

## INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AND EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: RETHINKING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION

**Sokol Mariana**

*Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor,  
Head of Foreign Languages Department  
Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatyuk National Pedagogical University,  
Ukraine*

*ORCID: 0000-0003-3876-026X*

*Web of Science Researcher ID: G-4104-2018*

*Scopus Author ID: 57209243195*

**Storozhenko Vasyl**

*PhD student  
Foreign Languages Department  
Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatyuk, National Pedagogical University,  
Ukraine*

**Sokol Yaryna**

*Student  
University of Rzeszow,  
Poland*

**Abstract.** *Intercultural communication competence (ICC) has become a cornerstone of modern higher education, reflecting the growing need for professionals capable of navigating global diversity with sensitivity and adaptability. This paper explores ICC from a theoretical standpoint, situating it within contemporary models of learning and communication. Drawing upon frameworks by Bennett (1993), Deardorff (2006), and Jackson (2014), it conceptualizes ICC as an integrative process involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The discussion highlights the role of higher education in cultivating reflective, empathetic, and globally competent graduates through experiential and transformative learning approaches. The paper argues that fostering intercultural competence requires not only curriculum innovation but also institutional commitment to inclusive pedagogy and professional identity formation.*

**Keywords:** *intercultural communication competence, global citizenship, transformative learning, educational theory, reflective practice, intercultural pedagogy*

The accelerating processes of globalization, digitalization, and migration have transformed higher education into a dynamic intercultural arena. Universities today are not merely spaces of academic instruction but laboratories of cultural interaction. Within this context, intercultural communication competence (ICC) emerges as a vital attribute that bridges personal development, social integration, and professional readiness. While traditional conceptions of communication emphasized linguistic proficiency, recent scholarship underscores the multidimensional nature of intercultural competence encompassing knowledge of cultural systems, emotional

intelligence, empathy, and ethical sensitivity. As Deardorff (2006) asserts, ICC develops through iterative cycles of reflection and engagement, where learners internalize respect for diversity and demonstrate external behaviors of effective interaction. Higher education, therefore, plays a decisive role in fostering environments where such transformative learning can take place.

The theoretical foundation of ICC draws from a range of interdisciplinary perspectives. Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) views cultural understanding as a continuum, progressing from ethnocentric orientations toward ethnorelativism where difference is not merely tolerated but valued. Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence complements this view by highlighting internal processes (attitudes, values, openness) and external outcomes (effective communication, behavior adaptation). From a communicative standpoint, Hua (2014) and Jackson (2014) conceptualize language as both a medium and a marker of cultural identity, suggesting that linguistic interaction inherently reflects cultural worldviews. Sokol (2020) extends this understanding to the educational domain, linking intercultural sensitivity with tolerance and leadership, emphasizing that communicative ethics and empathy are integral to professional growth. Together, these models situate ICC as a dynamic construct shaped by ongoing reflection, intercultural exposure, and ethical responsibility.

The cultivation of ICC in higher education requires a shift from knowledge transmission to transformative learning. Theories of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and reflective practice (Schön, 1983) support the notion that intercultural awareness evolves through engagement, experience, and critical self-reflection. Students must encounter difference not abstractly but through real intercultural interactions that challenge assumptions and expand cognitive and emotional horizons. In this sense, universities serve as incubators of global competence, where curriculum design integrates collaborative learning, international projects, and intercultural dialogue. Faculty development plays an equally vital role: teachers must model intercultural openness and facilitate environments where diversity becomes a learning resource rather than an obstacle.

So, intercultural communication competence represents a bridge between education and global citizenship. It is not merely a transferable skill but a transformative capacity that redefines how individuals understand themselves and others. The theoretical perspectives examined here point to a holistic model of ICC that integrates cognitive insight, affective empathy, and behavioral flexibility. For higher education, this means embedding intercultural learning across all aspects of institutional practice curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and community engagement. By doing so, universities contribute to shaping graduates who are not only professionally competent but also ethically grounded and globally aware. In an age of cultural plurality, fostering intercultural competence is both an educational mandate and a societal imperative.

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