements included in other

definitions seems to be the most comprehensive definition. It is defined as “the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next” (p. 16). Different cultures share common elements of IC, such as relationship-building, listening, self-awareness, respect, perspective taking, adaptation and cultural humility (Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff, 2023; UNESCO, 2013).

IC literature reveals several inconsistent attempts in the definition of competence, which can account for one of the reasons there are divergent pathways in the study of IC. Competence is a body of knowledge used by a person (Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2009). Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) state that competence in the literature refers to “a set of abilities or skills” on some occasions and “subjective evaluative impressions” on other (p. 6). While finding the first approach to be the most common, they argue that skills and behaviors can be perceived differently in different contexts by different people. In other words, some behaviors might be considered as appropriate in one context but inappropriate in another, or what might be appropriate to one perceiver may not be so to another. Therefore, they disagree that a particular ability or skill can be “universally competent” (p. 6).

Klemp (1979) defines competence based on a set of skills, motives, self-concept, traits and behaviors that should be measured holistically, rather than separately as is generally the case. This aligns with Pottinger's (1979) thinking that skills and traits constitute general competence. The treatment of competence from a holistic perspective appears to be a working remedy for the existing disputes in IC literature.

Holistically, competence consists of behavioral, cognitive, social and emotional elements, but what is important is not what an individual has learnt, but how what has been learnt can be applied (Egekvist et al., 2016; Illeris, 2014). In other words, the ability of an individual to successfully handle unknown, new and unfamiliar situations and contexts demonstrates the level of his/her competence (Illeris, 2014). Overviews of the word ‘competence’ involve reflection on terms such as awareness, empathy, knowledge and communication (Deardorff, 2006; Portera, 2014; Rathje, 2007; Solhaug & Kristensen, 2020).

Deardorff (2006) refers to IC “as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p. 247). This definition appears to focus primarily on the linguistic dimension of IC and is more applicable to contexts such as international companies. One shortcoming of Deardorff’s definition lies in the lack of specification of the levels of IC, which makes it difficult to quantitatively evaluate the actual learning and developmental processes underlying it (Gregersen-Hermans, 2015).

Fantini (2009, p. 458) extends this definition, redefining IC “as complex abilities that are required to perform *effectively* and *appropriately* when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself”, in which *effective* refers to an outsider’s view of the performance in the host culture and language, while *appropriate* refers to how the performance is viewed by the native population. This definition seems to be more precise than Deardorff’s definition and therefore more applicable to educational contexts. It includes two factors, linguistic and cultural, which seem to apply to international students. Tertiary education involves many challenges for international students, particularly during their first year, arising primarily from interacting with people who differ culturally and linguistically from themselves (Deardorff, 2006). Fantini’s definition includes the two sources of these challenges, but it is still narrow in terms of orientation.

Spitzberg and Changnon define IC as “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (2009, p.7). This definition meets the requirements for the present review. Firstly, it adopts a holistic approach to the concept of IC and involves multiple elements. In other words, it involves the individual and the context. The second reason for the suitability of this definition is the one-to-one correspondence between the orientations which it incorporates, and the outcomes being reviewed in this paper. *Affective, cognitive and behavioral* factors (Kim, 1991) are equivalent to feelings, knowledge and skills in Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy (Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020), which produce emotional, academic and social outcomes.

The first dispute in IC literature lies in the definition of this construct, as scholars tend to treat it as a ‘one size fits all’ construct. In other words, they define IC in such a way that the definition is applicable to different fields and in different contexts. There is a strong tendency to consider IC as a general construct, thereby encouraging its broad measurement and the generalization of findings in different fields. IC is not yet at the stage to provide a definition that is precisely aligned with the needs of each discipline, but this construct is not as vague as it used to be. IC literature is currently richer and more extensive to provide one with insights into what it is in general. Deardorff (2017; 2020) suggests adopting more than one definition when they can be complementary or developing a more holistic definition. She even pioneers a summary of the existing definitions in the literature and broadly defines intercultural competencies as “the competences (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) needed to *improve human interactions across difference, whether within a society (difference due to age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation, ethnicity, and so on) or across borders*” (p. 70). Definitions can be adopted in terms of relative applicability, as is the case with the models detailed in the next section.

A lack of consensus on the terminology associated with IC can, at times, disrupt research (Fantini, 2009), because of general definitions and difficulties in specifying the components that constitute IC (Deardorff, 2006; Cheng, 2012). Diversity in the identified components of IC has led to the development of different models which will be dealt with in the following section,

3. IC Components and models

The growing interest in IC over the past few decades has not only failed to provide a clear understanding of IC or adequately contribute to solving methodological issues (Van de Vijver & Leung, 2009), but has also created a diverse range of definitions, models and approaches (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2004; Mol et al., 2005), which might be the reason why the literature seems “to be murky in terms of the ICC construct” (Griffith et al., 2016, p. 1). For instance, while some definitions treat IC as a skill, others treat it as a trait, and still others as a performance outcome (Deardorff, 2006).

Diverse models and approaches to the direct conceptualisations, frameworks, measurements and studies of IC have been developed, with many commonalities at model and theory levels and contrasts at component level (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). The contrasting components might be attributable to the context and the field in which IC is investigated, which can be corroborated by Deardorff's (2006) view that the intercultural knowledge and skills that are required differ across disciplines.

Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) finds *effectiveness* and *appropriateness* to be the most commonly used components in IC literature, with the former referring to one's ability to reach goals and the latter referring to doing so in an acceptable manner. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) identify three concepts, *assimilation*, *adjustment* and *adaptation*, which most IC studies attempt to address. *Assimilation* refers to the degree to which an individual integrates with the host culture, but the question as to whether *assimilation* involves cognitive or attitudinal shift is as yet unanswered. *Adjustment* involves a person's adaptation to the new environment without any psychological consequences like stress. They identify *adaptation* at two levels: micro-level and macro-level. The former involves "the interdependence and alteration of behavior in episodes of interaction" (p. 6) where interactants are influenced by each other's actions in the context. Macro-level adaptation is where *assimilation* and *adjustment* overlap; the communicator is fully able to adapt himself/herself to the host culture. Stier (2003) identifies self-management, empathy, good communication skills and self-awareness as the key components of IC.

Wiseman et al. (1989) view IC as a multidimensional construct constituted mainly of an attitude towards the other culture and knowledge of the host culture. Collier (1989) identified cross-cultural attitudes, cultural identity, ethnography of speaking and behavioral skills in the study of IC. The other components associated with IC in the literature are mindfulness (Gudykunst, 1995), cognitive complexity (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003), and humility (Alexander et al., 2014). The investigation of how these components interact with one another adds further diversity to the various models and theories of IC, thereby adding to innovative systems for investigating them in the literature.

In an innovative, exploratory approach to identifying components contributing to IC, Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) introduced five variables in a new model: motivation, experience, empathy, listening or what Cegala (1981) called interaction involvement and attitude towards other cultures. This approach, which is based on the descriptions of interculturally competent communicators by participants from a wide range of countries and used semantic network analysis (Rice & Danowski, 1993), reduces the risks of influences of any kind of cultural bias and contributes to the development of an IC instrument that can be conceptually translated into different cultures (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005).

The introduction of this culture-general model, later named the Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (IMICC) (Arasaratnam et al., 2010a), was followed by two consecutive empirical and quantitative studies by Arasaratnam (2003; 2004; 2006). The model underwent another test later by Arasaratnam et al. (2010a) using structural equation modelling (SEM) in a different multicultural context, Australia, with participants from multiple cultural perspectives.

The regression analyses in the first follow-up study (Arasaratnam, 2003; 2004) revealed a positive relationship between empathy and attitude towards other cultures. The relationship between prior experience to intercultural experience and attitude towards other cultures was found to be positive, but the result showed a negative relationship between empathy and listening. Motivation and attitude towards others were found to be positively related to listening, just like the relationship between attitude towards others and motivation. The relationship between listening and ICC (we use Arasaratnam's originally used term) was not significantly related, but in contrast, a positive relationship was found between ICC and motivation.

Arasaratnam (2003) listed five limitations to this study and later conducted another study (Arasaratnam, 2006) to address them and analysed the model further. Although most of the hypotheses were proved in the initial test, it suffered some measurement issues, such as a low reliability of empathy instrument and a lack of direct relationship between ICC and empathy. Therefore, the need for a second test arose. One of the discrepancies between the findings of the two studies was revealed to be the minimal relationship between listening and empathy, which was strongly positive in the initial study. Arasaratnam attributes this discrepancy to the instrument employed to measure listening, which used only conversation attention, one of the subscales of interaction involvement measure used in the first study.

The second discrepancy between the two tests of the model was the relationship between ICC and listening. The two variables were not significantly related in the first test, but the second test revealed a strong relationship between them, which is again attributed to the different listening subscale used in the second test. The second test also revealed a direct relationship between ICC and empathy, which was investigated in this test only. The outcome of the path analyses of the two studies depicted experience and empathy as exogenous variables and ICC as the endogenous variable with motivation, listening and positive attitude towards culturally different others as mediating variables.

The third test, the SEM analysis of IMICC, mainly supported the predicted pathways (Arasaratnam et al., 2010a), but contrary to the results of the previous model, experience was depicted as an endogenous model. They highlighted three pathways, which they reported to have insightful theoretical implications. The first two, also consistent with the findings in the previous models, are 1) empathy proceeding to motivation and motivation leading to ICC, 2) empathy leading to motivation that proceeds to listening, which in turn proceeds to ICC. The path between global attitude and ICC contrasted with the proposed model. In other words, empathy leads to global attitude, then leads to ICC.

In a study serving as an alternative to the model introduced by Arasaratnam et al. (2010a), Arasaratnam et al. (2010b) replaced experience with sensation seeking in the context of IMICC and reported that sensation seeking plays a key role in ICC, but not as a direct contributor. The results showed a direct positive relationship between the new variable and attitude toward people of other cultures. A direct positive relationship was also reported between sensation seeking and empathy in the same study. The relationship between interaction involvement and sensation seeking was found to be positively direct, contrary to their prediction. The results revealed that sensation seeking, and ICC are positively related only when mediating variables exist between them. Arasaratnam and Banerjee (2009) found a similar result but with positive attitude toward other cultures and motivation as their mediating variables.

Morgan and Arasaratnam (2003) found a positive relationship between high sensation seekers and positive attitudes toward making intercultural friends. The same result was found with international students (Arasaratnam, 2005). Nadeem et al.'s (2018) research revealed a positive influence of sensation seeking and empathy on motivation to engage in intercultural communication. Attitude toward other cultures and sensation seeking have been revealed to directly influence ICC (Nadeem et al., 2020).

The IMICC has also undergone another test where ethnocentrism was inserted for the analysis of its effect on other variables in the model (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2007). Besides the American and Australian cultures, IMMIC has also been investigated in the Asian context (Nadeem et al., 2017; Nadeem et al., 2018; Nadeem et al., 2020). In a more recent study in the same context, which investigated the direct effect of sensation seeking, ethnocentrism and empathy on ICC in the presence of religiosity as a mediator and motivation to engage in intercultural communication and empathy, Nadeem (2022) found that ICC is directly influenced by sensation seeking, empathy and attitude toward other cultures. The mediating effect of attitude toward other cultures and the moderating effect of religiosity were empirically justified in this study.

Lustig and Koester (2006) introduce four approaches to the study of IC: culture-specific, perceptual, behavioral and trait. The culture-specific approach concentrates on unique cultural rules and cultural relationships. The perceptual approach concentrates on the ability to cope with stressful conditions. The behavioral approach refers to interpersonal competencies such as tolerance of ambiguity and empathy, and the trait approach relies on personal characteristics which can contribute to effective cross-cultural communication. These approaches appear to be sufficiently comprehensive and therefore can be applied to the study of IC in any field.

By introducing two approaches, namely topical and sequential, for the review of any theoretical achievement, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) present a systematic typology for the classification and review of IC models (see Table 1). In the topical approach, the focus is on common concepts across the models, while in the sequential approach, each model is presented as a unique model. These approaches also confirm that models in one category might overlap with those in other categories. Some relevant prominent models listed in Table 1 and a recent model will be discussed below.

3.1. Intercultural Competence Model

Developed by Byram et al. (2001), the Intercultural Competence Model is categorised as a coordination model but is associated primarily with the concept of identity within and across cultures (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Developed under the influence of cross-cultural communication (Gudykunst et al. (1991)) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), it distinguishes between

Table 1
Spitzberg and Changnon's systematic typology of IC models.

Model type	Models/Theories
Compositional (focus on components without any attempt being made to specify relations between them)	• Howard Hamilton et al. (1998) Model • Ting-Toomey and Kurogi's (1998) Model • Pyramid Model (Deardorff, 2006) • Global Competencies Model (Hunter et al., 2006)
Co-ordinational (focus on understanding the interaction of components to achieve intercultural understanding)	• Intercultural Interlocutor Competence Model (Fantini, 1995) • Intercultural Competence Model (Byram et al., 2001) • Coherence-Cohesion Model of Intercultural Competence (Rathje, 2007) • Intercultural Competence Model for Strategic Resource Management (Kupka, 2008)
Developmental (focus on the time dimension and progression of competency through stages of maturity)	• U-Curve Model of Intercultural Adjustment (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1962) • Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennet, 1986) • Intercultural Maturity Model (King and Baxter Magolda (2005))
Adaptational (focus on the evolution of competence through interaction; combining the developmental elements of previous models in an interactional fashion (Griffith et al., 2016))	• Intercultural Communicative Competence Model (Kim, 1988) • Intercultural Communicative Accommodation Model (Gallois et al., 1988) • Attitude Acculturation Model (Berry et al., 1989) • Relative Acculturation Extended Model (Navas et al., 2007)
Causal Path (focus on the linear interaction between downstream and upstream variables)	• Relational Model of Intercultural Competence (Imahori & Lanigan, 1989) • Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Model of Intercultural Competence (Hammer et al., 1998) • Multilevel Process Change Model of Intercultural Competence (Ting-Toomey, 1999) • Intercultural Communication Model of Relationship Quality (Griffith & Harvey, 2000) • Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence

Adapted from Spitzberg and Changnon (2009)

bicultural and intercultural speakers, in which the former refers to speakers who, due to their experience in both cultures, have the requisite skills, motivation and knowledge to accelerate interactional competence, but identity conflict is still involved. The conflict arises from “tensions between the person’s values and identity in one culture vis-à-vis the other culture” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p.18). The interactant gets stuck between the values of both cultures, thereby harming his/her own identity. By contrast, the intercultural speaker adopts a mediatory role between cultures with a flexible individual identity that can adapt his/her performance to different cultures. Contrary to many other IC models, significant emphasis is placed on language in this model (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Byram, 2014).

3.2. Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Developed by Bennett (1986), this model outlines six stages (see Fig. 1) through which an individual linearly progresses, from an ethnocentric view of other cultures (the first three stages) to an ethnorelative view (the second three stages) (Arasaratnam, 2017), also known as moving ‘from a monocultural worldview to a multicultural worldview’ (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). The assumption underlying this model is that one grows more interculturally competent as one accumulates more experiences of cultural differences, and these differences grow more sophisticated and complex (Hammer et al., 2003).

The first stage of ethnocentrism is *denial*, in which the person believes his own culture is the legitimate one. *Defence*, as the second stage, is considered as “a binary view of one’s culture versus other cultures” (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017, p. 13). *Defence reversal* occurs when the new culture supersedes one’s own culture, and *minimization* is the stage at which other cultures are viewed from the existing framework of one’s own culture. This involves thinking more universalistically and marks the transition to ethnorelative stages: *acceptance*, *adaptation* and *integration* (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). *Acceptance* occurs when one’s own culture is recognized as one of the world’s many cultures. As a result of continuous interaction with different aspects of the new culture, the individual’s internal system undergoes qualitative and quantitative changes by integrating concepts, attitudes and actions which are culturally accepted, thereby enabling the individual to live with others (Kim, 2001). Once *acceptance* occurs, the interactant tries to adapt his/her behaviors to the expectations of the new culture (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017) and follows the standards of appropriateness demanded by that culture (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). As a final stage, *integration* occurs when the interactant integrates the cultural worldviews of others into his/her own identity.

In situations where IC is required, *integration* is not necessarily considered to be better than *adaptation*. It simply characterizes groups of non-dominant cultures (Hammer et al., 2003). At this stage, individuals are often regarded as multicultural by themselves and others (Bennett, 1993; Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020). Some studies in the literature suggest that *integration* should not be treated as a component of the developmental continuum, but as a separate construct belonging to the development of cultural identity (Hammer, 2011; Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020). Bennett (1993) believes that, regardless of whether it is treated as part of the DMIS, *adaptation* seems to be the main requirement for IC.

What the DMIS appears to suggest is that there is a correlation between one’s ability to understand cultural differences and the development of their IC. This model is considered to be the most suitable for examining the process involved in cross-cultural interaction (Hightower, 2016). The main application of this model is in IC training (Altschuler et al., 2003) and its assessment (Hammer et al., 2003). It can help the education sector to establish whether the intercultural sensitivity status of learners can discriminate between students according to their very different needs (Paige & Goode, 2009). Although applicable to the education sector, this continuum-based model appears to be too linearly formulated and involves some degree of overgeneralization in the stages of intercultural development. A case in point is Lantz-Deaton’s (2017) finding that, seven months after commencing university, many students demonstrated regression to an earlier stage, meaning that there was no linear progression in the development of their IC. One possible reason for this finding could be their negative experiences of the cultural differences they encountered.

3.3. The process model of intercultural competence

The Process Model of Intercultural Competence was developed by Deardorff (2006) in a grounded-theory approach, whereby she adopted a Delphi model to arrive at a consensus on the definitions, components and evaluation strategies of IC that had been proposed by intercultural experts. In keeping with Deardorff’s (2004) Pyramid Model, this model consists of *knowledge*, *attitudes*, *skills*, and *internal and external desired outcomes* as its components, but it also focuses on movement between the various components, leading to a process whereby an individual acquires IC (see Fig. 2). The model “envision[s] a simultaneous interactional process that feeds back into itself at almost all levels” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 32). It illustrates how an individual reaches the interpersonal level starting from the personal level. As in the Pyramid Model, it is possible to move directly from *attitudes* or *knowledge* and *skills* to *external*

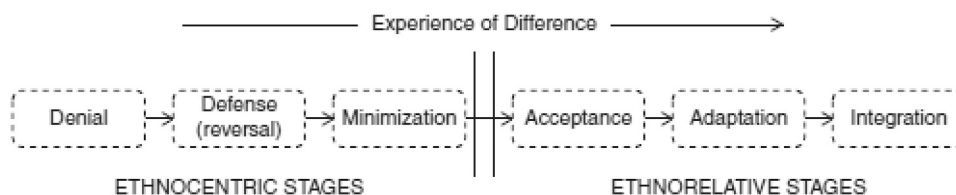


Fig. 1. Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986, p. 182).

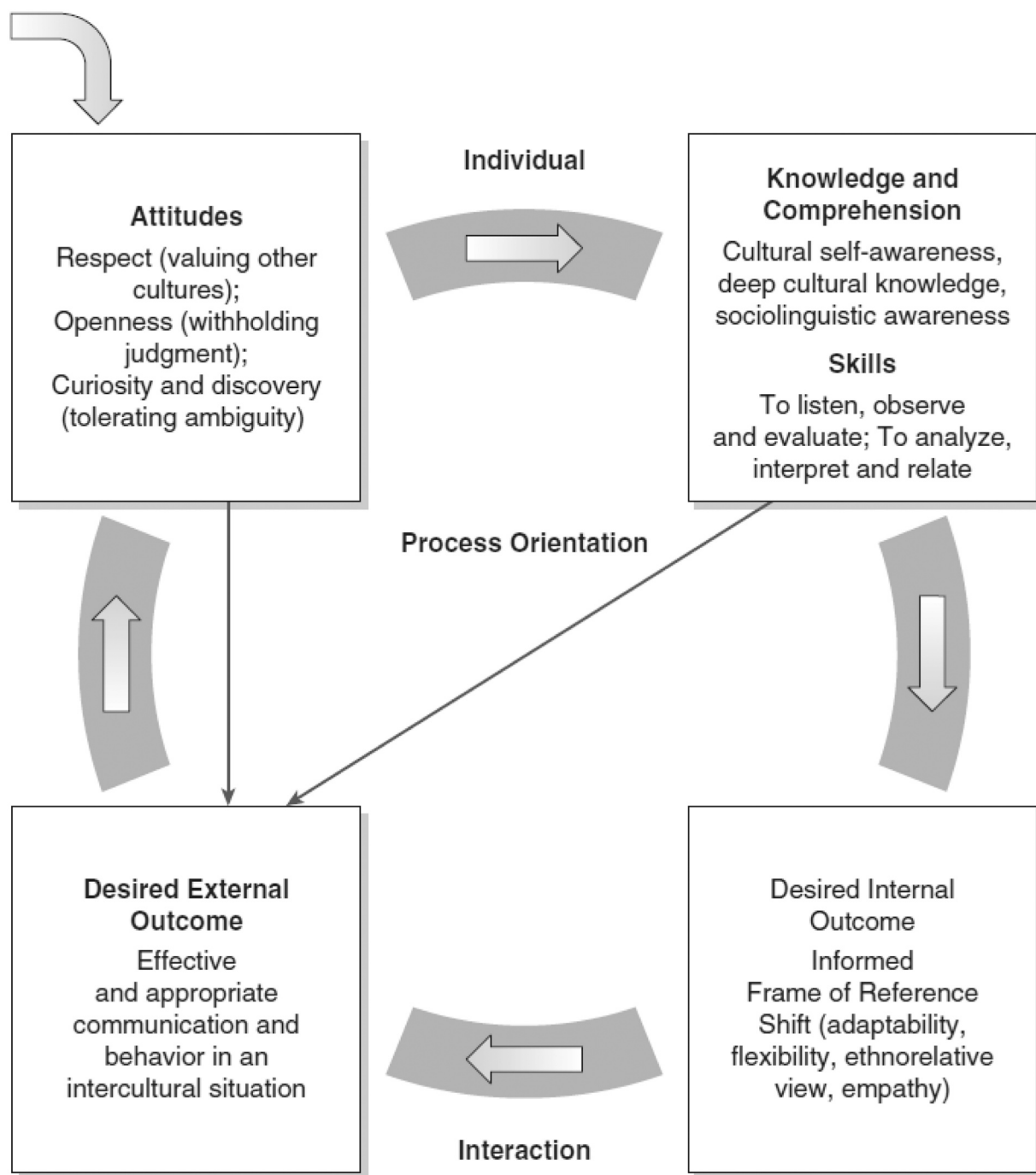


Fig. 2. The Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2009, p. 33).

outcomes, but the outcome of direct movement is not as effective or appropriate as that achieved when the individual completes the cycle and begins again (Deardorff, 2006).

The process model allows for the maintenance of a unique element, namely *desired internal* and *external outcomes*. In other words, it makes possible the achievement of *external outcomes* in communication and interaction in intercultural situations without *internal outcomes* having to be fully achieved. However, this situation is not as effective or appropriate as when *internal outcomes* are achieved (Deardorff, 2004). In this model, *attitudes* have a facilitative role in intercultural competence (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017) and the ongoing process of IC is emphasized, which means that an individual is continually improving in terms of IC and so there is no limit to IC development (Deardorff, 2004). This model has been built on the basis of the components that have been agreed upon by scholars

and administrators involved in intercultural studies. It has been extensively adopted in international tertiary education (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017), and its components will also inspire the present study. In this model, Deardorff (2006) suggests that IC should be assessed progressively by using multiple techniques. She also recommends using both qualitative and quantitative assessment tools.

3.4. The approach, analyze and act model of intercultural competence

Griffith et al.'s (2016) model has contributed to the literature on the theoretical framework of IC. In this model, they tried to offer a comprehensive framework, with domains and subdomains clearly specified, and the relationships between them clearly determined.

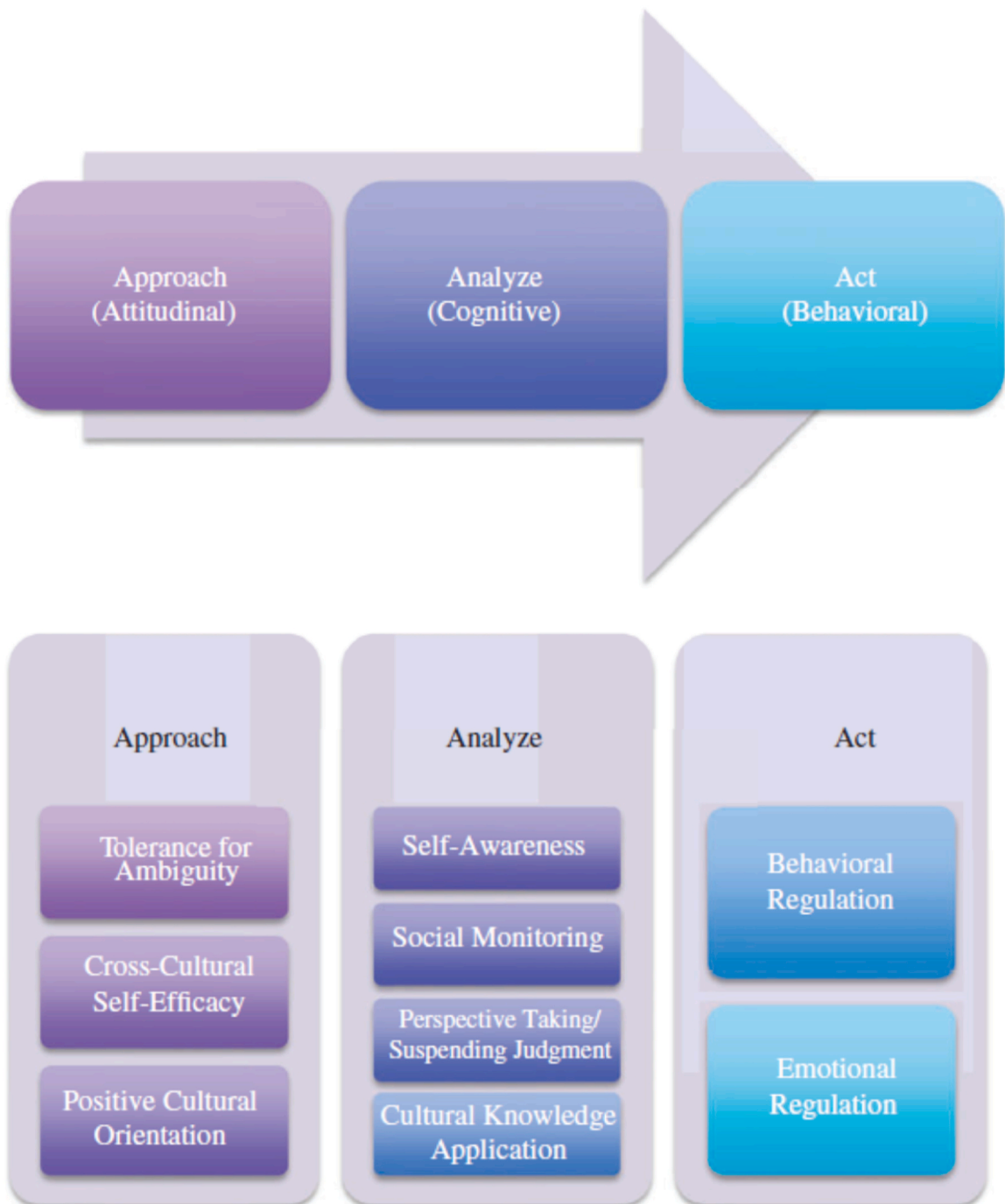


Fig. 3. The approach, analyze and act model of intercultural competence (Griffith et al., 2016, p. 29).

The framework has been established based on a process model of social thinking (Grossman et al., 2015), in which cross-cultural interactions are split into three stages, namely *approach*, *analyze* and *act*, and the skills required for effective performance in each are precisely specified (Fig. 3).

Approach is associated with characteristics that affect the chances of the voluntary initiation of intercultural contact and traits that relate to a person's overall positivity when involved in intercultural interactions. A tolerance of ambiguity, self-efficacy and a positive cultural orientation are considered to be constituents of this dimension.

The second dimension, *analyze*, concerns a person's ability to accept, assess and integrate information with no bias, prejudice or any thinking which involves stereotyping. This dimension incorporates self-awareness, social monitoring, taking a perspective and the application of cultural knowledge.

The last dimension, *act*, includes the incorporation of behaviors which previous dimensions have specified to evaluate the person's "ability to translate thought into action while maintaining control in potentially challenging and stressful situations" (Griffith et al., 2016, p. 27). Behavioral regulation and emotional regulation are included in this dimension.

The missing criterion identified in IC literature, namely comprehensiveness, and the clarity of the relationships in its subdimensions are included in the suggested framework (Griffith et al., 2016).

Deardorff (2020) has recently introduced an innovative methodology, called Story Circles, adopted from storytelling, an ancient tradition common in many cultures. This practical IC development tool involves the use of the live experiences of sojourners and is applicable in different contexts and situations in the world. The two elements of IC upheld in Story Circles are openness and respect. Contrary to many existing tools, such as online tools and simulations, which are western culture based, require formal learning contexts and long-term programs, Story Circles can be used within and outside formal learning contexts, and can run without the need for any resources and intercultural knowledge rich facilitators (Deardorff, 2020).

Adopting some of the prompts available in the Story Circles methodology, Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff (2023) published an invaluable resource for IC development based on the personal first-hand narratives describing lived experiences of sojourners from a variety of cultural contexts. The authors acknowledged identity, stereotypes, cultural differences, self-reflection, community support, and relationship as the themes emerging from these vignettes. The book highlights the claim that the development of IC is static and ongoing (D'Antoni & Mayes, 2023), that IC development "occurs over a lifetime, beyond one experience, and that we are all on intercultural lifelong journeys" (Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff, 2023, p. 163). The book concludes with the following considerations which, if delved into, can suggest new research questions:

1. The technology and virtual world has removed the need to physically travel to another culture to interact with the people from that culture.
2. By being willing and open to learning, conducting self-reflection and choosing constructive ways to change, even unpleasant experiences can be "enriching and transformative" (p. 172).
3. IC development demands moving beyond effective programs and materials and providing sojourners with support and social network.

Lantz-Deaton and Golubeva's (2020) evaluation of existing IC models identifies three critical elements. First, there is an order to the development. According to Deardorff's Process Model, the development of attitudes is a prerequisite to changing real behavior. Second, some models suggest that IC has a developmental nature. In other words, it is not innate nor something to be acquired quickly without concentration. Third, several models emphasize the adaptation strategies that people choose and the surrounding environment to which they are attempting to adapt. Despite such extensive reviews and the significant number of IC models and theories developed during the last couple of centuries, it is impossible to choose one as a definitive model. The only possible solution is to be selective in a collection of models, based on their contribution to the understanding of IC.

The variety of terms used to refer to IC might not create serious challenges in the literature, but inconsistency in what constitutes IC blurs the concept and challenges the discussions associated with this construct. The literature also lacks empirical studies on the comparison of suggested models. However, effective solutions have been suggested in recent scholarly works on IC to move towards meeting different disciplinary needs at this stage. An overarching theory of IC is evident, (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Van de Vijver & Leung, 2009) which we can use to develop our conceptualisations of IC based on (Arasaratnam, 2020). It should be noted that "the more we can draw from multiple disciplinary, cultural, and linguistic perspectives, the richer our understanding of intercultural competence" (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017, p. 16) gets and a deeper insight can be developed (Paracka & Pynn, 2017). We will then be able to adopt IC based on our needs, meaning that multiple frameworks or holistic approaches can be adopted for a particular context (Deardorff, 2017; 2020).

The literature is now experiencing the application of such a view whereby Deardorff (2020) introduced a broad definition of IC and developed a tool that is applicable in different contexts and situations. In the same way, adopting prompts from a methodology, applicable in different contexts and situations, Story Circles, Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff (2023) studied IC in sojourners in different countries of the world. This was made possible on the assumption that theories or models, which are applicable in multiple disciplines and developed from multiple perspectives, can more adoptable (Deardorff, 2017).

Seeking a single best framework, approach or model at this stage does not seem to be possible or logical. The literature is still in the "stage of conceptual development in which overlapping, complementary, and incompatible models coexist" (Van de Vijver & Leung, 2009, p. 406). Therefore, as discussed above, the solution seems to be that we need to be able to contextualize our existing understanding of IC to disciplinary needs. The existing gap should be an inspiration to scholars in the field, encouraging them to work more intensively to contribute to the development of more concrete IC conceptualizations.

4. IC and pedagogy

The authors have been unable to locate any empirical research that quantitatively investigates the link between IC and social, emotional and academic outcomes in pedagogy at the same time. Apart from an abundance of theoretical papers on IC, there are some empirical IC studies that focus on only one of the subcomponents of IC (e.g., confidence) and other IC related phenomena (e.g., intercultural training). There are also qualitative or quantitative studies that focus on IC and academic outcomes (e.g., [Schartner, 2014](#)), IC and affective outcomes (e.g., [Paige, 1993](#)) and IC and social outcomes (e.g., [Rienties et al., 2011](#)), which will be reviewed in this paper, but there is a gap in the literature on studies on IC and the three outcomes at the same time. Another line of research indirectly related to IC is centered around study abroad programs and the degree to which they can prepare students. The majority of these studies are based on pre-test and post-test designs.

To develop the IC of their students, study abroad or student mobility is one of the strategies most commonly adopted by tertiary educational institutions ([Gegersen-Hermans, 2015](#)). IC development is vital for modifying inflexible attitudes, preparing students for life in a global world ([D'Antoni & Mayes, 2023](#)) and making them more powerful in their professional lives ([Pinto, 2018](#)). Study abroad programs that are included in higher education courses can be effective ([Sol, 2017](#)), but are not enough ([Deardorff, 2009](#)) for such purposes. In fact, preparation through formal training prior to actual exposure is necessary to develop a student's intercultural experience ([Deardorff, 2009](#); [Savicki, 2008](#)). However, there is also evidence that such programs are not always successful, as they do not necessarily lead to the development of cross-cultural understanding ([Kramsch, 1991](#)). To produce graduates with a global outlook, institutions need to adopt a pedagogically oriented approach which is intentional and facilitates the students' recognition and reflection of commonalities and cultural differences, so that they can appropriately and effectively address any differences themselves ([Gegersen-Hermans, 2015](#)).

To this end and to develop graduates who not only possess literacy but also demonstrate readiness for a global workforce, [Ara-saratnam-Smith \(2020\)](#) introduced a framework listing four considerations based on the existing literature. The first consideration is *understanding of self*, which involves recognising how culture affects one's perception, also called self-awareness, one of the variables in the models of communication effectiveness by [Gudykunst \(1995\)](#). *Understanding of others*, as a second consideration, refers to mutual understanding, which emphasises the commonality leading to shared meaning. To be a competent communicator, one needs to understand others both cognitively and emotionally, have positive attitudes toward culturally different others and have a motivation to engage in interaction with them ([Arasaratnam, 2006](#)). Understanding of others also demands active listening ([Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005](#)). The third understanding, *understanding of self's responsibility toward others*, involves occasionally sacrificing our own personal right to benefit others. In other words, creating a balance between individual rights and social responsibilities. Finally, it is *understanding of others' contribution to self*, which involves understanding that "we are inevitably shaped by the contributions of others who came before us in history" ([Arasaratnam-Smith, 2020](#), p. 23). It encourages considering contributions made by others in society.

Attempts have been made to explicitly develop IC through different programs. The literature has witnessed some case studies, the outcomes of the application of IC to produce more interculturally competent students or what can be called the would-be global graduates. One of the insightful collections of these case studies, a total of 29, has been presented in [Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith \(2017\)](#). Using a socially diverse collection of innovative syllabi in IC programs, the authors developed the below 10 strategic considerations in IC development.

1. IC development demands systematic and initiative support on the part of institutions.
2. Contextual factors need to be included in IC development programs.
3. IC programs need to be learner centered.
4. IC knowledge should be applied in the daily life, not just recognized or obtained.
5. IC development should go beyond integrating the relevant knowledge and involve the development of other necessary attributes and attitudes, such as empathy and flexibility.
6. Rather than focusing on the product (the results), IC programs need to focus on the process which addresses the three terms: 'what', 'why' and 'how'.
7. As communication and behaviours follow norms, which are different in different cultures, learners need to be exposed to diverse perspectives in the programs.
8. IC programs should not only include the use of different qualitative and quantitative assessments but also make evaluations of learners as well as assess program effectiveness.
9. Factors, such as learner needs, contextual factors and the aims of the program should be considered prior to the implementation of IC training.
10. IC development should go beyond the learner level and include faculty and staff.

These 10 considerations seem to be of paramount importance and are expected to be explicitly incorporated into the design of future IC development program.

4.1. Application of IC in pedagogy

One theory associated with student IC is 'culture shock' ([Oberg, 1960](#)), defined as "the anxiety and frustration experienced in a new cultural environment due to the loss of familiar cues that guide our daily behaviors" ([Bennett, 2015](#), p. 207). It often results in psychological stress which takes some individuals longer to overcome than others ([Chen & Starosta, 2000](#)). [Oberg \(1960\)](#) identifies a

period in the culture shock experience of individuals called the 'honeymoon period' and characterizes it as the initial period in their encounter with a different culture when their reactions are optimistic. Upon further adjustment, these positive reactions turn negative, before reverting to more positive reactions when the individuals have adjusted to their environment. The adjustment levels experienced by individuals in unfamiliar environments are described by [Lysgaard \(1955\)](#) as a U-shaped line. A U-shaped line implies that adjustment levels in the middle of the period are lower than those at the beginning and end. Well-adjusted students are more likely to make strong, satisfactory contacts and less likely to suffer from feelings of helplessness ([Van Rooijen, 1986](#)).

In their study of the adjustment problems of Iranian international students in Scotland, [Mehdizadeh and Scott \(2005\)](#) discovered that academic, cultural and psycho-social factors are involved in their experiences during the honeymoon period. By applying the same theory, [Ayano \(2006\)](#) found that no honeymoon period, thus no significant adjustment period, occurred in the case of her British-based Japanese students, who were psychologically strained throughout the entire two-year study period. Despite the fluctuating moments reported in their interviews, their overall experience was difficult, which was corroborated by the quantitative analysis. Even though the researcher used triangulation to support the study's findings, the qualitative analysis still appeared to be biased. The researcher conducted an analysis of the metaphors and imagery used in student narratives, but not in the context in which they were used. Imagery and metaphors are among the commonly used devices in the counselling practice ([Morgan, 1997](#)), but inaccuracies in the way they are analyzed will undermine results. Decontextualized metaphors appear to have been analyzed based on the researcher's bias, which would indicate that she was influenced by the quantitative results when interpreting the qualitative data. It is likely that if the qualitative data had been analyzed prior to the quantitative data, the reported result would have been less assertive, if not entirely different.

[Masgoret et al. \(2000\)](#) report a decline in the attitudes of their respondents after their study abroad experiences in Spain. A possible reason for such inconsistencies across studies could be the diverse range of IC models that are used to develop IC assessment instruments, or differences in the task types or response formats of the instruments themselves. It might also indicate that simply attending study abroad programs does not guarantee a successful experience. Mere exposure to another culture for education or work purposes does not ensure the cultural competency of the person either ([Allport, 1954](#)), which might lead to regression ([Berg et al., 2012](#)). Students need reflective practice during their intercultural training process ([D'Antoni & Mayes, 2023](#); [Deardorff, 2006](#); [Yershova et al., 2000](#)) and a passion for intercultural interaction and building relationships ([Deardorff, 2011](#)). Although related to IC, these studies do not directly address the performance of students in academic institutions. The gap that exists can suggest that future studies explicitly investigate the relationship between IC and the outcomes of three significant elements of teaching and learning, namely academic, affective and social outcomes. As the authors were unable to locate any empirical work involving the suggested variables, a number of indirectly related empirical studies are reviewed below.

In her study of the changes in the IC levels of first-year Masters students during their first nine months in an internationalized university environment, [Gregersen-Hermans \(2015\)](#) found no increase in their IC. This finding is in contrast to other findings in the literature which report that IC increases as the length of time spent in the host country increases (e.g., [Brunsting et al., 2017](#)). The finding does not appear to be generalizable because, firstly, as acknowledged by the researcher, this was a case study. Secondly, such factors as language instruction, previous experience abroad and the nationality of the participants, which can play a significant role, had not been taken into consideration during the study. Furthermore, [Gregersen-Hermans \(2015\)](#) did not find any correlation between the IC of students and their social interaction, whether inside or outside the curriculum, despite their high levels of satisfaction with their interaction between culturally diverse students and its perceived importance for IC promotion. Gregersen-Hermans claims that this finding emerges because students are unable to appropriately recognize cultural differences and tend to interact primarily on the basis of their commonalities. Therefore, intergroup experiences are positively reinforced, but do not contribute to IC. The question thus arises: how are culturally varied groups able to maintain relationships at such satisfactory levels without developing IC? This is worth debating because such relations are not short-lived nor accidental, and commonalities which do not appear to be significant in such culturally contrastive groups cannot be the sole source of fuel for such positive intergroup experiences.

[Wang-Taylor and Milton \(2019\)](#) studied IC, a non-linguistic factor, in conjunction with vocabulary, to predict the academic performance of Chinese students. Their findings reveal that IC could account for more than 30% of their students' academic performance, which might support the need for the inclusion of IC assessment in language proficiency tests ([Kazemian et al., 2023](#)). [Young et al. \(2013\)](#) identified a strong relationship between the academic outcomes of their MA postgraduate participants and satisfaction with their new environment, IC, contact with non-compatriots and language proficiency. [Sobkowiak's \(2016\)](#) slightly different study revealed that only a minimum change occurred in the IC of Polish EFL learners because of their developing linguistic proficiency, motivation to study abroad and study abroad experience. Therefore, there is a weak correlation between the development of the linguistic, motivational and study abroad experience levels of EFL learners and their IC development. The narrow scope of the study may have undermined the reliability of the findings. The author based the study on the cultural content of only 20 Polish coursebooks, which were analyzed to determine whether the students' understanding of reality is influenced by different cultures. As can be seen, the IC knowledge contained within 20 coursebooks is rather limited, which is not comparable to the actual extent of IC in reality. What appears to be remarkable is that the findings of a study of rather limited scope have been overgeneralized.

The essential building blocks for developing IC are trust, respect and building authentic relationships with people from diverse backgrounds ([Deardorff, 2009](#)), and these develop over time. Although [Deardorff \(2009\)](#) believes that single sessions or courses on IC development might be effective, she considers them to be insufficient. Therefore, she recommends integrating such sessions and courses into the overall curriculum. Given that study abroad programs largely include IC components, it is necessary to go a step beyond Deardorff's above suggestion. Regardless of whether study abroad programs are directly or indirectly integrated into tertiary education curricula, the question is how IC, the main focus of such programs, affects the academic, social and affective outcomes achieved by international students in tertiary education.

5. Outcomes

Measuring an outcome requires a clear definition and specification of its components. The three outcomes, namely affective, social and academic, and the concepts associated with them will be discussed below. Two challenges are involved in the investigation of emotional and social outcomes. Firstly, social and emotional constructs are treated as an individual construct by some scholars (e.g., Domitrovich et al., 2007) and as two distinct constructs by others (e.g., Scales et al., 2017). In this paper, they will be treated as two distinct constructs, as Denham et al. (2003) also suggest. Secondly, there is a lack of consensus on the definition and constituents of each construct, due to the diversity of contexts, goals and people involved in each study, and their demography. These constructs also differ across different disciplines. For clarity and consistency, the first two constructs will be discussed in terms of competence.

5.1. Affective outcomes

The terms *emotional* and *affective* have been used interchangeably in the literature, but for consistency, *affective* will be the preferred term in this review. Morris et al. (2013, p. 981) define emotional competence “as the ability to (a) appropriately express emotions, (b) understand one’s own emotions and the emotions of others, and (c) regulate one’s own emotions”. Emotional competence is one of the constituents of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It can facilitate intercultural adaptation by providing the motivational or emotional capacity to handle the challenges involved in living in a new environment (Kim, 2001). Emotions can have facilitative or impairing roles in academic engagement or commitment, thereby affecting academic success (Durlak et al., 2011).

The literature identifies different components that are categorised under emotional competence. These include moods, affective tendencies, regulating strategies, emotion regulation, coping strategies, self-efficacy, emotional self-efficacy, empathy, self-esteem, emotional stability and many more. Some of these components, however, are slightly vague, as there is no clear-cut boundary to specify whether they are emotional or social competencies. For example, while Yu et al. (2020) treat empathy as an emotional factor, Benson (2006) and Müller et al. (2020) categorise it as a social variable. Bloom (1956, p. 16) defines empathy as “the act of coming to experience the world as you think someone else does”, which is both an element and an outcome of IC (Deardorff, 2006; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Exercising more empathy towards people coming from other cultures leads to deeper emotional and intercultural understanding (Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020). Therefore, the categorization of empathy as an emotional factor seems to be more reasonable.

Interaction with people from a different culture can pose psychological challenges for students and demands emotional resilience to cope with frustrations in intercultural contexts (Paige, 1993). It can lead to such outcomes as homesickness, depression, isolation, language barriers and loneliness (Ayano, 2006; Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004; Morales-Mann & Higuchi, 1995; Noponen, 1997), and international adjustment (Berry, 2005). Due to higher levels of social isolation and inadequate social support in the host country, international students suffer from greater levels of psychological problems than their local counterparts (Ramsay et al., 2007), which is corroborated in Russell et al. (2010) research, where 41% of international students in Australia experienced substantial levels of anxiety and stress arising from homesickness and culture shock. This can affect students’ moods and thereby their academic performance (Gumora & Arsenio, 2002). The level of stress encountered by international graduate students is high because they feel pressured into demonstrating high academic and professional standards (Bang & Montgomery, 2013). To cope with such pressures, students need social support and inner strength (Hyun et al., 2007).

A link exists between emotion management and the ability of students to adapt to university related stressors (McCann, 2011), and thereby their academic success. Those with higher emotion management scores are able to successfully manage their emotions and stress (Cheng, 2020). Denham (1998) reports a connection between emotional factors and social factors in learners. Social support can affect the academic stress experienced by students (Misra et al., 2003) and their socio-emotional and academic outcomes (Bai, 2016). In her study on the early stage of the Mexican postgraduate students’ experience in the UK, López (2020) found that the students described the stage as a crisis stage, full of stress, due to the cross-cultural problems.

Along the same lines, a link exists between the emotions experienced by learners and their friendships with peers (Oatley et al., 2006). In the university context, this appears to play an important role in the case of newly arrived international students, as the majority of their interactions and contact with people during their first year are with their classmates, before they go on to develop their own networks. They develop three types of networks in the host culture: ethnic/home culture (monocultural), host culture (bicultural) and other foreigners (multicultural) (Bochner et al., 1985). They are more motivated to interact with domestic students, but relationships are often not established nor maintained as local students can lack interest (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Parks & Raymond, 2004), thereby impacting the ability of international students to adjust and develop IC (Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020). This can also lead to both groups avoiding one another (Lantz, 2014), contrary to Gregersen-Hermans’ (2015) expectations of study abroad programs in which both groups should benefit; the foreign students by experiencing a different culture and the local students by attending international classes.

In their study of the interactions between different groups of international students outside of the classroom context, Kimmel and Volet (2012) find very limited interaction. These students prefer to interact primarily with students from the same background as their own, but if they engage in interaction with other students, they tend to choose other foreign students. They emotionally rely on, and prefer to interact with, ethnic or foreign friends abroad, which leads to them developing fewer contacts with the host culture (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Ethnic networks facilitate adaptation in the early stages (Kim, 1988). In a similar vein, Kashima and Loh’s (2006) research on international students in Australia reveals a positive correlation between the international ties of Asian students and their psychological adjustment.

Contact between international students and the local community plays a more instrumental than an emotionally supportive role

(Parks & Raymond, 2004; Rohrllich & Martin, 1991; Young et al., 2013). It can promote their functional fitness for performing daily transactions and facilitate the transition “from the original cultural identity to a broader, ‘intercultural’ identity” (Kim, 2001, p. 61), which falls under the social category that will be elaborated upon in the subsequent section.

5.2. Social outcomes

The efforts made to conceptualise social skills have developed into two models (Leganés-Lavall & Pérez-Aldeguer, 2016). Scholars such as Dias et al. (2013) use social skills and social competence interchangeably, while others take social skills to be behaviors that concern social action, and social competence to be the abilities used to evaluate social action in terms of social skills (Gresham, 1986). Rubin and Rose-Krasnor (1992, p. 4) define social competence as “the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships over time and across situations”. Poor social competence leads to poor interaction with events promoting life planning strategies for dealing with adverse situations (Oberst et al., 2009); therefore, tertiary education institutions need to utilize generic competency indicators to improve their performance in enhancing the learning outcomes of their students (Xie et al., 2014). A crucial role is inherent in the social factors contributing to the learning process of tertiary education students while they are growing as future professionals and active participants in society (Leganés-Lavall & Pérez-Aldeguer, 2016).

Social skills are defined as “socially significant behaviors exhibited in specific situations that predict socially important outcomes” (Gresham, 2002, p. 1029). Such outcomes can be achieved through social integration. Social integration is more challenging for international students than for their domestic peers because the former do not have access to their home social networks, friends and families (Bochner et al., 1977; Zhou et al., 2008). Unfamiliarity with the culture or customs of the host country, especially for students from non-western countries in western tertiary education systems, is another major concern that can have a significant impact on their performance (Asmar, 2005; Bochner et al., 1977; Rienties et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2008). The development of intercultural knowledge can enhance social interactions and strengthen ties among students (Stone, 2006). In their mixed-methods research, recruiting first-year tertiary level students in the Netherlands, de Hei et al. (2020) reported a positive relationship between effective collaboration among students from culturally diverse backgrounds and IC development.

In their study, which aims to fill the gap in research on the role played by the host culture in study-abroad programs, Egekvist et al. (2016) focus on the experiences of 22 Danish students aged 12 and 13 who host 22 Chinese students of the same age in a homestay experience. The results reveal the many challenges that were experienced by the host students in their intercultural encounters, despite the fact that these encounters took place in a cultural environment they were familiar with and, thus, could be considered to be their comfort zone. The findings reveal that a host experience does not necessarily lead to IC development. It can, conversely, lead to “negative hetero-stereotypes” (p. 48). Yee’s (1989) study of university students from 11 East Asian countries, nations and territories in more than 100 universities reveals that students from Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan experience the most stress, which adversely affects their socioemotional performance. To evaluate the level of social support in higher education, Ozga and Sukhnandan (1998) find that students who drop out of their courses link their decisions to insufficient levels of social support from their tertiary institutions. This indicates that the social support provided by friends and family can contribute to academic outcomes (Rienties et al., 2011).

5.3. Academic outcomes

The literature reveals that academic outcomes are the most sensitive and dependent of all the outcomes and appear to be the most influenced by other factors. Scharnter (2014) points out that integrating academic dimensions can complement sociocultural and psychological realms in the holistic understanding of international students’ experiences. Studies have revealed that academic outcomes can be predicted by considering both social (Zins & Elias, 2007) and emotional factors (Paige, 1993). Academic outcomes can be determined by assessing academic adjustment, defined as the “adjustment to the specific demands of academic study” (Scharnter, 2014, p. 32), which include learning and teaching style emphasis, assessment procedures and bonds with and between staff in the host university. Socioemotional problems can adversely affect the academic value and cognitive skills of international students (Yee, 1989).

A link exists between the social networks of first-year students, such as social support from friends and family, and their academic success (Wilcox et al., 2005). Wilson and Linville (1985) point out that the academic setbacks experienced by students occur mainly during their first year at university, as this is the first time that many of them have lived away from home. Zins and Elias (2007) report enhanced academic performance in students who apply their problem-solving skills to solve study-related issues and homework completion. In the same way, Andrade (2009) finds a positive relationship between IC of first-year international students, their academic habits and involvement behaviors.

What the review in this section reveals is that IC programs can contribute to IC development, and that each of the three outcomes plays a significant role in the life of international students, but when it comes to the direct relationship between IC and the combination of the three outcomes, a gap becomes evident. What remains to be discussed is whether IC programs are sufficient for student preparation. As Deardorff (2006) asserts, they might be effective, but they are insufficient. There is no guarantee that taking an IC course leads to competency, as IC requires “a lifelong commitment” (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2018, p. 16). IC learning process does not begin with the learners stepping “on the plane or train to the host country, nor does it end when they step foot again on their home soil” (Murray-García & Tervalon, 2017, p. 22). To internationalize their campuses, universities use strategies, such as internationalization at home, student mobility and internationalization of the curriculum (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017). Such programs might subject students to transformative experiences, but they will not necessarily lead to IC (Bennett, 2012).

As Gregersen-Hermans (2017) states, to produce interculturally competent graduates, higher education institutions need to unergo

a holistic change in their approach to IC development, “fully commit to a long-term and evidence-based systems” (p.78) and intergrate IC development into their disciplinary content.

6. Conclusion

This paper began with a review of IC definitions and moved to IC conceptualizations, which set the context for the summary of some relevant IC models in the literature. It then dealt with IC in pedagogy, followed by a review of the relationship between IC and academic, affective, and social outcomes in tertiary education.

This literature review has highlighted the fact that unanimous agreement on IC definitions, components and models appears to be a long way off. Despite the number of definitions presented here, the search for a suitable definition remains in progress because existing definitions have been subjected to a range of criticisms, one of which from Deardorff's (2009) perspective is that “they are either too general or provide a disjointed list of attributes” (p. 244), but with the recent broad definition of IC introduced by Deardorff (2020), not only is there a clearer picture of what IC is, but also a very notable example has been given as to what direction future IC studies can take. Little wonder that, in terms of the constituent components and assessment tools, unanimity across disciplines is difficult to achieve when a precise definition cannot be agreed upon first, but it has been suggested that with the existing status of IC literature, there is enough to contribute to a more solid foundation for future research.

The emerging overarching theory of IC, drawn from the existing IC components and the plethora of models from multiple cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary perspectives, can provide us with the frameworks to contextualize our existing understanding of IC and apply it to disciplinary needs. It has been suggested that, in keeping with this view, multiple IC frameworks or holistic approaches applicable to a context can be adopted. Examples of such approaches are the board definition of IC and the introduction of Story Circles, an innovative IC methodology applicable in different contexts and situations (Deardorff, 2020), and the adoption of prompts of Story Circles in the study of the intercultural experiences of sojourners from different countries (Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff, 2023).

Reviewing the significance of the academic, affective and social outcomes achieved by students in tertiary education, the literature reveals that few quantitative studies have been undertaken on the link between these outcomes and IC at the same time. This can suggest a quantitative research study to contribute to filling the gap.

The review of the related literature confirms the contributory role of training programs to IC development, but simply taking these courses does not guarantee becoming interculturally competent. IC development is lifelong and requires a process. To produce global citizens, universities need to undertake holistic changes by adopting long-term measures and embed IC development into their disciplinary content.

Finally, the disputes that are evident in IC literature, however valid they might be, do not indicate shaky ground for IC studies, but provide a rich and reliable foundation for more profound insight into the future direction of IC studies. There is no doubt that “conversation about intercultural competence must continue and evolve as the world and its cultures evolve” (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017, p. 3).

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