The Development and Validation of a Questionnaire for Measuring English-majored Students' Intercultural Competence in a Vietnamese Higher Education Context

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop an instrument to measure the intercultural competence (IC) of English majors in a formal, interculturally embedded English-language program in Vietnam. To do this, we implemented measures to prepare the item pool and validate the IC instrument. Using a self-report approach, the initial 38-item instrument was verified through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with sample sizes of 274 and 212, respectively, in each phase. The result was a finalized 20-item IC scale with four factors: knowledge of one's own culture; knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication; attitudes (openness, respect, willingness to talk to people from other cultures); and skills (interpreting/relating, analyzing/evaluating). The measurement model exhibited good fit indices (Chi-square/df = 1.62, CFI = 0.96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = 0.05, PCLOSE = 0.26) and acceptable reliability and validity. Hence, the recently developed scale is deemed legitimate and dependable for implementation in the given Vietnamese higher education contexts.

Keywords: Intercultural competence, instrument validation, cultural education, English-majored students, language and culture integration

Introduction

The increasing speed of globalization has made interactions of people from diverse cultural backgrounds more frequent than ever before (Deardorff, 2009). As a result of this global trend, the need for intercultural competence (IC), the ability to communicate effectively with culturally diverse individuals, has emerged in professional contexts (Brislin, 2010; Ilie, 2019). This is the competence to ensure the success of international cooperation, global business, and study abroad (Cushner & Chang, 2015; Kealey et al., 2004; Matveev, 2017; Nero, 2018; Zhang & Zhou, 2019) and harmonized intercultural relationships within domestic settings (Deardorff, 2009; Jackson, 2012).

In preparing the labor force to meet the demands of the contemporary world, educational

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institutions, especially tertiary institutions, should strongly consider innovating their curricula to be more internationalized and intercultural. Among the various solutions to integrate IC into training programs, foreign language (FL) education has long been considered a significant location for IC cultivation due to the widely acknowledged inseparability between language and culture (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999). Since the late 20th century, the "cultural turn" in FL education has greatly affected learning goals, teacher training, and teaching methodologies (Byrnes, 2012). As a result, IC has shifted its status from a supplement to a central objective in language programs (Alptekin, 2002). In English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, there have been frequent arguments for integrating intercultural components, which position IC as one of the main goals of EFL education (Baker, 2012; Dervin & Gross, 2016; Sercu, 2006). The pedagogical focus, therefore, has shifted from building linguistically proficient users to developing "intercultural speakers" (Byram, 1997; Young & Sachdev, 2011) who can successfully navigate cultural boundaries.

In Vietnam, several innovative policies have been issued in response to global transformations in EFL education. Since the Doi Moi reforms in the late 1980s, intercultural elements have gradually received greater attention in the Vietnamese educational system. Since the early 2000s, the rapid development of Vietnam's national economy and its international cooperation with other countries have brought intercultural communication to the forefront of educational discussions (Le, 2014; D. M. H. Nguyen, 2015; Trinh, 2016). The initiation of the National Foreign Language Project (Government of Vietnam, 2008) and the application of the Vietnamese 6-level framework of references for foreign language learning (the VNFR) (MOET of Vietnam, 2014) have officially recognized the roles of FL education towards international communication with its primary aim of equipping learners with abilities to work and cooperate in multilingual and multicultural settings. The focus of FL instructions, therefore, has shifted from pure linguistic competence to intercultural (communicative) competence (L. Nguyen et al., 2016). The importance of IC was also highlighted in the 2018 National School Curriculum, which aligns closely with the VNFR and encourages FL education to achieve communicative competence in a globalized world (Hoang, 2022; MOET of Vietnam, 2018).

Those policies have sparked extensive discussion about integrating culture and IC into FL education at all levels in Vietnam. They have also prompted research on cultural/ intercultural related issues, such as the representation of cultural content in English textbooks (T. T. M. Nguyen et al., 2021; Tran & Huynh, 2025), teachers' perceptions of IC-related pedagogy and classroom practices (Chau & Truong, 2019; Ho, 2011; L. Nguyen, 2014; T. T. N. Nguyen, 2023; Trinh, 2016). In addition, many English major programs in Vietnam have formally integrated IC-related courses into their curricula, such as Country Studies or Cross-cultural Communication courses. Although the existing literature has provided insights into the implementation of intercultural education in Vietnam, it focuses more strongly on policy issues, teachers and administrators' perspectives, and intercultural contents in teaching materials, while minimally addressing the assessment of learners' IC as an educational learning outcome (Ho, 2011, 2014; Pham & Pham, 2022; Vo, 2017). In addition, many existing studies have focused on general EFL learners (Chau, 2020; Vu & Dinh, 2022), while formal IC instruction embedded in programs for English majors has received little discussion.

There are some critical implications raised from such an imbalance in research focus. The lack of empirical data on students' levels of exposure to IC risk policies remains a national aspiration rather than effective practice. In addition, the current IC evaluation instruments were mostly developed and validated in European contexts (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 2000; Hammer & Bennett, 1998) or other Asian settings than Vietnam (T. Y. Chen, 2022; Huang, 2021). These tools may be unable to accurately depict dimensions relevant to the context of Vietnamese EFL learners,

thereby challenging the precision of IC assessment and the diagnosis of program effectiveness. The only attempt, i.e., Vu and Dinh's (2022) tool, aimed to create a context-relevant measure, but its participants were limited to non-English majors, and the validation did not include a CFA phase. The lack of valid and reliable IC assessment tools that are culturally relevant and context-specific presents a critical gap in the Vietnamese EFL education setting. It prevents educators from recognizing learners' needs in IC growth, tracking their developmental progress, and evaluating the effectiveness of IC-embedded programs. Addressing this gap is both empirically and practically essential to ensuring alignment between Vietnamese FL education outcomes and the nation's goals for global integration.

This study addresses this gap by developing and validating an IC assessment tool to measure the perceived levels of English-majored students in the context of Vietnamese FL education. The tool presented explicit attention to the Vietnamese higher education setting, drawing from existing global IC models while integrating context-specific considerations. The development and validation procedures were conducted through structured processes of item generation and two phases of validation, utilizing rigorous statistical techniques, specifically exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). By offering a valid, reliable, and context-relevant IC assessment tool, the study contributes to the IC literature by advancing theoretical understanding of IC evaluation and by advancing the practical application of developing learners' IC in the Vietnamese higher education context.

Literature review

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence (IC) is a multifaceted construct that has been conceptualized in various ways across different disciplines (Arasaratnam, 2015; Deardorff, 2015; Guilherme, 2015). In the field of foreign language (FL) education, Byram (1997) described intercultural communicative competence as the capacity to use a second language to communicate in a meaningful way in intercultural situations; meanwhile, Fantini (2006) defines IC as a set of complex abilities necessary for effective and appropriate interactions with people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Deardorff (2006), utilizing the Delphi method, conceptualized IC as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural settings, drawing upon one's intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

Grounded in these views, IC in this study is defined as a set of abilities (i.e., knowledge, skills, attitudes) required for appropriate and effective communication in intercultural settings, which one can acquire progressively through education or personal experiences. This definition retains the most prominent features of IC (i.e., appropriateness and effectiveness) (Arasaratnam, 2017) while acknowledging the role of education as agreed by many scholars (Berardor et al., 2012; Borghetti, 2013; Hammer & Bennett, 1998).

While a number of IC models exist (e.g., M. J. Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997, 2021; Deardorff, 2006; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005), this study was framed by Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models since they provide sufficient ground for IC conceptualization and operationalization. These two models complement each other and are relevant to the context and purpose of this study. Byram's (1997) model suggests the five *savoirs* of IC: knowledge (of own culture, other culture, and interaction process) (*savoirs*), attitudes (*savoir être*), critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*), interpreting/relating skills (*savoir comprendre*), discovery/interaction skills (*savoir apprendre/faire*). The model has been commonly used in the field of FL education with IC-related aims and shaped the initiation of the Common

European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). Dearfford's (2006) model posits that *attitudes* (i.e., openness, respect, curiosity) form the foundation of IC. These attitudes were reinforced by a deep understanding of cultural *knowledge* and *skills* (e.g., observation, interpretation, analysis). Thus, IC is viewed as a process involving the active interaction of IC components, resulting in *internal outcomes* (a shift in frame of reference) and *external outcomes* (effective and appropriate intercultural communication).

This study adopted IC components from both models and operationalized IC as consisting of (1) knowledge (of one's own culture, of other culture and of intercultural communication processes), (2) attitudes (positive attitudes towards other cultures, e.g. openness, respect, willingness to communicate), and (3) skills (interpreting/ relating, analyzing/ evaluating). Interaction skills (Byram, 1997) or external outcomes (Deardorff, 2006) were not included in this study's measurement model, as Deardorff (2009) noted that these skills can only be evaluated by the direct interlocutor and are not feasible for self-report instruments. This study, which aims to develop a validated self-report tool tailored to Vietnamese higher education EFL students, could provide a valuable instrument for educators to assess IC instruction outcomes and inform both the development of the EFL curriculum and current IC teaching practices.

Intercultural Competence Instruments

IC can be measured directly with performance-based instruments or indirectly with self-report tools (Fantini, 2009; Sinicrope et al., 2007). While interculturalists suggested a combination of tools (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009), survey tools are more commonly used in large-scale educational studies due to their practicality and their ability to benchmark.

To identify commonly used instruments in the field, we conducted a literature search in reliable peer-reviewed journals using the key words "intercultural competence measurement/ scale/ instrument." The results revealed some well-established and internationally used instruments: (1) The *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* (ISS) developed by Chen and Starosta (2000), which gauges aspects of interaction, e.g., confidence, engagement, and respect; (2) The *Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)* proposed by Hammer et al. (2003), which measures the development stages of IC along a continuum; (3) The *Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI),* suggested by Kelley and Meyers (1995), which assesses aspects such as autonomy, emotional resilience, perceptual acuity, and flexibility. Those instruments, although highly impactful in their original settings, contain features that do not align well with the IC development targets through classroom-based practices inherent in this study (see Table 1).

Regarding the instruments developed for Asian or Vietnamese contexts, some were identified. For example, based on Byram's (1997) model, Huang (2021) developed a 25-item scale for EFL students in Taiwan but did not report its validity. Chen (2022) developed a 28-item survey instrument for Chinese students in a Spanish as a foreign language class. The instrument was validated through factor analysis, but the items were rather context sensitive. In the Vietnamese higher education setting, the validated tool was very limited, with only one found within the timeframe from 2000 to 2024. This existing scale was developed by Vu and Dinh (2022) with 21 items grounded in Byram's (1997) model and validated through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using a sample of 310 EFL students from various disciplines in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The scale, although developed for the Vietnamese context, has been validated using a sample from a more affluent area of Vietnam (i.e., Ho Chi Minh City), with students from other disciplines rather than English majors. In addition, although the tool was claimed to be a reliable and construct-valid instrument, its structural validity has not been confirmed due to the lack of a CFA phase.

Table 1

Common IC Self-reported Instruments and Their Misalignment with the Context of English Majors in IC-embedded Curricula

Tool	Dimensions/ Focus	Validation proofing	Misalignment with the context of English majors in Vietnamese tertiary education
CCAI (Kelley & Meyers, 1995)	Traits for adaptability (flexibility, autonomy, perceptual sharpness, emotional resilience)	Reliable in training for emigrants	More suitable for training emigrant contexts; assessing traits instead of developmental features
ISS (Chen & Starosta, 2000)	IS (intercultural sensitivity: respect, enjoyment, engagement, confidence, attentiveness)	Broadly applied, acceptable reliability (Mighani & Moghadam, 2019; Tamam, 2010; Tuncel & Paker, 2018; Wu, 2015)	Built in the US setting, it centers on attitudinal aspects rather than the knowledge and skill components of IC.
IDI (Hammer et al., 2003)	Stages of development (i.e., denial, defense, and minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration)	Extensive cross-cultural validation (Duisembekova, 2021; Hammer, 2012, 2015)	More relevant for direct intercultural contact/ immersion contexts; protective tool with high cost
Huang (2021)	IC components (i.e., knowledge, attitudes, skills) in the Taiwanese EFL context	No validity evidence reported; context-specific	No reported psychometric validation; Taiwanese educational/ cultural context
Chen (2022)	IC knowledge and skills, attitudes, and Spanish as a foreign language for Chinese students	Reported good reliability via EFA	Not for English language learners; validated for Chinese students
Vu & Dinh (2022)	IC components (knowledge, attitudes, skills, critical awareness) in an EFL Vietnamese setting	Validated through EFA in a sample from universities in Ho Chi Minh City	No reported CFA; validated among non-English majors

As shown in Table 1, none of the existing global instruments adequately meet the specific needs of Vietnamese EFL classrooms, particularly in terms of reflecting diversity and inclusiveness. While some focus on educational emersion experiences or professional contexts (IDI, CCAI), others are not feasible for Vietnamese teachers due to high cost (IDI); still others focus on a particular aspect of IC, i.e., sensitivity (ISS) instead of the three IC components (knowledge, skills, attitudes). In addition, the specific items in those scales are relevant to the validated samples and target population in a specific context, such as Spanish as an FL (Chen, 2022), Taiwanese EFL students (Huang, 2021), or non-English majors (Vu & Dinh, 2022), instead of the Vietnamese English majors at the university as targeted in this study. Some instruments were not reported with complete psychometric validation procedures (Huang, 2021; Vu & Dinh, 2022). Theoretically, since the construct of *knowledge of one's own culture* in Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models requires measurement items to address a specific culture

(e.g., Vietnamese), any IC instrument targeting Vietnamese settings could not borrow its items from existing scales developed for other cultural contexts.

The lack of culturally relevant and psychologically strict IC tools for English-majored students in Vietnamese tertiary contexts hinders the capability to (1) evaluate their IC levels, (2) identify areas for program improvements, and (3) assess the effectiveness of IC-embedded curricula towards IC development. Without such an instrument, the national IC-related objectives risk remaining ambitions rather than measurable outcomes. This study fills these gaps by developing and validating a new IC tool grounded in the theories of Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006), explicitly customized for the Vietnamese higher education context. This new self-reported tool was tested using both Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to ensure empirical validity and theoretical coherence.

Research Aims

This study aims to develop and validate a new self-report instrument for measuring IC among English-major students at Vietnamese universities where IC instruction is formally integrated into the curriculum. The factor structure was first determined through EFA, and model fit was evaluated using empirical data to confirm the instrument's reliability and validity.

Methods

Pedagogical Setting and Participants

The surveys were administered at a public university in Vietnam that specializes in foreign language education. The survey participants were recruited via convenience sampling and divided into two phases. In the first phase, which aims to discover the factor structures of the initial 38-item scale (the EFA phase), 312 students were selected following Hair et al.'s (2019) guidelines for sample sizes (i.e., at least 5 observations per variable). The survey received 280 responses, and after data screening, 274 were included in the analysis. In the CFA phase, which aims to test the fitness of the measurement model as well as the scale's validity and reliability, the analysis was done on a different dataset from that of the EFA phase to avoid bias and overfitting, which is commonly advised by researchers (Brown, 2015; Hair et al., 2019; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Therefore, an independent sample of 259 participants was selected; 217 provided responses, and 212 remained for analysis after data screening. This sample size meets the requirement for CFA, as suggested by Kline (2023) and Hair et al. (2019).

The two groups of participants share similar characteristics: they are English-major students in their third year of university (aged 20-22) aiming to achieve the B2 level of English proficiency. The participants underwent similar university entrance screening processes with identical selection criteria. Due to career preferences in Vietnam, most were female (80% and 83% respectively for the two phrases). The participants completed the Vietnamese version of the online questionnaire, which took 15-20 minutes. Before answering the questionnaire, they were all well-informed about the purpose of the study and the ethical issues, such as the confidentiality of personal information during the survey.

Design of the Study

The study employed a survey model to develop a reliable and valid self-report instrument for Vietnamese English majors. The study followed the steps for scale development suggested by McCoach et al. (2013), including specifying the scale's purposes and defining the constructs, generating items, obtaining expert review, piloting, and validating the scale.

Data Collection & Analysis

The data was collected in two phases. Phase 1 commenced in the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, and Phase 2 was completed a year later with participants of similar characteristics. The surveys were delivered online via Google Forms after the researcher obtained agreement from both university administrators and the students themselves to conduct the study ethically. The data were then processed using IBM SPSS Statistics software version 27 and Amos Graphics version 20. Reliability and validity statistics were calculated using an Excel stats tool with inputs from Amos outputs.

Results/Findings

Phase 1

Initial Development of the Scale

After defining the construct (i.e., IC for English majors in formal IC embedded curricula), which includes three major components (i.e., knowledge, skills, attitudes), an item pool was generated combining both inductive and deductive approaches (Boateng et al., 2018). Deductively, an extensive literature review was conducted of previously developed scales to identify similar constructs and to prepare items. Three existing instruments were selected for item generation, which include Huang (2021), Vu and Dinh (2021), and Chen (2022), due to some commonalities with the current study (e.g., foreign language education, Asian contexts, tertiary level) and their coverage of the three IC components defined in this study (i.e. knowledge, skills, attitudes). Inductively, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 students on aspects that they believed students should possess for effective and appropriate intercultural communication. The combination of the two approaches resulted in a scale of 38 items, with some adaptations and additions to the original items and to student interview responses. The adaptations involved some changes in wording, such as replacing "in Taiwanese culture" with "in Vietnamese culture" (from Huang's (2021) scale) and "my classmate cultures" with "other cultures" to better reflect the local cultural setting (from Vu and Dinh's (2021). Adding items was based on relevant constructs in Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models, which were reflected in students' interviews.

The initial scale was then reviewed by two experts specializing in language education, both senior lecturers and PhD holders with over ten years of experience in applied linguistics and intercultural research. The experts independently assessed the clarity, cultural appropriateness, and construct relevance of the items. Their feedback was incorporated, and items were refined based on the consensus reached through iterative discussions. Following expert reviews, a pilot study was conducted with 10 students to assess additional face validity. The students were drawn from the population and were independent from the actual participants of the study. They read the questionnaire items and gave feedback on the clarity of the instructions and items. Feedback was then collected for consideration of revision. Ultimately, the items were refined, finalized, and rated on a Likert scale of 7 points, ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1), distributed as follows: knowledge (15 items), attitudes (15 items), skills (8 items) (see Table 2).

Table 2

IC Scale Item Distribution

IC facets		**Codes**
Knowledge	own culture	kw1 - kw4
	other cultures	kw5 - kw8
	intercultural communication processes	kw9 - kw15
Attitudes	open	opeatt1 - opeatt5
	respect	resatt1 - resatt3
	willing to communicate	wilatt1 - wilatt7
Skills	Interpreting/relating	intrelkill1 - intrelskill3
	Analyzing/ evaluating	anaevaskill1 - anaevaskill5

Exploration of Factor Structure

After the initial scale was constructed, its factor structure was explored using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Prior to EFA, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was tested utilizing the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure for sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO value of 0.828 and the significant Bartlett's test ($p < 0.001$) indicated a suitable sample size and adequate correlation among variables, allowing for proceeding with factor analysis.

Table 3

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Barlett's Tests

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.828
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	8819.035
	df	903
	Sig.	.000

Principal axis factoring (PAF) with oblique rotation (Promax) was used for factor extraction. Decisions on factor retention were based on the eigenvalues (exceeding 1), scree plot (break points), parallel analysis (Williams et al., 2010), and theoretical interpretability. Items were removed from the scale if they had factor loadings below 0.50 or exhibited substantial cross-loadings. Principal axis factoring (PAF) identified 9 factors (eigenvalues > 1), accounting for 65.2% of the total variance. The Scree plot showed two breaks (at the 5th and the 7th factor), indicating two potential solutions (Figure 1), while parallel analysis revealed only six accepted factors (Table 4).

Figure 1

Exploratory Factor Analysis: Scree Plot

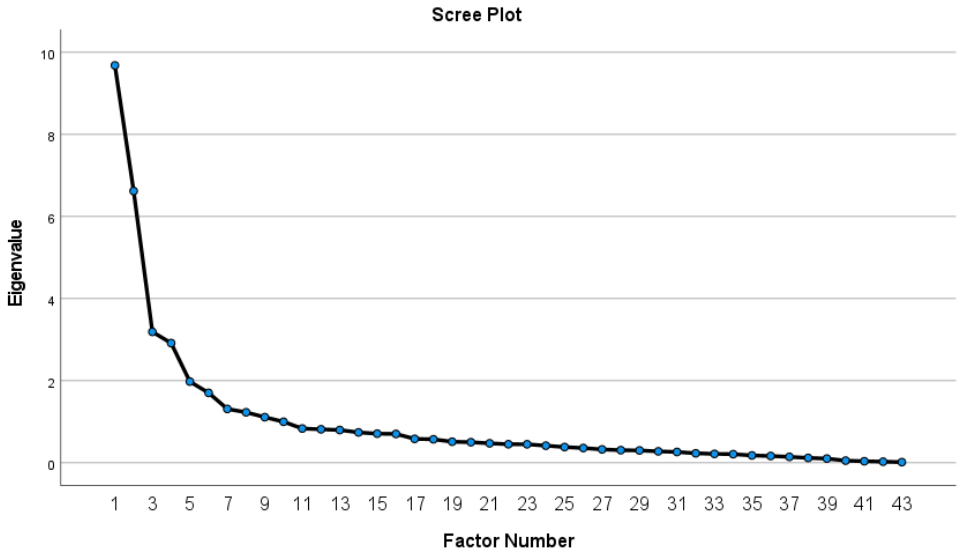


Table 4

Parallel Analysis Results

Component	PAF actual eigenvalue	Generated Mean Eigenvalue	Status
1	9.681	1.787953	Accepted
2	6.621	1.691295	Accepted
3	3.189	1.617485	Accepted
4	2.916	1.556746	Accepted
5	1.978	1.500121	Accepted
6	1.703	1.449591	Accepted
7	1.312	1.402893	Rejected
8	1.229	1.358651	Rejected
9	1.110	1.316491	Rejected

The first PAF indicated some free-standing, low-loading, or significant cross-loading items. These items were removed, and the analysis was rerun after each removal to ensure the factor structure's stability. After six iterations, a stable solution was achieved with five factors. A 28-item scale with all remaining items loading above .50 on their corresponding factors and showing no cross-loadings was finalized after the EFA phase (see Table 5).

The result of the first phase was a 28-item scale with five factors: knowledge of own culture (3 items), knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication (7 items), skills (7 items), attitudes (8 items), and interaction confidence (3 items). The subscales' alpha coefficients were from .744 to .905, suggesting acceptable to excellent internal consistency or reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 5

Results from EFA after Restructuring Factors

Items	Factor					Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
	1	2	3	4	5		
#1: Attitudes						**8**	**.891**
resatt1	.810						
wilatt1	.782						
opeatt4	.754						
resatt2	.749						
opeatt1	.697						
wilatt2	.675						
resatt3	.624						
opeatt5	.623						
# 2: Skills						**7**	**.905**
intreskill3		.821					
anaevaskill4		.787					
anaevaskill5		.781					
anaevaskill1		.777					
intreskill2		.773					
anaevaskill3		.719					
intreskill1		.670					
# 3: Knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication						**7**	**.875**
kw13			.896				
kw12			.845				
kw10			.711				
kw11			.646				
kw9			.609				
kw8			.540				
kw7			.535				
# 4: Knowledge of one's own culture						**3**	**.842**
kw2				.846			
kw3				.777			
kw1				.660			
# 5: Interaction confidence						**3**	**.744**
wilatt5R					.826		
wilatt6R					.680		
wilatt4R					.646		
Overall						**28**	**.853**

Phase 2

The second phase involved 212 participants and aimed to assess whether the factor structure model derived from EFA fits the empirical data, thereby providing stronger evidence of the scale's reliability and validity and confirming the factors. The commonly suggested practice is to perform EFA and CFA on separate datasets to prevent overfitting and improve generalizability (Brown, 2015). As a result, a CFA was conducted on the new dataset to confirm the five-factor model's fit.

Several indices were used to evaluate the model fit, i.e., Chi-square/degrees of freedom (χ^2/df), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and test of close fit (PCLOSE). The accepted model fit indices were decided following Hu and Bentler's (1999) guidelines.

Table 6

Common Model Fit Indices (Hu & Bentler, 1999)

Fit Index	Acceptable	Good	Very Good	Current model
χ^2/df (CMIN/df)	≤ 5	≤ 3	–	1.61
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	≥ .80	≥ .90	≥ .95	.95
GFI (Goodness of Fit Index)	≥ .80[1]	≥ .90	≥ .95	.88
TLI (Tucker–Lewis Index)	–	≥ .90	–	.94
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	≤ .08	≤ .06	–	.05
PCLOSE (p of Close Fit)	≥ .01	≥ .05	–	.24

[1] In cases where GFI is limited due to model complexity or sample size, a threshold of .80 is reasonable (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Doll et al., 1994).

Inspection of the p-values and standardized factor loadings revealed some items (intreskill3, opeatt1, kn10, kn13) that do not explain the factor well ($p > 0.05$ or standardized regression weights < 0.50), and the model was re-estimated after each removal. Besides statistical criteria, the items' relatively low loadings may be attributed to their semantic overlap with other indicators within the same factor, thereby reducing their unique contribution to the latent construct. After item removal and mode l re-estimation, the result showed an item model with improved fit (Chi-square/df = 1.61, CFI = 0.95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = 0.05, PCLOSE = 0.24) (Table 6). All the items that remained had substantial loadings ($p < .001$) on their corresponding factors, with standardized regression weights from .615 to .902, providing strong confirmation of the multidimensional nature of IC (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Estimates Statistic for IC Scale Measurement Model

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
anaevaskill3	<---	SKL	1.000			
anaevaskill1	<---	SKL	.914	.057	16.158	***
anaevaskill4	<---	SKL	1.143	.069	16.542	***
intreskill1	<---	SKL	.760	.063	12.119	***
intreskill2	<---	SKL	.836	.082	10.249	***
anaevaskill5	<---	SKL	1.130	.077	14.606	***
resatt2	<---	ATT	1.000			
resatt1	<---	ATT	.999	.057	17.467	***
wilatt1	<---	ATT	1.424	.124	11.469	***
resatt3	<---	ATT	1.485	.125	11.918	***
wilatt2	<---	ATT	1.517	.135	11.239	***
openatt5	<---	ATT	1.264	.128	9.865	***
openatt4	<---	ATT	1.469	.145	10.109	***
kw12	<---	KNW1	1.000			
kw11	<---	KNW1	.939	.112	8.397	***
kw9	<---	KNW1	.831	.091	9.100	***
kw2	<---	KNW2	1.000			
kw1	<---	KNW2	.719	.057	12.524	***
kw3	<---	KNW2	.941	.081	11.631	***
wilatt5R	<---	INCF	1.000			
wilatt6R	<---	INCF	.797	.085	9.349	***
wilatt4R	<---	INCF	.766	.082	9.338	***
kw7	<---	KNW1	.936	.122	7.683	***
kw8	<---	KNW1	.733	.086	8.497	***

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 -

			Estimate
anaevaskill3	<---	SKL	.902
anaevaskill1	<---	SKL	.827
anaevaskill4	<---	SKL	.837
intreskill1	<---	SKL	.699
intreskill2	<---	SKL	.623
anaevaskill5	<---	SKL	.782
resatt2	<---	ATT	.781
resatt1	<---	ATT	.757
wilatt1	<---	ATT	.777
resatt3	<---	ATT	.797
wilatt2	<---	ATT	.764
openatt5	<---	ATT	.675
openatt4	<---	ATT	.689
kw12	<---	KNW1	.667
kw11	<---	KNW1	.684
kw9	<---	KNW1	.759
kw2	<---	KNW2	.853
kw1	<---	KNW2	.812
kw3	<---	KNW2	.754
wilatt5R	<---	INCF	.836
wilatt6R	<---	INCF	.724
wilatt4R	<---	INCF	.722
kw7	<---	KNW1	.615
kw8	<---	KNW1	.694

Note. SKL = skills, ATT = attitudes, KNW1 = knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication, KNW2 = knowledge of one's own culture, INCF = interaction confidence.

In order to examine how well first-level constructs representing IC components (i.e., KNW1, KNW2, SKL, ATT, INCF) explain the broader latent construct of intercultural competence (IC), a second-order CFA was conducted. Paths were drawn from the second-order construct (i.e., IC) to each first-order latent variable. The findings from this stage revealed one latent variable, i.e., interaction confidence (INCF), which explained only a small portion of IC (INCF←IC: p = 0.42), indicating that the component was not necessary in the measurement model (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Second-order CFA Estimate Statistics

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
SKL	<---	IC	1.000			
ATT	<---	IC	.618	.107	5.795	***
KNW1	<---	IC	1.396	.226	6.181	***
KNW2	<---	IC	.947	.145	6.534	***
INCF	<---	IC	-.152	.188	-.808	.419

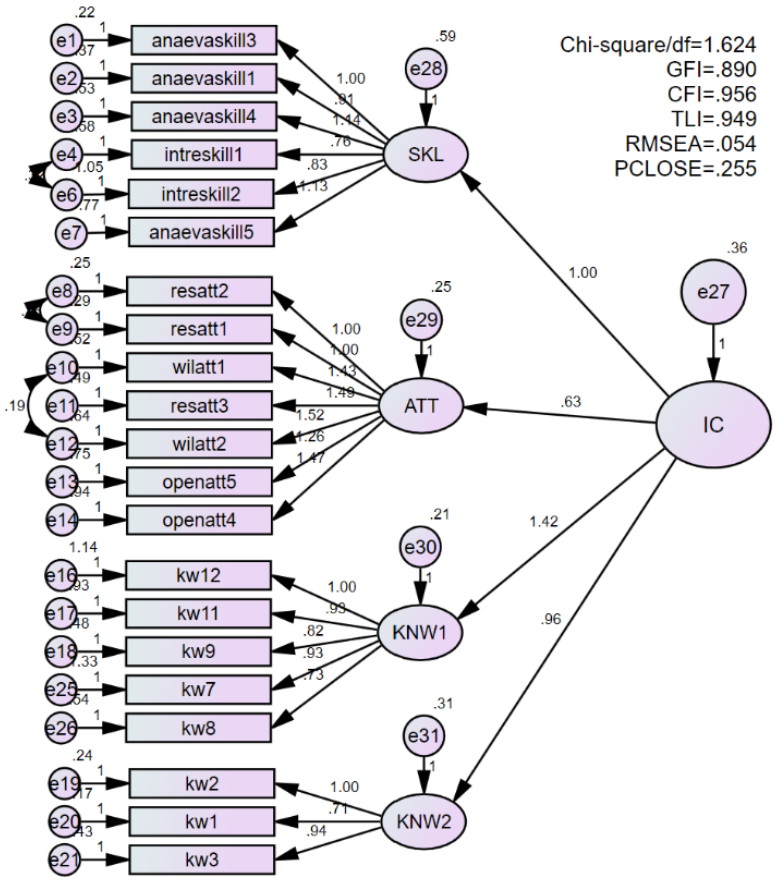
Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1

			Estimate
SKL	<---	IC	.624
ATT	<---	IC	.603
KNW1	<---	IC	.874
KNW2	<---	IC	.717
INCF	<---	IC	-.070

Beyond the statistics, the construct was carefully considered from theoretical grounds. It is noted that interaction confidence (INCF) is not among the major components of IC in either Byram's (1997) or Deardorff's (2006) models. Instead, in some existing scales, it is treated as an element of intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta, 2000) or blended into other latent constructs, such as *Interaction Involvement* (Arasaratnam's ICCI scale; Arasaratnam, 2009). Therefore, the CFA result that INCF was weak in explaining IC is reasonable from a theoretical standpoint, and eliminating the factor does not affect the theoretical conceptualization of IC. Informing by both statistical and theoretical perspectives, the INCF element was removed from the scale. The re-estimation of the new model after variable deletion yielded good fit indices for the model to the data (Chi-square/df = 1.62, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.05, PCLOSE = 0.26) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Second-order CFA Models for IC Scale



As presented in Figure 5, the significant p value ($p<.01$) and all standardized regression weights above .60 indicated that IC as a second-order latent variable can be explained well by its components (i.e., KNW1, KNW2, SKL, ATT), and the construct validity of the measurement was ensured. The final IC measurement model consisted of 20 items, grouped into four factors: attitudes, skills, knowledge of one's own culture, and knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication.

Figure 5

Second-order CFA Estimate Statistics for the IC Scale

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
SKL	<---	IC	1.000			
ATT	<---	IC	.627	.109	5.772	***
KNW1	<---	IC	1.417	.231	6.135	***
KNW2	<---	IC	.959	.148	6.493	***
anaevaskill3	<---	SKL	1.000			
anaevaskill1	<---	SKL	.912	.057	16.120	***
anaevaskill4	<---	SKL	1.141	.069	16.535	***
intreskill1	<---	SKL	.758	.063	12.083	***
intreskill2	<---	SKL	.834	.082	10.226	***
anaevaskill5	<---	SKL	1.129	.077	14.612	***
resatt2	<---	ATT	1.000			
resatt1	<---	ATT	.999	.057	17.439	***
wilatt1	<---	ATT	1.428	.125	11.455	***
resatt3	<---	ATT	1.490	.125	11.914	***
wilatt2	<---	ATT	1.521	.135	11.228	***
openatt5	<---	ATT	1.265	.129	9.842	***
openatt4	<---	ATT	1.471	.146	10.088	***
kw12	<---	KNW1	1.000			
kw11	<---	KNW1	.934	.110	8.470	***
kw9	<---	KNW1	.817	.090	9.105	***
kw2	<---	KNW2	1.000			
kw1	<---	KNW2	.715	.057	12.511	***
kw3	<---	KNW2	.938	.081	11.635	***
kw7	<---	KNW1	.934	.120	7.759	***
kw8	<---	KNW1	.726	.085	8.539	***

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1

			Estimate
SKL	<---	IC	.616
ATT	<---	IC	.604
KNW1	<---	IC	.879
KNW2	<---	IC	.718
anaevaskill3	<---	SKL	.903
anaevaskill1	<---	SKL	.826
anaevaskill4	<---	SKL	.837
intreskill1	<---	SKL	.697
intreskill2	<---	SKL	.623
anaevaskill5	<---	SKL	.783
resatt2	<---	ATT	.780
resatt1	<---	ATT	.756
wilatt1	<---	ATT	.777
resatt3	<---	ATT	.798
wilatt2	<---	ATT	.764
openatt5	<---	ATT	.674
openatt4	<---	ATT	.689
kw12	<---	KNW1	.673
kw11	<---	KNW1	.686
kw9	<---	KNW1	.752
kw2	<---	KNW2	.856
kw1	<---	KNW2	.810
kw3	<---	KNW2	.754
kw7	<---	KNW1	.619
kw8	<---	KNW1	.693

The next step is to evaluate the scale's reliability and its convergent and discriminant validity. Table 7 below illustrates the results regarding these qualities.

As illustrated in the table, the five-factor measurement model showed satisfactory reliability and validity. The composite reliability (CR) values (ranging from .816 to .904) were all higher than the suggested threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2019), ensuring the internal consistency. Average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the suggested level of .50 for three latent constructs (KNW2, ATT, SKL), confirming convergence validity, while one value (KNW1) fell slightly below (AVE = .470). Despite this, the construct was kept for both its theoretical soundness and empirical value. From a theoretical perspective, the construct characterizes a multidimensional domain that encompasses both knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication processes. Such conceptual breadth typically yields modest inter-item correlations, which in turn yield slightly lower AVEs without necessarily weakening construct validity. From an empirical standpoint, all items demonstrated significant factor loadings and strong reliability (CR = .816), indicating that they jointly represent the underlying theoretical dimension. Eliminating items solely to improve AVE would narrow the construct's conceptual coverage and weaken the scale's theoretical coherence. In addition, as guided by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the construct was kept due to its satisfactory reliability and theoretical soundness in capturing the complexity of intercultural competence.

Lastly, the discriminant validity was evaluated and confirmed following the Fornell-Larcker criterion; specifically, the MSV values were constantly lower than AVE, and the AVE square roots for all constructs were greater than the corresponding correlations between them. Brought together, the findings indicated that the IC measurement model is robust, exhibiting strong

internal consistency, construct, and discriminant validity, while only a modest restriction existed for the latent variable of KNW1 (knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication) regarding the convergence of its items. However, this restriction could be justified both theoretically and practically, and the overall scale was valid and reliable for measuring the intercultural competence of Vietnamese learners of English majors.

Table 7

Scale Reliability, Convergent and Discriminant Validity

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	KNW1	SKL	ATT	KNW2
KNW1	0.816	0.470	0.396	0.820	**0.686**			
SKL	0.904	0.614	0.296	0.923	0.544	**0.784**		
ATT	0.900	0.562	0.282	0.903	0.531	0.367	**0.750**	
KNW2	0.849	0.652	0.396	0.856	0.629	0.442	0.438	**0.807**

Discussion

The study's findings revealed a 20-item, validated instrument with four factors (i.e., knowledge of one's own culture, knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication, attitudes, and skills) to measure the intercultural competence of Vietnamese English majors. These constructs confirm the multidimensional nature of IC, as broadly accepted in intercultural studies, consisting of three major interacting domains: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Borghetti, 2013; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). The findings also reinforced the idea that IC cannot be reduced to a single construct; instead, it should be viewed as a complex attribute that combines knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

The results emphasize the importance of both self-awareness and awareness of others, highlighting the significance of *recognizing one's own culture* as an independent factor. This highlights the need to consistently reflect on one's home culture while interacting with others. The component of *knowledge of one's own culture* strongly corroborates Byram's (1997) concept of *knowledge of social groups in one's own culture* and Deardorff's idea of *cultural self-awareness*. Likewise, the importance of *knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication* underscores the necessity of understanding both cultural/ sociolinguistic factors, as well as communication conventions, in intercultural interactions, as noted by Canale and Swain (1980) and Byram (1997). The results confirmed the presence of positive *attitudes*, including openness, respect, and willingness to communicate as the foundation of IC (Bennett, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 2000; Deardorff, 2006). Lastly, the skills of analyzing and evaluating, as well as interpreting and relating, reflect students' abilities to mediate perspectives and engage critically with differences, affirming Byram's (1997) *savoir s'engager* and savoir *comprendre*.

In relation to previous studies, this study affirms the current conceptualization of IC while presenting empirical validation in a Vietnamese tertiary education setting. The emergence of one's own cultural knowledge as a separate factor differed from previous research by emphasizing a component that has been theoretically acknowledged but has received little empirical attention. Although Huang's (2021) study on Taiwanese learners and Chen's (2022) research on Chinese students treated IC as fragmented into knowledge, attitudes, and skills, neither study included *knowledge of one's own culture* as a distinct factor. Similarly, the scale developed in the Vietnamese context by Vu and Dinh (2022), although operationalized on the basis of Byram's (1997) framework, did not treat knowledge of one's own culture as an isolated

domain. Therefore, this study expands on previous research by providing empirical validation of the importance of understanding home culture in contributing to IC in the context of EFL education in Vietnam. The study's contribution was to confirm, through CFA, the presence of learners' own culture as a distinct factor in the Vietnamese EFL context, providing evidence to support the argument that IC requires a balanced understanding of both home and foreign cultures, and that IC measurement tools should reflect this.

Several theoretical and pedagogical implications arose from this study's findings. From theoretical perspectives, it supports the claim that IC requires learners to reflect on their own culture while interacting with others (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). From a pedagogical standpoint, IC education should be more than just immersing learners in new cultures; it should include reflective, systematic practices for integrating new cultural inputs into one's own. This aligns with Borghetti's (2013) and Deardorff's (2012) affirmation that awareness of one's own culture enhances students' capacity to engage more effectively with cultural differences.

In addition, the emergence of interpreting/relating and analyzing/evaluating skills highlights the view that IC includes not only the recognition of diversity but also the ability to analyze critically and ethically evaluate such differences. This is consistent with Deardorff's (2006) set of IC skills and Byram's (1997) concept of critical cultural awareness. In this way, the validated instrument aligns well with international IC frameworks while meeting the needs of local education. The study, therefore, has provided a reliable and valid tool for assessing IC for English majors in a Vietnamese higher education context.

Conclusion

The study's findings revealed a validated 20-item scale measuring the IC of Vietnamese English majors, including four factors: attitudes, skills, knowledge of one's own culture, and knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication processes. The study affirms that IC is best represented as a multidimensional concept covering cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. The findings confirm the theoretical foundations of existing models (e.g., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). The emergence of *knowledge of one's own culture* as a separate factor in this study presents an important contribution to the field since it emphasizes the central role of self-cultural knowledge in IC learning, an element frequently stated in theory but seldom validated in empirical literature. Moreover, the positive attitudes (i.e., openness, respect, and willingness to communicate) and the set of skills (interpreting/relating, analyzing/evaluating) widely recognized in international frameworks were also found to fit the tertiary setting in Vietnam. With the validation of items customized for Vietnamese learners in a formal IC-embedded EFL program at the university, the instrument is eligible for use to evaluate IC development in similar Vietnamese higher education contexts.

In addition to these contributions, the study was subject to several limitations. First, as with most factor-analytic studies, the findings are sample-dependent, suggesting the use of larger, more diverse samples to stabilize the four-factor measurement model in future research. Second, since this scale is a self-reported instrument, its reliance on learners' perceptions is undeniable, which may lead to response bias and the possibility of failing to capture the actual IC in real communication. This shortcoming aligns with broader concerns in the field that IC assessment requires triangulation using both direct and indirect tools (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Finally, since the instrument was validated in the context of Vietnamese higher education, its generalizability to other educational and cultural contexts cannot be assumed without additional adaptation and testing.

Based on the findings and acknowledgement of limitations, the study suggests several practical implications and directions for future research. First, the validated scale provides practical value for teachers and curriculum designers in Vietnamese and similar EFL contexts. It can be used as an instrument for diagnosing and reflecting on students' IC across the four aspects (i.e., knowledge of own culture, knowledge of other cultures, and intercultural communication, attitudes, and skills). Educators may use the instrument at different points in a course to diagnose learners' IC, monitor their development, and plan relevant teaching and learning activities. The findings also inform curriculum and materials design, supporting teachers in incorporating more focused intercultural content and tasks that target underdeveloped areas of IC.

Regarding directions for future research, we suggest cross-validating the instrument with other populations, such as school students or learners from other regions, to enhance its generalizability. Next, in evaluating learners' IC in educational settings, it is recommended that complementary tools be incorporated with this self-reported instrument, e.g., performance-based tasks, teachers' observations, and intercultural scenarios, to provide a more complete view of learners' IC. In addition, longitudinal research could examine how the four IC components develop over time, particularly under educational interventions, thereby offering insights into the effectiveness of intercultural learning.

In short, the current study has contributed to both theory and practice by providing a psychometrically tested, context-relevant tool for measuring IC. Apart from its research applications, the instrument offers a feasible tool for teachers to plan, implement, and assess classroom IC-related objectives, thereby supporting broader educational goals of equipping learners with effective and appropriate intercultural communication in the globalized, interconnected world.

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