

Research to evaluate and improve intercultural competence (as an example of the Mongolian National University of Education)

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Abstract. In today's world, where technological advances, digital networks, and globalization in many sectors of the economy are imperative, intercultural skills are essential for intercultural interactions, international teams, working abroad, living, learning, and undertaking projects. This ability is being studied internationally under the name of intercultural communication skills and intercultural competence. In this study, we sought to find ways to assess intercultural competence and to identify the content and analysis that form these competencies. We also explained how we assessed intercultural competence using the method we developed. This competence is recognized worldwide as the foundation for communication and cooperation in all sectors of society, not only in research such as linguistics, comparative language studies, and translation. Furthermore, the article presents the results of the research on the changes in intercultural competence and the work written during the research.

Key words: *information networks, foreign language, different culture, assessment*

INTRODUCTION

One of the recognized pressing issues among institutions of higher education is the need to develop curricula that formulate the composition of intercultural competencies and prepare interculturally competent graduates that can succeed in a globalized society. At the same time, research on how to assess the latter is needed. In this light, in addition to emphasizing vocational education and foreign language requirements, higher education institutions are focusing on one's perception and valuation of their own culture and cultures of others or intercultural competence (hereafter, ICC).

With the increasing need to improve the responsibility and competence of the graduates, there is also a rising necessity to evaluate the globalization objectives and outcomes of the curriculum.

Main Part

Conceptualization of the Intercultural Capacity

The researchers identified between 3 to 27 skills related to intercultural competence and, among these, *flexibility, adaptability, emotional intelligence, love and respect, communication* are most referenced. Several researchers underscored the salience of person's attitude in intercultural competence. In particular, openness, respect, curiosity, tolerance of uncertainty are understood as core qualities for ICC. We have recognized, that intercultural sensibility is connected to the experience with cultural diversity and the ability to differentiate while intercultural capacity is the ability to think and operate in a way that is compatible between cultures.

The INCA project (2007) provides a more practical definition and suggests that ICC creates a welcome environment in which you and others working in different intercultural settings can collaborate effectively. In Mongolian mentality, an ability to adapt and live anywhere in the world in harmony with the environment and society can be defined as ICC.

Methodology to Assess Intercultural Capacity

When we study the general concept of intercultural competence and its significant needs, we have to account for ICC's dynamics and multi-component properties. Based on our comparative research, ICC assessment methodologies can be divided into three groups: indirect, direct, and mixed.

a. Indirect Assessment Methodology of the Intercultural Competence

The indirect methods currently are designed as self-assessment reports and multi-parameter questionnaires that include a general cross-cultural capacity structure.

Researchers are still uncertain about the ability of individuals to report accurate self-assessments. Since the baseline indicators of the pre-training test serve as a proxy for the increase in intercultural capacity, this growth indicator might be inaccurate

b. Direct Assessment Methodology of the Intercultural Competence

Direct assessment methodology of the intercultural competence includes the following: performance evaluation, evaluation of creative portfolio, reports and interviews.

Although the direct method is not commonly used, it has the advantage of allocating practical time to the collection and analysis of evaluation documents.

c. Mixed Assessment Methodology of the Intercultural Competence

One of the modern mixed methods of intercultural competence assessment is the Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA), developed by the Intercultural Competency Assessment Project. The steps to assess intercultural competence for any program can be used as the following:

- I. To decide which assessment or the goal to use;
- II. To determine the principles of intercultural competence for your country by identifying what students should learn and how they would be changed;

- III. After that, program developers, faculties, and schools choose the purpose of the ICC training and the appropriate assessment method, and consider the opportunities and examples mentioned here.

Content of the Course “Intercultural Competency”

The foreign language curriculum includes objectives for knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to students' intercultural competencies.

Therefore, we have developed reading courses for Russian and English teachers in the 2nd and 3rd grades with the content of intercultural competence.

Table 1. Brief content of ICC

Chapter topic name	Topic	Purpose	Theoretical principle	Methods
Culture symbols (6 hours)	Appearance and the behavior	Understand the role of intercultural competence in others work and create own consciousness	Theories of cultural onion design (according to Hofstede), (Theories of Trompenaars, Hall)	Advanced lecture methods, student reading, translating and answering questions
	Clothes			
	Food			
Rituals (8 hours)	Home	Consider cross-cultural competencies in the literature context and organize training, <u>teaching and learning</u> .	Training theory – Cycle of Kolbo (work in the order of plan-do-evaluate-improve).	Find and use games to create presentations, complete assignments, and create new ones.
	Geography			
	Greetings and goodbyes			
	Wedding			
Values (6 hours)	Holidays	Compare different cultures and learn about symbols, heroic representatives, rituals and values, and norms.	Get acquainted with theories of response, understand and master cultural norms.	Learn to use <u>team work</u> reports, ICC research methods, etc.
	Religion			
	Beliefs, and things to avoid			

The training was conducted in a group of 24-32 students. The ICC training consists of a total of 20 hours of lessons and independent assignments. Based on the results of the survey conducted before and after the course, the content and methodology of the training were improved and a handbook entitled “Russian Tourist-Scholars visited Mongolia” was prepared and published.

The handbook consists of two identical sections in Russian and Mongolian, with a sample of 10 topics, followed by questions, assignments, and additional information.

In addition to the compulsory or elective courses in this field, the handbook can be used for cross-cultural capacity building training for leisure, tourism, business, international organization staff, and other interested people.

Selecting and Improving Assessment Methods

The results of cross-cultural competency surveys conducted within the universities have inspired us to study the intercultural competencies of university students in teacher preparing universities. We combined two

different research questionnaires and conducted a survey before and after the training to identify changes in student intercultural competencies. Although the questionnaire method has some shortcomings in terms of theory, methodology and capabilities, it is still widely used in practice because it has ready-made research questions and can collect and analyze data quickly and easily.

The evaluation questionnaire consists of 5 parts. They are:

1. Explain the purpose of the questionnaire and how to complete the task, the principles.
2. My Native Culture” section answers questions about age, ethnicity, religion, experience of traveling and working abroad, problems encountered, and social connections.
3. Assignment for students to assess the level (level 4) of the 28 behavioral manifestations given in the “My Intercultural Competence” section.
4. “Intercultural Situation ” a task in which the student chooses the correct one from the 3 options of response to each of the 8 cases of real conflict.
5. Students are asked questions about their “ability to explore language and culture in relation”.

The tasks to determine the level of 28 behavioral manifestations divide into the following five groups of ICC. They are:

1. Self-assessment and self-awareness (2 tasks)
2. Anxiety management: adaptability and flexibility (8 tasks)
3. Appreciate and respect people from other cultures (4 tasks)
4. Communicating with others (10 tasks)
5. Ability to listen and observe (4 tasks)

After processing the questionnaire, the conformity was checked and some corrections were made. They are:

- In addition to students' knowledge, questions about national customs, basic culture, and language may also affect the ability to understand and answer questions. Therefore, the principles of assessment and the ideas and expressions of the questions have been made simple to understand for any Kazakh or Mongolian students.
- Some questions and assignments have been modified to prevent students from guessing the answer. For example, the third answer, No, was added to Question 8, Part II (if you chose No, please continue directly from Question 13). Also, the level of behavioral manifestation was changed from 5 to never, and in a few cases, mostly, always.
- Discussion and correction of questionnaires, word choices, grammatical and editorial errors were checked.

Research Results

The results of the study were analyzed to test the reliability of the assessment, the internal constants of each of the general and 5 sub-parameters of the questionnaire were calculated using Crombach's alpha. Crombach's alpha is not a statistical criterion, but a reliability factor, and a value above 0.6 indicates high reliability or good enough.

A total of 28 ICC detection tasks were divided into 5 groups, but these components were interrelated.

Table2. Pre-training questionnaire evaluation results (%)

Intercultural competency group	The level of correct response					
	Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Usually (%)	Always (%)	Did not answer (%)	Total (%)
	Test 1	Test 1	Test 1	Test 1	Test 1	Test 1
Self-monitoring and self-awareness	12.6	47.3	24	14.3	1.8	100
Adaptability and flexibility	4.5	24.6	45.4	23.7	1.8	100
Appreciate and respect people from other cultures	0	8.5	45.5	44.7	1.3	100
Communicate with others	2.9	19.5	42	33.6	2	100
Listen and observe	0	27.2	47.3	24.6	0.9	100
Total	3.2	22.4	43	29.7	1.7	100

The following conclusions can be made based on the results of the pre-training survey (Table 2). These are:

1. 29.7% of students rated themselves as always doing the right thing when required, 3.2% never doing the right thing, and 43% rated themselves as able to respond correctly in most cases, but rarely to make mistakes when there is a need of ICC.

2. Apart from self-monitoring and self-awareness, behavioral manifestations belonging to the four groups of ICC appear to be always or in most cases correct. Therefore, it is concluded that such opportunities and resources are more important than the need to develop self-monitoring, self-awareness, adaptability and flexibility, and communication skills.

3. It is important to note that errors are more likely to occur due to a lack of self-monitoring and self-awareness.

4. However, it was argued that students need to further develop their intercultural competencies, given that always doing the right thing in any ICC group is often less than doing the right thing.

5. Pre-training surveys and surveys have shown that our students' self-monitoring and self-awareness levels are relatively low compared to other ICC skills, and that they have a poor understanding of their own culture, values, nature, and evolution. It should be considered when we develop the content of the training.

ICC training was conducted using the developed content and methodology. In order to evaluate the results of the training for the development of ICC, we conducted a post-training survey and compared the results of the previous survey with the following conclusions.

Table 3. Comparison of previous (I) and following (II) questionnaires

Intercultural competency group / level	Correct response											
	Never (%)		Sometimes (%)		Usually (%)		Always (%)		Did not answer (%)		Total (%)	
	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II
Self-monitoring and self-awareness	12.6	8.0	47.3	42.3	24.0	24.4	14.3	25.25	1.8	0	100	100
Adaptability and flexibility	4.5	3.1	24.6	22.26	45.5	49.5	23.7	25.24	1.8	0	100	100
Appreciate and respect people from other cultures	0	0	8.5	1.9	45.5	46	47.7	52.1	1.3	0	100	100
Communicate with others	2.9	0	19.5	10.5	42	34.4	33.6	44.6	2	0	100	100
Listen and observe	0	0	27.2	20.3	47.3	34.9	24.6	44.8	0.9	0	100	100
Total	4	2.4	25.4	19.45	40.86	49.8	28.18	38.35	1.56	0	100	100

The overall assessment of students and the assessment of each group of ICC improved. This allows us to conclude that the content of the course has had a positive effect on students' intercultural competence (at least it has had a positive effect on their self-control, self-awareness and respect for people from other cultures). Situational examples mainly measure behavior and learners' knowledge, and any of the situations described measure the value of a student's personality. From the three possible responses to each of the eight cases of "Intercultural Situation," we compare how the results of the pre- and post-training questionnaires changed for the student to choose the right question (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of the results of the questionnaire before and after the situational task

	Previous test scores	Percentage of previous test success	Scores for the next test	Percentage of next test success	Percentage of the change
Example 1	22, 34, 0*	39,3	22,18,0	55	+15,7
Example 2	31,25,0	55,4	25,15,0	62,5	+7,1
Example 3	22,34,0	39,3	12,28,0	30	-9,3

Example 4	26,28,2	46,4	17,23,0	42,5	-3,9
Example 5	28,27,1	50,0	19,21,0	47,5	-2,5
Example 6	44,12,0	78,6	33,7,0	82,5	+3,9
Example 7	21,35,0	37,5	22,28,0	55	+17,5
Example 8	44,12,0	78,6	33,7,0	82,5	+3,9
Average		53,1		57,2	+4,1

The results show that in all examples except 3,4,5, the number of correct student answers increased from the first test to the next test. Example 3, in particular, appears to have been the most problematic. The reality of the overall score was good enough. (Table3). Based on the results of this assessment, we conclude that our training has had a positive impact on students' intercultural competence, at least on intercultural awareness of the students. Finally, in order to explore the changes in the students' ICC, a comparative study of the “ability to study language and culture in relation” was conducted among the students majoring in foreign language teaching.

A comparative study of students' changes in language and culture-related competencies shows that student’s intercultural competence develops as the he or she enters the next class (Table 5).

Table 5. Comparison of the ability to study language and culture

№	Questions	Response	II class	III class	IVclass
1	Can you get the information you are interested in through a foreign language course?	Yes	50	59.4	60.1
		No		37.5	5.6
		A little	33.3	-	34.3
		Did not answer	16.7	3.1	
2	did you compare the culture of the country you are studying with the culture of your own country during the class?	Yes	12.5	50	52.3
		usually	20.8	31.3	36.8
		sometimes	20.8	12.5	10.9
		Did not answer	45.9	6.2	
3	Have you ever tried to explain the cultural differences between the country you are studying and Mongolian culture from a foreign perspective?	Yes	62.5	59.4	62
		No	33.3	40.6	38
		Do not know	-	-	-
		Did not answer	4.2	-	-
4	Would you be interested to read an article written by a foreigner about Mongolia and the life and culture of Mongolians?	Yes	87.5	81.3	95.9
		No	4.2	3.1	4.1
		Do not know	4.2	15.6	
		Did not answer	4.1	-	-
5	Do you think that studying such sources will help you communicate and understand them?	Yes	70.8	59.4	86.3
		No	4.2	18.8	13.7
		Do not know	16.7	21.8	
		Did not answer	8.3	-	-

The percentage of 2nd and 3rd graders who answered yes to the question is as high as the proportion of 4th graders who answered yes. This shows that the principle that “deep understanding of one's own culture is the basis for understanding and respecting the culture of others” has been implemented even in a **little** amount in our training.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of experiments and training with a small number of participants, only preliminary conclusions can be made. And we think, that is possible to provide students with intercultural competence, or at least to make them more aware of intercultural issues. This conclusion is based on the fact that the evaluation of student questionnaires is increasing after training, and all students answered the questions they avoided during the previous test, and the number of students who chose the correct answer increased. Students' ability to study language and culture is likely to improve as they progress the class, but it is important to study subjects that provide intercultural competence. The questionnaire used this time can be used to assess the effectiveness of intercultural competency training. However, although it is not possible to assess cross-cultural competency indicators using a closed-ended questionnaire, it cannot be said that our questionnaire was sufficient to assess cross-cultural competency factors. Instead of recommending the methods mentioned above, we recommend that universities should focus on why they want to be evaluated first and what exactly they want to value behind intercultural competence.

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Хураангуй

Технологийн дэвшил, дижитал мэдээллийн сүлжээ, эдийн засгийн олон салбар даяарчлагдаж буй орчин үеийн ертөнцөд өөр өөр соёл, сэтгэлгээтэй хүмүүстэй харилцах, олон улсын багт ажиллах, гадаадад ажиллах, амьдрах, суралцах, төсөл хэрэгжүүлэхэд соёл хоорондын ур чадвар зайлшгүй шаардлагатай юм. Энэхүү чадварыг соёл хоорондын харилцааны чадвар, соёл хоорондын чадамж гэж нэрлэн олон улсын хэмжээнд судалж эхлээд байгаа ба бид энэхүү судалгаагаар соёл хоорондын чадамжийг хэрхэн үнэлэх арга замыг эрэлхийлэн, эдгээр чадамжийг бүрдүүлэх агуулга, шинжилгээг илрүүлэхийг хичээсэн билээ. Мөн бид өөрсдийн боловсруулсан аргыг хэрхэн хэрэглэн соёл хоорондын чадамжийг хэрхэн үнэлсэн үйл явцаа тайлбарласан. Уг чадамж нь хэлшинжлэл, хэлний харьцуулсан судалгаа, орчуулгын төрлийн судалгааны ажилд төдийгүй нийгмийн бүх салбарын харилцаа, хамтын ажиллагааны үндэс суурь болж байгааг далхий дахинаа хүлээн зөвшөөрөөд байна. Түүнчлэн уг өгүүлэлд соёл хоорондын чадамжийн өөрчлөлт, судалгааны явцад бичсэн бүтээлийн талаархи үр дүнг танилцуулсан болно.

Түлхүүр үг: мэдээллийн сүлжээ, гадаад хэл, ялгаатай соёлын тухай ойлголт, үнэлгээ

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