

Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization

Darla K. Deardorff

This study seeks to determine a definition and appropriate assessment methods of intercultural competence as agreed on by a panel of internationally known intercultural scholars. This information is validated by a sample of higher education administrators and can be used by administrators in identifying and assessing intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization efforts. Conclusions made from this study include identified elements of intercultural competence and assessment methods on which both the intercultural scholars and administrators agreed, resulting in the first study to document consensus on intercultural competence. Both groups agree that it is possible to assess degrees of intercultural competence and in so doing, that it is best to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess intercultural competence, including interviews, observation, and judgment by self and others. Two models of intercultural competence are presented based on the findings of the study.

Keywords: *communication skills; cross-cultural training; evaluation methods; identification; intercultural communication; intercultural programs; internationalization; interpersonal competence; measures (individuals); multicultural education; outcomes of education; student assessment; study abroad; Delphi technique; higher education; questionnaires*

One meaningful outcome of internationalization efforts at postsecondary institutions is the development of interculturally competent students. Yet few universities address the development of interculturally competent students as an anticipated outcome of internationalization in which the concept of “intercultural competence” is specifically defined. This lack of specificity in defining intercultural competence is due presumably to the difficulty of identifying the specific components of this complex concept. Even fewer institutions have designated methods for documenting and measuring intercultural competence. As Terenzini and Upcraft (1996) observed, “while assessing the purported outcomes of our efforts with students is probably the most important assessment we do, it is seldom done, rarely done well,

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and when it is done, the results are seldom used effectively” (p. 217). Key questions arise: How do institutions of higher education measure the effectiveness of their internationalization efforts? And specifically, how can these institutions know if they are graduating interculturally competent students? Even more important, what does it mean to be interculturally competent? Furthermore, what works and what doesn't in the way of assessment, particularly in regard to assessing students' intercultural competence?

This article details a research study that examined some of these questions through the collection and analysis of data on the definitions and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization in higher education. As one scholar wrote, “competence can be measured. But its measurement depends first on its definition” (Klemp, 1979, p. 41). Scholars throughout the past 30 years have defined intercultural competence in its various iterations, but there has not been agreement on how intercultural competence should be defined (Baxter Magolda, 2000; Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 1999; Bennett, 1993; Bradford, Allen, & Beisser, 2000; Byram, 1997; Cavusgil, 1993; Chen, 1987; Chen & Starosta, 1996, 1999; Collier, 1989; Dinges, 1983; Dinniman & Holzner, 1988; English, 1998; Fantini, 2000; Fennes & Hapgood, 1997; Finkelstein, Pickert, Mahoney, & Douglas, 1998; Gudykunst, 1994; Gundling, 2003; Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Hanvey, 1976; Hess, 1994; Hett, 1992; Hoopes, 1979; Hunter, 2004; Kealey, 2003; Kim, 1992; Koester & Olebe, 1989; Kohls, 1996; Kuada, 2004; La Brack, 1993; Lambert, 1994; Lustig & Koester, 2003; Miyahara, 1992; Paige, 1993; Pedersen, 1994; Pusch, 1994; Rosen, Digh, Singer, & Phillips, 2000; Ruben, 1976; Samovar & Porter, 2001; Satterlee, 1999; Spitzberg, 1989; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Stewart & Bennett, 1991; Storti, 1997; Tucker, 2001; Wiseman, 2001; Yum, 1994, Zhong, 1998).

One study observed that there is “a need for a clearer definition of the concept of intercultural competence” (Kuada, 2004, p. 10). The director of Educational Testing Service's Center for Assessment of Educational Progress concurred, noting that “once a definition (of global competence) has been agreed upon, experts will have to decide what the components of the definition are” so that they can then be measured (Lapointe, 1994, p. 275). This study is the first to document consensus among top intercultural scholars and academic administrators on what constitutes intercultural competence and the best ways to measure this complex construct, thus representing the first crucial step toward measurement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Assessment of student outcomes of internationalization can be placed within the theoretical program logic model (Rogers, 2000) in which outcomes become one step beyond outputs, defined as the citing of numbers as indicators of successful

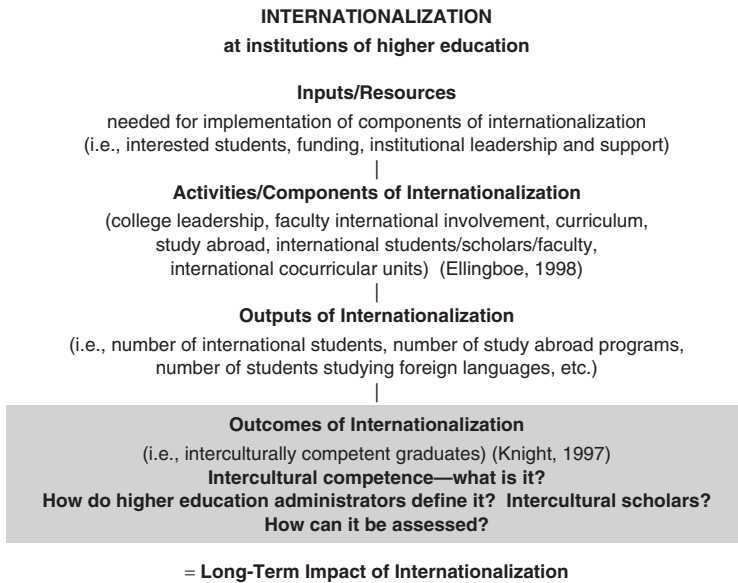


Figure 1. General Program Logic Model Applied to Internationalization

Source: Deardorff (2004).

internationalization efforts. In addressing specific outcomes of internationalization efforts, long-term impact can be more fully determined. Figure 1 contains the model as it relates to this study, with the shaded area being the focus of this research. Although this model may not necessarily recognize the distinction between the organizational interests and needs of administrators and the cognitive interests of scholars, it does frame one way of viewing how learning measures may be brought more into alignment with organizational measures.

METHOD

This study used a combination of two research methodologies in analyzing the concept and measurement of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization efforts at institutions of higher education. The two methods were a questionnaire completed by U.S. institutional administrators of internationalization strategies and a Delphi technique used to develop consensus by a panel of nationally and internationally known intercultural scholars on a definition and components of intercultural competence, as well as recommended ways for assessing intercultural competence. As Linstone and Turoff (1975) describe it, the Delphi method is a process for structuring anonymous communication within a larger

group of individuals in an effort to achieve consensus among group members. As in the case of this study, the Delphi technique can be used when there is a need for identified experts who are not geographically close to arrive at consensus on a particular issue; the structured nature of the process allows all members to contribute equally without dominance by a few.

A total of 73 U.S. postsecondary institutions initially received invitations through NAFSA: Association of International Educators and the American Council on Education (ACE) to participate in the first phase of this study. These institutions were identified as those that were strongly committed to internationalization, either through their participation in ACE's Internationalization Collaborative or through their national recognition by NAFSA as being an internationalized institution. Twenty-four of the 73 institutions (33%) chose to participate, representing a wide variety of institutions from across the United States, from community colleges to large research universities. The 11-item questionnaire, completed by midlevel and senior-level administrators, included both closed and open-ended questions about how that institution addressed intercultural competence as a student outcome. Data from the informational questionnaires were summarized and analyzed using descriptive statistics for overall trends and patterns so as to give a "snapshot" of what is currently being done in defining and assessing intercultural competence as an outcome of internationalization efforts at institutions of higher education in the United States.

The questionnaire also asked administrators to identify nationally and internationally known intercultural scholars from the intercultural field for participation in the Delphi study. This was one method used to generate names of top intercultural scholars who were later invited to participate in the second phase of the study. Names of top intercultural scholars were also generated through recommendations of other scholars, through an extensive literature review, and from those scholars included in the International Academy of Intercultural Research. From the names generated through these lists, 37 scholars received multiple nominations and were invited to participate in the Delphi study. Selection of participants for a Delphi study is crucial to the overall validity of the study (Dalkey, Rourke, Lewis, & Snyder, 1972), which is why a variety of means were used to generate the list of scholars invited to participate as members of the Delphi panel.

Twenty-three intercultural scholars (62%) accepted the invitation and participated in a three-round Delphi study. The 23 scholars included those with doctorates in a variety of disciplines, including communication, political science, education, international relations, anthropology, political science, psychology, and business. All have written books and/or articles on intercultural topics. Several are active cross-cultural trainers, and 2 have been involved directly in international education administration. One is currently a university president, as well as an expert on intercultural competence. Twenty-one are from the United States, 1 is in Canada, and 1 is in the

United Kingdom. All are known nationally or internationally in the intercultural field. In fact, a study published in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (Hart, 1999) provided a list of the 20 most cited authors in the intercultural field, of which one third were involved in this study, including 2 of the top 3 most influential authors in the intercultural field as defined by that study.

These scholars represent a Western and mostly U.S.-centric view of intercultural competence, a view in which such competence resides largely within the individual. Some scholars, particularly from Asia, have engaged in limited work on the definition of communication (not necessarily intercultural) competence that is derived from other cultural contexts. Oftentimes, the unit of analysis in Asian cultures is not the individual but rather the group or one's interpersonal relationships (Miyahara, 1992; Yum, 1994). For example, Samovar, Porter, and Stefani (1998) note an article by G. Chen (1993) in which the author stresses that harmony is the chief goal of human behavior and thus communication competence would ultimately result in harmony in relationships with others. Thus, given that most definitions of intercultural competence reflect a distinctively Western perspective, it was anticipated that the data from this research would be reflective of the scholars' cultural context.

The Delphi participants remained anonymous to each other throughout the process so as to reduce respondent bias; however, permission was sought from each participant to reveal his or her identity at the end of the study. Names of those who gave their permission to acknowledge their participation can be found in Table 1.

The first round of the Delphi study involved two open-ended questions on the definition of *intercultural competence* and best ways to assess it. The second round reflected the data collected in Round 1, and data were rated by the scholars on a 4-point Likert-type scale (4 = *highly relevant/important* and 1 = *not relevant/important to intercultural competence*). The third round involved accepting or rejecting the data collected and analyzed in Round 2. Institutional respondents from the first phase of the study also participated in the last round of the Delphi study to indicate whether they agreed with the conclusions reached by the intercultural scholars.

Data from Round 3 of the Delphi study were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed using two different methods—frequency distribution and Pearson's chi-square test—in an effort to determine the prescribed range for group consensus. To determine the frequency distribution, frequencies were first tabulated for each item from each group. A summary of the frequencies per item per group was tabulated in respective bar charts. Through analysis of the bar charts, it was determined that the 80% agreement mark was the appropriate prescribed range for reaching consensus for both groups.

Pearson's chi-squared test was used to analyze the results of this final round as yet another way to determine the items on which consensus was obtained through a

Table 1 Intercultural Scholars Participating in This Study

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following intercultural scholars who graciously shared their time and expertise as expert members of the Delphi panel:

Janet Bennett, Intercultural Communication Institute, Oregon
Michael Byram, University of Durham, England
Guo-ming Chen, University of Rhode Island
Mary Jane Collier, University of Denver
Mitchell Hammer, American University
Daniel J. Kealey, Centre for Intercultural Learning, Canadian Foreign Service Institute, Canada
Jolene Koester, California State University, Northridge
L. Robert Kohls, Institute for Intercultural Leadership, California
Bruce La Brack, University of the Pacific
Josef Mestenhauser, University of Minnesota
Robert Moran, Thunderbird, American Graduate School of International Management
R. Michael Paige, University of Minnesota
Paul Pedersen, Syracuse University
Margaret Pusch, Intercultural Communication Institute, Oregon
Brian Spitzberg, San Diego State University
Craig Storti, Craig Storti & Associates, Maryland
Harry Triandis, University of Illinois
Gary Weaver, American University
Richard Wiseman, California State University, Fullerton
... and four other intercultural scholars who served on the panel but did not wish to be acknowledged

prescribed range established by the probability value calculated through Pearson's chi-squared test. One purpose of Pearson's chi-squared test is to compare expected frequencies to actual obtained frequencies (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993). Pearson's chi-squared test was performed for each item to which panelists responded and again for each item to which the practitioners responded. Responses were placed in a contingency table for each item, and a probability value was calculated for each against the null hypotheses of equal probability of response. Those items with a probability value of .05 or less were retained from Round 3. Those with a probability value of higher than .05 were discarded as items that did not have consensus.

The results of both the frequency distribution and Pearson's chi-squared test were used to compare responses of expert participants and practitioner participants, as well as to assess overall areas of consensus by both. A final listing of accepted items was established based on the results of this last round of the Delphi study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected and analyzed in this study, the following key findings emerged.

Finding 1

There were a variety of opinions and definitions among administrators as to what constitutes intercultural competence. Most preferred a more general definition of the construct as opposed to specific, delineated components as to exactly what constitutes intercultural knowledge, for example. The reason most often cited for a more general definition of intercultural competence is that administrators need an institutional definition that works with all students in all situations, regardless of their majors.

Nine definitions of intercultural competence, culled from intercultural literature, were provided to administrators who participated in this study. The definition deemed most applicable to institutions' internationalization strategies was one derived from Byram's (1997) work on intercultural competence. It received an average rating of 3.5 out of 4.0 and was summarized as follows: "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (Byram, 1997, p. 34). The second highest rated definition received an average rating of 3.3 and can be summarized as follows: "Five components: World knowledge, foreign language proficiency, cultural empathy, approval of foreign people and cultures, ability to practice one's profession in an international setting" (Lambert, 1994, as cited in Deardorff, 2004, p. 230). In addition, several schools had developed institutional definitions of intercultural competence that were general in nature and contained several common elements. The top three common elements were the awareness, valuing, and understanding of cultural differences; experiencing other cultures; and self-awareness of one's own culture. These common elements stress the underlying importance of cultural awareness, both of one's own as well as others' cultures.

It is interesting to note the variety of terminology used by administrators to refer to the concept of intercultural competence, with more than six different terms cited by administrators, including cross-cultural competence, global competence, intercultural competence, and global citizenship. Though these terms are similar, there remain subtle differences in their definitions. It is apparent that consensus has not yet been reached among administrators as to what terminology is best to use.

Finding 2

There was an even greater breadth of intercultural competence definitions among intercultural scholars than among the administrators, with a wide variety of definitions put forward. Based on the data generated from intercultural scholars through the Delphi study, the top-rated definition was one in which intercultural competence was defined as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills,

and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194). There were numerous other statements developed by the scholars regarding intercultural competence, which received 85% or higher agreement, including the ability to shift one’s frame of reference appropriately, the ability to achieve one’s goals to some degree, and behaving appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations. The definitions seemed to focus primarily on communication and behavior in intercultural situations.

Of the specific components of intercultural competence noted, many of them addressed an individual’s personal attributes, such as curiosity, general openness, and respect for other cultures. Other delineated components involved cultural awareness, various adaptive traits, and cultural knowledge (both culture-specific knowledge as well as deep cultural knowledge).

One surprising result of this study was the specific skills that emerged through consensus, which included skills to analyze, interpret, and relate, as well as skills to listen and observe. Cognitive skills emerged, including comparative thinking skills and cognitive flexibility. These skills point to the importance of process in acquiring intercultural competence and the attention that needs to be paid to developing these critical skills. This finding confirms the writing of Yershova, DeJeagbere, and Mestenhauser (2000), in which they argue that the intercultural perspective along with intellectual competencies is integral to developing intercultural competence.

In regard to specific components of intercultural competence, the intercultural scholars in particular seemed to feel strongly that one component alone is not enough to ensure competence (i.e., knowledge by itself). Table 2 contains all items receiving 80% or higher acceptance by the top intercultural scholars in this study. These results are very important findings of this study, as there has previously been no consensus among intercultural scholars as to what constitutes intercultural competence. It is important to note that only one element received 100% agreement from the intercultural scholars, which was “the understanding of others’ world views.” This substantiates other literature that upholds respect for other worldviews as essential to intercultural competence, where worldview is described as basic perceptions and understandings of the world (Fong & Furuto, 2001; Ibrahim, 1985; Sue & Sue, 1990).

Finding 3

All institutions in this study agreed that it is important to assess students’ intercultural competence. Thirty-eight percent already assess students’ intercultural competence, and there was surprising consistency among methods used. Top assessment methods currently being used include student interviews (used by eight out of nine institutions), followed by student papers and presentations, student portfolios, observation of students by others/host culture, professor evaluations (in courses), and pretests and posttests. An important finding from this study is that these institutions used a variety of methods to assess students’ intercultural

Table 2 Intercultural Competence Elements With 80% to 100% Agreement Among Top Intercultural Scholars

Intercultural Competence				
ACC	REJ	M	SD	Item
19	1	3.8	0.5	Ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes
19	1	3.6	0.8	Ability to shift frame of reference appropriately and adapt behavior to cultural context; adaptability, expandability, and flexibility of one's frame of reference/filter
19	1	3.4	0.7	Ability to identify behaviors guided by culture and engage in new behaviors in other cultures even when behaviors are unfamiliar given a person's own socialization
18	2	3.4	1.0	Behaving appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations based on one's knowledge, skills, and motivation
17	3	3.4	0.8	Ability to achieve one's goals to some degree through constructive interaction in an intercultural context
16	4	3.6	0.6	Good interpersonal skills exercised interculturally; the sending and receiving of messages that are accurate and appropriate
16	4	3.1	1.0	Transformational process toward enlightened global citizenship that involves intercultural adroitness (behavioral aspect focusing on communication skills), intercultural awareness (cognitive aspect of understanding cultural differences), and intercultural sensitivity (focus on positive emotion toward cultural difference)
Specific Components of Intercultural Competence				
ACC	REJ	M	SD	Item
20	0	3.4	0.7	Understanding others' worldviews
19	1	3.8	0.6	Cultural self-awareness and capacity for self-assessment
19	1	3.7	0.6	Adaptability and adjustment to new cultural environment
19	1	3.5	0.6	Skills to listen and observe
19	1	3.4	0.8	General openness toward intercultural learning and to people from other cultures
19	1	3.4	0.8	Ability to adapt to varying intercultural communication and learning styles

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

ACC	REJ	M	SD	Item
18	2	3.8	0.4	Flexibility
18	2	3.8	0.4	Skills to analyze, interpret, and relate
18	2	3.7	0.6	Tolerating and engaging ambiguity
18	2	3.6	0.6	Deep knowledge and understanding of culture (one's own and others')
18	2	3.5	0.8	Respect for other cultures
17	3	3.5	0.9	Cross-cultural empathy
17	3	3.4	1.0	Understanding the value of cultural diversity
17	3	3.3	0.9	Understanding of role and impact of culture and the impact of situational, social, and historical contexts involved
17	3	3.2	1.0	Cognitive flexibility—ability to switch frames from etic to emic and back again
17	2	3.0	0.8	Sociolinguistic competence (awareness of relation between language and meaning in societal context)
17	3	3.0	1.1	Mindfulness
16	4	3.6	0.8	Withholding judgment
16	4	3.4	0.8	Curiosity and discovery
16	4	3.2	0.9	Learning through interaction
16	4	3.1	1.2	Ethnorelative view
16	4	2.9	0.9	Culture-specific knowledge and understanding host culture's traditions

Note: ACC = accept; REJ = reject.

competence, with an average of five different assessment methods used per institution. Figure 2 contains the results of this finding.

The results of the administrators' participation in the last round of the Delphi study indicated that administrators achieved 100% agreement on four specific assessment methods: observation by others/host culture, case studies, judgment by self and others, and student interviews. Administrators were nearly unanimous (95%) in using a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures to assess students' intercultural competence. The following assessment methods also received 95% acceptance among administrators: analysis of narrative diaries, self-report instruments, other-report instruments, triangulation (multiple methods), and a bottom-up approach involving such techniques as focus groups, dialogues, and workshops.

Finding 4

According to the intercultural scholars, the best way to assess intercultural competence is through a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures (rated 3.7 out of

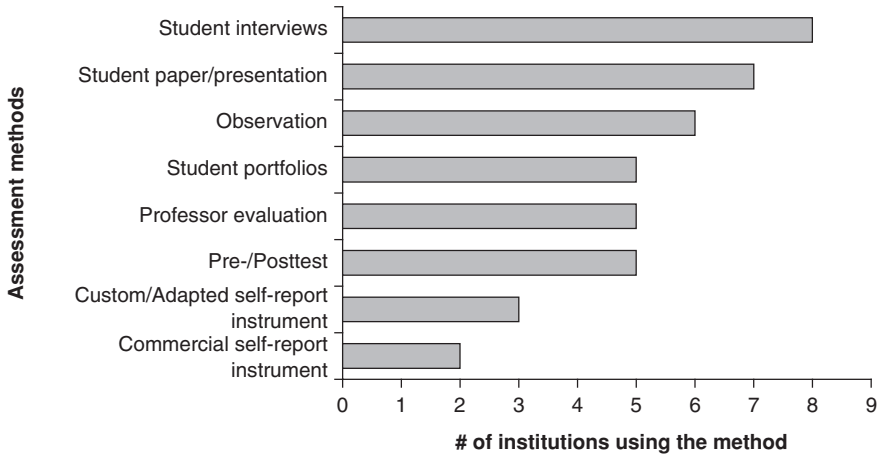


Figure 2. Intercultural Competence Assessment Methods Used by Institutions

4.0). Specifically, case studies and interviews received the strongest agreement (90%), followed by analysis of narrative diaries, self-report instruments, observation by others/host culture, and judgment by self and others (all at 85% agreement). Table 3 contains further details.

Finding 5

Generally, intercultural scholars and higher education administrators agreed on the definitions, components, and assessment methods for intercultural competence that emerged through this study. However, administrators accepted a larger percentage of the items pertaining to the definition and assessment of intercultural competence areas, with the scholars rejecting 19 items that were accepted by the administrators, based on a 70% acceptance rate by both groups. Those items on which there was disagreement between administrators and scholars included the following components of intercultural competence: accomplished language and cultural learner, gaining trust and confidence of others, comparative thinking skills, operating within the rules of the host culture, and cross-cultural scholarship.

Assessment methods rejected by scholars but accepted by administrators included quantitative measurements, pre- and posttests, other-report measures, and critical incidents and essays. In fact, it is important to note that only 65% of the scholars felt that pre- and posttesting should be used as a way to assess intercultural competence, whereas administrators (90%) overwhelmingly agreed on the use of pre- and posttests. The reasons for this controversial view on pre- and posttesting are numerous and warrant further investigation. The premise is that administrators find the use of pre- and posttesting generally easy to administer

Table 3 Assessment Items With 80% to 100% Agreement Among Top Intercultural Scholars

Ways to Assess Intercultural Competence				
ACC	REJ	M	SD	Item
18	2	3.2	0.9	Case studies
18	2	2.9	1.0	Interviews
17	3	3.7	0.8	Mix of quantitative and qualitative measures
17	3	3.4	0.7	Qualitative measures
17	3	3.2	0.9	Analysis of narrative diaries
17	3	3.2	0.9	Self-report instruments
17	3	3.2	0.9	Observation by others/host culture
17	3	3.1	1.0	Judgment by self and others
16	4	3.1	1.1	Developing specific indicators for each component and dimension of intercultural competence and evidence of each indicator
16	4	3.0	1.2	Triangulation (use of multiple data collection efforts as corroborative evidence for validity of qualitative research findings)
Issues Raised by Scholars in Assessing Intercultural Competence				
ACC	REJ	M	SD	Item
19	1	3.6	0.5	Intercultural competence assessment involves more than just observable performance
19	1	3.4	0.6	It is important to consider the cultural and social implications of assessing intercultural competence
17	3	3.6	0.6	It is important to determine who measures intercultural competence, who is the locus of evaluation, in what context, for what purpose, to what benefit, the time frame involved, the level of cooperation, and the level of abstraction
16	4	3.2	0.9	It is important to measure the degrees of intercultural competence
16	4	3.1	0.7	When assessing intercultural competence, it is important to analyze the impact of situational, social, and historical contexts involved

Note: ACC = accept; REJ = reject.

and are hopeful to find that the intervention (i.e., study abroad) has indeed made a difference, thus providing a more meaningful and measurable outcome. Delphi participants, however, expressed skepticism over the use of self-report instruments (which are often used in pre- and posttesting), particularly as the sole method, to measure the outcomes of an intervention. Furthermore, the results may not accurately reflect the impact of a particular intervention but may be the

result of a combination of factors. Further research is needed in exploring the use and effectiveness of pre- and posttesting approaches.

Both administrators and scholars rejected seven items, including statements about placing the concept within a theoretical frame, measuring intercultural competence holistically as well as within a specific situation or context, and avoiding the use of standardized competency instruments. Both groups agreed that assessment of intercultural competence involves more than observable performance, that it is important to measure the degrees of competence, and that it is important to consider the cultural and social implications when assessing intercultural competence.

Although 65% of both the administrators and intercultural scholars accepted the statement *measuring intercultural competence is specific to context, situation, and relation* (65% was defined as not constituting consensus), there was general agreement on the importance of analyzing the situational, social, and historical contexts when assessing intercultural competence.

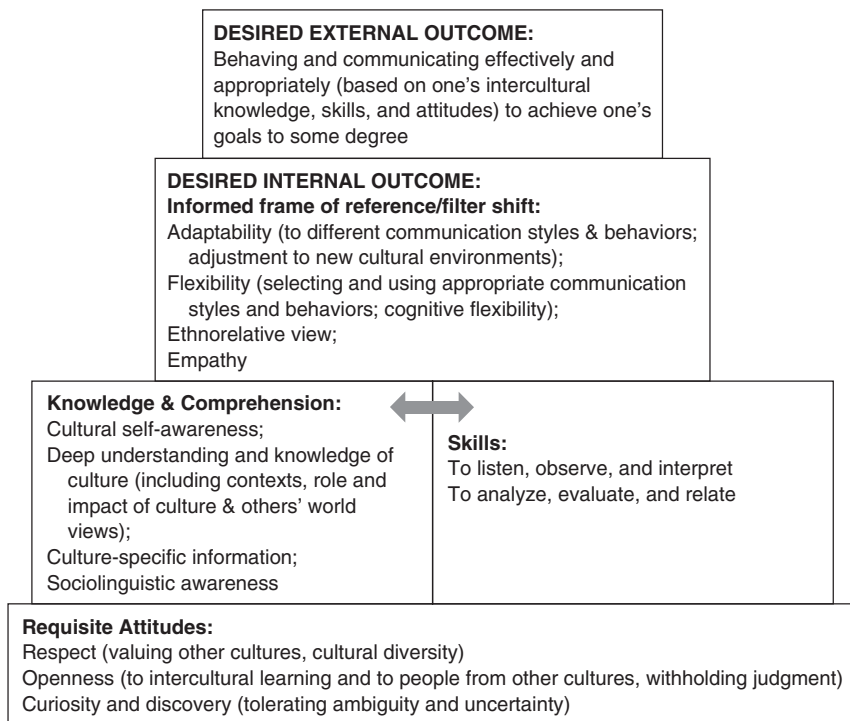
CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions can be made.

Conclusion 1

Intercultural scholars and higher education administrators did not define intercultural competence in relation to specific components (i.e., what specifically constitutes intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes). Instead, both groups preferred definitions that were broader in nature. Although this may be a surprising conclusion, this is actually in keeping with the literature in that most definitions are more general. However, it is important to note that a key criticism of existing definitions is that they are either too general or provide a disjointed list of attributes. This criticism may be responsible, in part, for the lack of specificity on the part of the intercultural scholars. Furthermore, the research methodology (Delphi technique) used in gaining scholars' consensus often leads to more general results rather than more specific ones, as in this case, which is one limitation of the methodology used in this study.

One of the key motivations for initiating this research was the assumption that specific components of intercultural competence needed to be delineated for institutions to assess students' intercultural competence. The findings actually run contrary to this initial assumption. Because both administrators and intercultural scholars preferred more general conceptions of intercultural competence, it appears that further research is needed on the development of this definition. In reviewing the specific components developed by the scholars in this study, it can be concluded that even these components are more general in nature (e.g., culture-specific knowledge, flexibility). Thus, further research is needed to delve more deeply into the terminology used in the actual definition of intercultural competence.



- Move from personal level (attitude) to interpersonal/interactive level (outcomes)
- Degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of underlying elements

Figure 3. Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence

Source: Deardorff (2004).

Based on the literature review and the findings of this study, what can be concluded about intercultural competence? It is important to note that 80% or more of the intercultural scholars and administrators in this study were able to reach consensus on 22 essential elements of intercultural competence (Table 2). Those key elements primarily involved communication and behavior in intercultural contexts.

There are many ways that the information in Table 2 could be organized. Using the items on which 80% or more of both the intercultural scholars and administrators agreed, an attempt was made by the researcher to organize these items into two visual ways of defining intercultural competence that could be used by administrators and others in their work in developing and assessing intercultural competence.

The visual representation (Figure 3) of intercultural competence eliminates long fragmented lists by placing components of intercultural competence within a visual framework that can be entered from various levels. However, having components of the lower levels enhances upper levels. Process orientation (mindfulness)

throughout is key—this means being aware of the learning that takes place at each level and the necessary process skills that are needed for acquisition of intercultural competence.

Though individuals can enter these frameworks at any particular point, attitude is a fundamental starting point (Byram, 1997), as illustrated in both of these visual representations. It has been referred to as the affective filter in other models (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Hadley, 2001). Lynch and Hanson (1998) highlight the fundamental role of attitude in intercultural competence when they wrote, “After all the books have been read and the skills learned and practiced, the cross-cultural effectiveness of each of us will vary. And it will vary more by what we bring to the learning than by what we have learned” (p. 510). Okayama, Furuto, and Edmondson (2001) reinforce the foundational importance of attitude by stating that

what may be most important is . . . to maintain culturally competent attitudes as we continue to attain new knowledge and skills while building new relationships. Awareness, the valuing of all cultures, and a willingness to make changes are underlying attitudes that support everything that can be taught or learned. (p. 97)

The following two models concur with these scholars in emphasizing the importance of attitude to the learning that follows. Specifically, the attitudes of openness, respect (valuing all cultures), and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity) are viewed as fundamental to intercultural competence.

This pyramid model of intercultural competence (Figure 3) allows for degrees of competence (the more components acquired and developed increases probability of greater degree of intercultural competence as an external outcome), and although it provides some delineation of the definition, it is not limited to those components included in the model. This model enables the development of specific assessment indicators within a context or situation while also providing a basis for general assessment of intercultural competence, thus embracing both general and specific definitions of intercultural competence. This model of intercultural competence moves from the individual level of attitudes and personal attributes to the interactive cultural level in regard to the outcomes. The specific skills delineated in this model are skills for acquiring and processing knowledge about other cultures as well as one’s own culture. The model also emphasizes the importance of attitude and the comprehension of knowledge (Bloom, 1965).

A unique element of this pyramid model of intercultural competence is its emphasis on the internal as well as external outcomes of intercultural competence. The internal outcome, which involves an internal shift in frame of reference, although not requisite, enhances the external (observable) outcome of intercultural competence. The external outcome can be described as essentially “behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations” (Deardorff, 2004, p. 196). Definitions of *effective* and *appropriate* are taken from Spitzberg’s (1989) work,

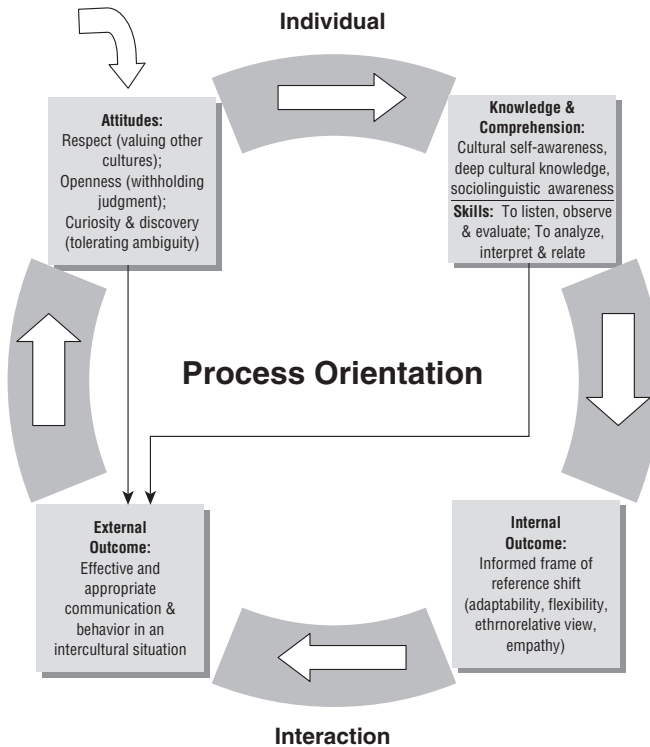


Figure 4. Process Model of Intercultural Competence

Source: Deardorff (2004).

Note: Begin with attitudes; move from individual level (attitudes) to interaction level (outcomes). Degree of intercultural competence depends on degree of attitudes, knowledge/comprehension, and skills achieved.

where appropriateness is the avoidance of violating valued rules and effectiveness is the achievement of valued objectives.

It is interesting to compare this pyramid model of intercultural competence to the four developmental stages developed by the American Council on International Intercultural Education (1996). The four developmental stages of the global competence development process were listed as follows: (a) recognition of global systems and their interconnectedness (including openness to other cultures, values, and attitudes), (b) intercultural skills and experiences, (c) general knowledge of history and world events, and (d) detailed areas studies specialization (i.e., language). The administrators who developed these stages recognized that the first stage was most important to all global learners. The first stage stressed the importance of openness, which is the same starting point as the two visual models presented in this article. Intercultural skills and general knowledge are also

noted in the developmental stages, which are accounted for in the two visual models.

Another way of organizing and displaying the final data is the process model in Figure 4 developed by Deardorff (2004). This process model of intercultural competence, while containing the same elements as the first pyramid model of intercultural competence, depicts the complexity of acquiring intercultural competence in outlining more of the movement and process orientation that occurs between the various elements. This model denotes movement from the personal level to the interpersonal level (intercultural interaction). As in the pyramid model, it is possible to go from attitudes and/or attitudes and skills/knowledge directly to the external outcome, but the degree of appropriateness and effectiveness of the outcome may not be nearly as high as when the entire cycle is completed and begins again. The unique element of internal as well as external outcomes is also maintained with this process model, and in fact, it would be possible for an individual to achieve the external outcome of behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations without having fully achieved the internal outcome of a shift in the frame of reference. However, the degree of appropriateness and effectiveness would be more limited than if the internal outcome had also been achieved.

This process model also demonstrates the ongoing process of intercultural competence development, which means it is a continual process of improvement, and as such, one may never achieve ultimate intercultural competence. As with the pyramid model, the attitudinal element in this process model is the most critical, and as such, attitudes are indicated as the starting point in this cycle.

There are, of course, adaptations that can and will be made to these models, and it will remain to future research to determine the usefulness of these models. And as with any model, there are limitations to both. Nonetheless, these models are attempts to organize the components of intercultural competence agreed on by both intercultural scholars and administrators.

Conclusion 2

Based on the overall consensus of both the scholars and administrators, it can be concluded that intercultural competence can indeed be measured. Furthermore, it is important to measure degrees (levels) of intercultural competence (as discussed in Pottinger, 1979). It can be concluded that it is important to measure intercultural competence for a period of time as opposed to one point in time. However, measuring intercultural competence is complex, and several conclusions can be made on assessing intercultural competence based on the results of this study.

Given the findings of this study, it is best to use multiple assessment methods and not just one method, such as an inventory. In fact, it is important to note that an inventory alone is not a sufficient measurement of intercultural competence according to

the results of this study. Recommended assessment methods are primarily qualitative in nature, including the use of interviews, observation, and case studies, as well as the possible use of standardized competency instruments. Quantitative methods of measurement are somewhat controversial with administrators and intercultural scholars, and there is much stronger agreement between both groups on the use of qualitative measures. Both groups agree that intercultural competence can be measured in its separate components and not holistically, as some of the literature had indicated.

In measuring intercultural competence, it is important first to determine who is engaged in the actual measurement (including identifying their cultural biases), who is the locus of evaluation, in what context, for what purpose, to what benefit, the time frame involved (e.g., ongoing assessment), the level of cooperation, and the level of abstraction. Furthermore, it is important to determine how the assessment will be used and how measurement methods will account for multiple competencies and multiple cultural identities within individuals. It is vital for the assessment method to match the definition devised for intercultural competence (i.e., more specific methods for more specific definitions and more general methods for more general definitions). This leads to the importance of developing indicators (perhaps in specific contexts) and delineated objectives and criteria for measurement if definitions and assessment methods are more specific. An assessment guide for intercultural competence has been developed based on the results of this study and can be obtained from the researcher.

Conclusion 3

The definition of intercultural competence continues to evolve, which is perhaps one reason why this construct has been so difficult to define. The panelists' opinions and definitions have changed throughout the years, so what was written 10 to 15 years ago by these scholars may not be considered valid anymore by the author, and in fact, several panelists expressed this explicitly to the researcher. Definitions and assessment methods need to be reassessed on an ongoing basis. Just as culture is ever changing, scholars' opinions on intercultural competence change with time. It is important for research and practice to stay current with scholars' research and thought processes on this construct.

Conclusion 4

Intercultural competence continues to be a complex topic fraught with controversial issues. This study highlighted several issues that remain controversial, including the following on which intercultural scholars and administrators were not able to achieve consensus, sometimes even within their own group:

- the use of quantitative methods to assess competence
- the use of standardized competency instruments

- the value of a theoretical frame in which to place intercultural competence
- the use of pre- and posttests and knowledge tests to assess intercultural competence
- the role and importance of language in intercultural competence
- whether measuring intercultural competence is specific to context, situation, and relation
- whether this construct can and should be measured holistically and/or in separate components

Among the controversial items, the role and importance of language in intercultural competence as well as the use of pre- and posttests in assessing intercultural competence have a direct impact on the international education field. Further research is needed to resolve these and other controversial issues related to intercultural competence.

Recommendations and Implications

For practice. Implications of this study for practitioners in international education include the following:

1. Defining and measuring students' intercultural competence will help not only to measure the effectiveness of internationalization strategies, but at a minimum, it gives meaning to outputs (numbers) that are commonly cited as evidence of successful internationalization efforts. Ultimately, the exploration of intercultural competence raises the question of how the knowledge, skills, and attitudes attributed to intercultural competence vary from those attributed to those acquired through a liberal arts education.
2. Intercultural competence needs to be identified as a student outcome of internationalization and assessed throughout time—not just at one or two points in time. The development of intercultural competence needs to be recognized as an ongoing process and not a direct result of solely one experience, such as study abroad.
3. To assess intercultural competence, the concept first needs to be defined by the institution, keeping in mind that there are multiple definitions of intercultural competence from a variety of academic disciplines as well as the intercultural field, and it is important for administrators to at least be aware of these definitions instead of re-creating a definition without any influence or grounding from the intercultural field. Furthermore, administrators need to revisit institutional definitions of intercultural competence to keep definitions current and relevant.
4. In defining and assessing intercultural competence, it may be helpful for administrators to develop specific indicators of intercultural competence in specific situations. At a minimum, assessment methods need to correspond with the definition (i.e., more specific methods for more specific definitions and more general methods for more general definitions).
5. Intercultural competence is a complex construct that involves more than one component. For example, knowledge or language does not guarantee intercultural competence. Thus, internationalization strategies need to address the development of the components of intercultural competence in a variety of ways (i.e., course work, study abroad, on-campus interaction with students from different cultural backgrounds, etc.) as well as the actual process for acquiring intercultural competence, including necessary cognitive skills.

6. It is important for administrators to use multiple assessment methods in measuring intercultural competence—both in and out of the classroom—that recognize the degrees of intercultural competence. Thus, for example, institutions that offer “global competence certificates” need to have multiple assessment methods in place that measure students’ global competence development throughout time (which leads to a further question as to whether an institution can certify students’ global and intercultural competence, given the complexities of the construct).
7. Given that there is no real agreement among administrators on the terminology to use in referring to intercultural competence, it will be important for administrators to explore the implications of using different terminology to refer to intercultural competence and how the different terms are interpreted. (For example, what are the implications of using “cross-cultural competence” vs. “intercultural competence?”)
8. To assist in assessing intercultural competence, an assessment inventory guide was developed by the researcher as a result of this study and can be obtained from the researcher. The assessment guide was also published in the *International Educator* (Deardorff, 2005).

For further research. Questions and research areas raised by this study that are recommended for further study include the following:

1. How do specific internationalization strategies affect the development and preparation of global citizens who are interculturally competent? How is intercultural competence developed in students through internationalization efforts?
2. How are the assessment methods noted in this study specifically implemented to assess intercultural competence? Further study is needed on the specifics and effectiveness of these assessment methods.
3. How does the developmental stage of an individual affect the assessment of that individual’s intercultural competence? More research is needed on the intersection of an individual’s development stages and the acquisition and development of intercultural competence.
4. What are the implications of assessment results? How do administrators use assessment results to benefit the students, the institution, and internationalization strategies?
5. How do college students perceive and define intercultural competence? How do they perceive the development, value, and benefit of intercultural competence?
6. In this study, the expert panels comprised primarily Western scholars from the intercultural field. What are the perspectives of other scholars, including those from non-Western perspectives and from different fields, including service fields (i.e., health care, public safety)?
7. Two models of intercultural competence were developed in this study as a result of the data collected. More research is needed to refine these models as well as to determine their usefulness to higher education administrators in identifying and assessing intercultural competence as a student outcome.

8. How does the development of intercultural competence affect global workforce development?
9. How do other current and future studies on the definition and delineation of intercultural competence correspond with the findings of this study?
10. Looking more broadly at the overall topic of assessing meaningful outcomes of internationalization efforts, is there consensus on the criteria of an internationalized institution? What are the most effective ways of assessing meaningful outcomes of internationalization strategies at postsecondary institutions?

SUMMARY

This article summarizes the first study to document consensus among top intercultural scholars on the definition and assessment methods of intercultural competence. It is hoped that this study's findings, along with the two models of intercultural competence developed from the results of the study, will benefit academic administrators in developing and assessing student outcomes of internationalization at their institutions.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darla K. Deardorff has a doctorate in higher education, specializing in international education. She is an international education administrator and instructor at Duke University as well as director of the Association of International Education Administrators. She also currently holds an elected national office with NAFSA: Association of International Educators. She is a professional cross-cultural trainer and English as a second language instructor/teacher trainer. Her international experience includes working in Germany, Japan, and Switzerland, and she has given many presentations in the United States and abroad. Her research interests include outcomes assessment of internationalization and intercultural competence, and she has published on various aspects of internationalization assessment.