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ASSESSING NON-LINGUISTIC FACULTY STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Abstract. This article explores the theoretical foundations and practical approaches to assessing intercultural competence among students from non-linguistic faculties in the context of foreign language learning. In an era shaped by globalization, digitalization, and academic mobility, intercultural competence has become a critical component of professional development and inclusive education. The study proposes a staged diagnostic model, comprising diagnostic, formative, and summative phases, that integrates cognitive, affective, behavioural, and reflective dimensions of competence. Based on established frameworks, intercultural competence is conceptualized as a dynamic combination of cultural knowledge, empathy, adaptability, and critical cultural awareness.

To validate the model, a mixed-methods study was conducted with 68 undergraduate students from three faculties of the Ternopil National Pedagogical University. The findings revealed significant variation in intercultural competence levels, with Geography students demonstrating the highest

competence due to greater exposure to intercultural contexts. Arts students showed strong affective engagement, while Engineering students exhibited lower behavioural adaptability. The study also introduced an assessment matrix aligning specific tools, such as surveys, self-assessment scales, portfolios, observations, and case studies, with the four competence dimensions.

The results underscore the importance of integrating intercultural content into language instruction, especially for students whose academic focus lies outside linguistic disciplines. The proposed model and tools offer educators a practical framework for designing inclusive, reflective, and competence-oriented language education that prepares students for effective communication and collaboration in multicultural environments.

Keywords: intercultural competence, foreign language education, non-linguistic faculties, assessment, global skills, interdisciplinary learning, higher education

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ОЦІНЮВАННЯ МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ СТУДЕНТІВ НЕМОВНИХ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТЕЙ У ПРОЦЕСІ ВИВЧЕННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ

Анотація. У цій статті досліджуються теоретичні основи та практичні підходи до оцінювання міжкультурної компетентності (МКК) студентів нелінгвістичних факультетів у контексті вивчення іноземних мов. В епоху, що формується глобалізацією, цифровізацією та академічною мобільністю,



МКК стала критичним компонентом професійного розвитку та інклюзивної освіти. У дослідженні пропонується поетапна діагностична модель, що включає діагностичну, формувальну та підсумкову фази, яка інтегрує когнітивні, афективні, поведінкові та рефлексивні виміри компетентності. На основі встановлених рамок МКК концептуалізується як динамічне поєднання культурних знань, емпатії, адаптивності та критичної культурної обізнаності.

З метою перевірки валідності моделі було проведено дослідження з використанням змішаних методів за участю 68 студентів бакалаврату з трьох факультетів Тернопільського національного педагогічного університету. Результати виявили значну варіацію в рівнях МКК, причому студенти-географи продемонстрували найвищу компетентність завдяки більшому впливу міжкультурного контексту. Студенти-гуманітарії продемонстрували сильну афективну залученість, тоді як студенти-інженери продемонстрували нижчу поведінкову адаптивність. У дослідженні також було запроваджено матрицю оцінювання, яка узгоджує конкретні інструменти, такі як опитування, шкали самооцінки, портфоліо, спостереження та тематичні дослідження, з чотирма вимірами компетентності.

Отримані результати підкреслюють важливість інтеграції міжкультурного контенту у викладання мови, особливо для студентів, чий академічний фокус лежить поза межами лінгвістичних дисциплін.

Запропонована модель та інструменти пропонують викладачам практичну основу для розробки інклюзивної, рефлексивної та орієнтованої на компетенції мовної освіти, яка готує студентів до ефективного спілкування та співпраці в мультикультурному середовищі.

Ключові слова: міжкультурна компетентність, навчання іноземних мов, нефілологічні факультети, оцінювання, глобальні навички, міждисциплінарне навчання, вища освіта

Introduction. In the context of accelerating globalization, digitalization, and the internationalization of higher education, intercultural competence (ICC) has emerged as a fundamental dimension of professional development. The contemporary labor market demands more than technical expertise; it requires the capacity to navigate and collaborate effectively within culturally diverse environments. Accordingly, the mission of modern higher education must expand to encompass the systematic cultivation and evaluation of ICC alongside conventional professional knowledge.

For students in non-language disciplines, acquiring a foreign language is indispensable for global career mobility. However, university curricula often place disproportionate emphasis on grammar and examination performance,



while neglecting the cultural dimensions of communication. This imbalance produces a skills gap: graduates may possess adequate lexical knowledge yet lack the cultural intuition essential for successful international collaboration. Consequently, linguistic proficiency is frequently achieved without the parallel development of sensitivity to cultural nuances that shape professional interaction.

The main challenge is not just teaching language but accurately assessing how students apply it in culturally diverse settings. If educators had a strong system for evaluating ICC, they could identify exactly where students are struggling and tailor their teaching strategies accordingly. However, while there is plenty of research on teaching ICC, there is very little on how to assess it—especially for students in non-linguistic fields. Because there are no standard tools or criteria, current assessments are often inconsistent and fail to measure a student's true ability to communicate in the real world.

Addressing this research gap, **the present study aims** to examine the theoretical foundations and practical approaches to evaluating ICC within the framework of foreign language instruction for non-linguistic students. The analysis seeks to support the development of more inclusive, interdisciplinary, and learner-centred models of language education that integrate linguistic, cultural, and personal development as complementary components of professional growth.

Analysis of Recent Studies and Publications. The study of ICC in foreign language education has become one of the most dynamic and interdisciplinary fields in recent decades. It integrates insights from applied linguistics, communication theory, psychology, and education. Since the 1990s, the concept of ICC has evolved from general notions of cultural awareness toward complex models that link language learning with global citizenship and reflective communication. ICC has emerged as a critical component of education in the 21st century, particularly in the context of foreign language learning. It is broadly defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. According to Deardorff [1], intercultural communication competence (ICC) encompasses a range of attitudes (such as respect and openness), knowledge (including cultural self-awareness and sociolinguistic understanding), and skills (such as listening, observing, and interpreting), all of which contribute to successful intercultural interaction. Byram [2] emphasizes the integration of language competence and intercultural understanding, defining intercultural communication competence as the ability to communicate in a foreign language with people from other cultural backgrounds in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner. It encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, including cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and communication skills.



Several models have been developed to conceptualize and assess intercultural competence. Byram [2] made significant contributions to this field, defining intercultural communication competence (ICC) as the ability to effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds using knowledge, interpretive skills, and critical cultural awareness. His five-element model, including attitudes, knowledge, interpretive and communicative skills, discovery and interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness, remains a theoretical benchmark in language education. Building on Byram's theory, Deardorff [1] proposed a process-oriented model, describing intercultural communication competence as a dynamic cycle encompassing the development of respect, openness, curiosity, and adaptability. According to her approach, assessment should capture both internal outcomes (empathy, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity) and external behaviours (effective communication and relationship-building). Deardorff's Pyramid Model outlines a progression from internal attitudes and skills to external behavioural outcomes, providing a holistic framework for both teaching and assessment. Byram's model includes five key components: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) describes a six-stage continuum, ranging from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, and provides a developmental perspective on intercultural growth [3]. Fantini further proposed directions for the development of assessment methods, emphasizing that language competence, cultural knowledge, and personal reflection are indispensable elements of intercultural growth. His framework inspired educators to design holistic diagnostic tools that combine performance-based and reflective tasks [4].

The table below summarizes the theoretical models that have the greatest impact on understanding and assessing ICC.

Table 1

Models of ICC

Model	Key Components	Focus	Authorship
Byram's ICC Model	Attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting, discovery, interaction, critical cultural awareness	Language-integrated intercultural interaction	Byram (2020)
Deardorff's Pyramid Model	Attitudes (respect, openness), knowledge, skills, internal outcomes (empathy, adaptability), external outcomes (effective behaviour)	Holistic development from mindset to behaviour	Deardorff (2006)



Model	Key Components	Focus	Authorship
Bennett's DMIS	Six stages: Denial, Defence, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration	Developmental progression of intercultural sensitivity	Bennett (2017)
Fantini's ICE Model	Awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge	Emphasis on experiential learning and reflection	Fantini (2009)

While these frameworks acknowledge the multidimensionality of cross-cultural communication, their assessment remains highly context dependent. Holmes [5] and Heggernes [6] argue that effective assessment must balance general indicators such as attitudes, knowledge, and skills with the communication expressions inherent in the culture. ICC is not a static trait, but a dynamic process shaped by exposure, reflection, and intercultural engagement.

In a European context, Lázár et al. [7] and Sercu [8] provided practical guidance on the development and assessment of interdisciplinary competence (ICC), particularly in the field of teacher education. Their work highlights the importance of formative assessment, self-evaluation, and reflective practice in multicultural classrooms. Sercu critiques the dominance of linguistic proficiency in assessment frameworks and advocates for more holistic, culturally responsive approaches.

Ukrainian scholars have also made significant contributions to this discourse. Ahibalova, Kalashnyk, and Alpatova [9] emphasize the integration of intercultural skills into foreign language instruction for non-language majors, highlighting the role of interdisciplinary courses in fostering cultural awareness and inclusivity. Dvorianchykova et al. [10] studied the development of intercultural communication skills among future interpreters, while Kostyrya et al. [11] focused on enhancing English proficiency through interdisciplinary intercultural communication training. These studies reflect a growing recognition in Ukrainian higher education of the need to embed intercultural dimensions into language curricula beyond philological programs.

In response to these concerns, Arasaratnam-Smith [12] challenged the assumption that language exposure alone is sufficient to cultivate ICCs. She identifies a persistent gap between grammatical proficiency and the deeper readiness required for authentic intercultural engagement, particularly among students in non-linguistic fields.

Recent empirical research has responded to these challenges by validating assessment tools tailored to diverse educational contexts. Tsatzali et al. [13]



introduced the Intercultural Communicative Competence Evaluation Instrument (ICCEI), offering a robust quantitative framework for educational research. The research showed that experiential learning, when combined with reflective assessment, significantly enhances students' intercultural capabilities.

Research Results

The Concept and Structure of Intercultural Competence. ICC is increasingly recognized as a central learning outcome in higher education, reflecting the capacity of individuals to understand, respect, and interact effectively with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. According to Byram [2] and Deardorff [1], communication skills are considered a dynamic combination of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that enable individuals to communicate appropriately and effectively across cultures.

From a pedagogical perspective, ICC represents more than an accumulation of cultural facts or behaviours. It entails critical cultural awareness, as defined by Byram, which is the ability to evaluate the perspectives, practices, and products of both one's own and other cultures. This approach requires students to shift from an ethnocentric perspective to an ethnorelativist one, a process described by Bennett [3] in his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). In this continuous process, learners progress from a stage of denial or defence to one of acceptance, adaptation, and integration of cultural differences.

Modern interpretations, such as Fantini's [4] multidimensional framework, emphasize that ICC comprises four interconnected domains: knowledge (awareness of cultural norms and values), attitudes (openness, curiosity, and respect), skills (interpretation, connection, and discovery), and awareness (reflective self-evaluation). These domains are equally relevant for students of non-linguistic faculties, for whom intercultural ability directly supports professional success and mobility.

The Need for Assessment in Non-Linguistic Faculties. While ICC has been widely researched, its systematic assessment in non-linguistic faculties remains limited. As Holmes [5] notes, intercultural education often assumes that exposure to a foreign language naturally produces intercultural understanding, whereas in reality, learners may acquire grammatical proficiency without developing sensitivity to cultural diversity. In technical or professional faculties, where language courses are often limited in scope, assessment practices tend to prioritize measurable linguistic outcomes (such as grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension) at the expense of socio-cultural and reflective components.

Nevertheless, ICC plays a crucial role in professional communication. For engineers, economists, or healthcare specialists, intercultural misunderstandings can affect collaboration, negotiation, and ethical decision-making. As Heggernes [6] have emphasized, integrating cross-cultural learning into foreign language



education can enhance critical thinking, empathy, and global awareness. These skills are now recognized as essential elements of 21st-century professionalism.

Thus, there is a clear need to incorporate intercultural assessment into language curricula at non-linguistic faculties. Such an assessment not only measures learning outcomes but also promotes students' reflective engagement with cultural diversity, helping them internalize values of tolerance, respect, and cooperation.

Criteria and Indicators of Intercultural Competence. To assess systematically, it is necessary to define observable indicators aligned with its multidimensional structure. Based on the frameworks of Byram, Deardorff, Fantini, and Tsatzali et al., the following criteria can be proposed:

- *cognitive criteria* – understanding cultural systems, values, norms, and communication conventions; ability to explain sociocultural phenomena and make cross-situational comparisons;
- *affective criteria* – openness, empathy, and tolerance for ambiguity; willingness to suspend judgment and appreciate differences;
- *behavioural criteria* – ability to adjust communication strategies, handle misunderstandings, and demonstrate flexibility in cross-cultural communication;
- *reflective criteria* – self-assessment ability, awareness of ethnocentric tendencies, and sustained personal development engagement.

Each criterion may be operationalized through measurable indicators, such as interpretive accuracy, perspective-taking, cooperative behaviour, or reflective commentary. The combination of these indicators allows for a comprehensive view of learners' intercultural progress.

Approaches and Tools for Assessment. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes the value of employing mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative reliability with qualitative. Quantitative instruments, including structured questionnaires, Likert-scale surveys, and standardized tools like ICCEI [13], can capture general trends and self-perceived competence levels. However, qualitative methods, such as portfolio assessment, critical incident analysis, reflective journals, and teacher observation, reveal deeper insights into students' values, attitudes, and communicative behaviour.

Fantini suggests combining these methods for more effective results. For example, situational judgment tasks and case study discussions can simulate real-world cross-cultural communication and examine learners' decision-making processes. Reflective journals and self-assessment checklists support ongoing awareness and growth, allowing students to monitor their own development over time [4].

Such tools can be adapted to the specific context of a particular discipline in Ukrainian higher education. Engineering students, for instance, might analyze



cultural differences in professional ethics or teamwork, while medical students could reflect on patient-centered communication in multicultural settings. These activities help connect language learning with authentic professional experiences, making ICC assessment both relevant and motivating.

Proposed Model of Students' ICC Assessment. Based on the synthesis of current research and practical insights, a structural-functional model of assessment for non-linguistic faculties can be outlined. It involves three interrelated stages (see Fig. 1). The model ensures continuity between instruction and assessment, making ICC both a learning objective and an evaluative criterion. Importantly, it positions the learner as an active participant in assessment rather than a passive recipient, thus encouraging autonomy and lifelong learning.

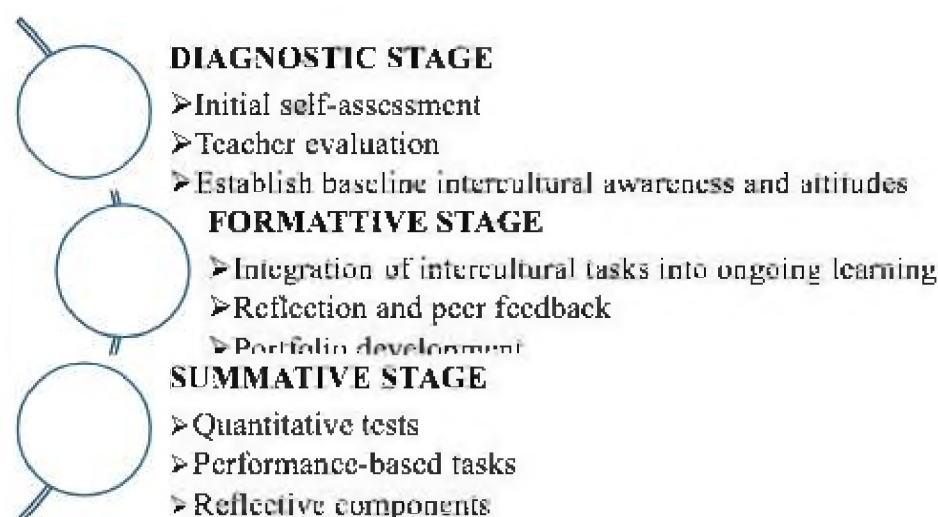


Fig. 1. Model of Students' ICC Assessment

The proposed model for assessing ICC among students of non-linguistic faculties is grounded in a multidimensional framework that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. This model reflects the understanding that ICC is not a static attribute but a dynamic, evolving capacity shaped by knowledge, attitudes, and communicative behaviours in multicultural contexts.

At the core of the model lies the recognition that effective intercultural engagement requires: 1) *cognitive dimension*: encompassing cultural knowledge, awareness of sociolinguistic norms, and critical cultural consciousness. This includes the ability to analyse and interpret cultural phenomena, recognize ethnocentric biases, and understand the diversity of worldviews; 2) *affective dimension*: reflecting attitudes such as openness, empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, and emotional resilience. This component gauges students' willingness to engage with cultural difference and their capacity for perspective-taking; 3) *behavioural dimension*: focusing on observable skills such as adaptability, communication

strategies, and the ability to respond appropriately in intercultural situations. It assesses students' readiness to apply their knowledge and attitudes in real-life interactions.

To evaluate ICC effectively, educators must identify observable criteria aligned with its core dimensions (see Table 2).

Table 2

Core Dimensions in ICC Assessment

Dimension	Description	Assessment Scale (1–10)
Cognitive Awareness	Understanding of cultural norms and communication styles	1–3: Low, 4–6: Moderate, 7–8: Strong, 9–10: Very Strong
Affective Disposition	Openness, curiosity, respect toward diversity	
Behavioural Adaptability	Ability to adjust language and behaviour in intercultural contexts	
Reflective Capacity	Willingness to analyse cultural assumptions and biases	
Interactional Effectiveness	Success in real or simulated intercultural communication	

To make this model viable, a combination of quantitative and qualitative assessment tools is recommended. These include: *surveys and self-assessment scales* to measure students' perceived levels of intercultural awareness, empathy, and openness; *standardized tests* to evaluate cognitive understanding of cultural concepts and communication norms; *portfolios* to document reflective learning, personal growth, and intercultural experiences over time; *classroom observations* to assess behavioural indicators of ICC in authentic or simulated intercultural interactions; *case studies and situational judgment tasks* to analyse students' responses to complex intercultural scenarios, highlighting their decision-making processes and adaptability.

This integrative model not only facilitates a more nuanced understanding of students' intercultural development but also encourages reflective engagement with their own cultural identities. By aligning assessment practices with the holistic nature of ICC, educators can foster inclusive learning environments that support both academic achievement and personal transformation.

Implementation and Empirical Validation of the Model. To validate the proposed diagnostic model and explore the current state of ICC (ICC) among students from non-linguistic faculties, a mixed-methods study was conducted at Ternopil V. Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University. The research involved a



total of 68 students from three faculties: Engineering (22 undergraduates), Arts (23), and Geography (23 students). The study aimed to assess students' ICC levels using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), complemented by qualitative data from reflective journals and semi-structured interviews.

The procedure of the research included three phases:

Phase 1: Diagnostic baseline using ISS and self-assessment

Phase 2: Formative activities including intercultural case studies, peer feedback, and portfolio development

Phase 3: Summative evaluation through performance tasks and final reflections

Students from the Geography faculty consistently demonstrated higher ICC scores, likely due to their exposure to diverse cultural contexts through academic projects and international collaborations. Arts students demonstrated strong affective and reflective dimensions, while Engineering students exhibited lower behavioural adaptability, despite having adequate cognitive awareness (see Table 3). A study conducted across multiple faculties revealed varying levels of ICC.

Table 3

Faculty-Based Results

Faculty	Average ISS Score (out of 5)	Key Observations
Engineering	3,2	Moderate awareness, low confidence
Arts	3,8	Stronger engagement and adaptability
Geography	4,1	Highest competence due to diverse interactions

Students with international exposure and culturally integrated curricula performed better across all dimensions.

Qualitative insights revealed that students with prior international experience or participation in culturally integrated curricula expressed greater empathy, openness, and readiness for intercultural dialogue. Reflective journals highlighted the transformative impact of intercultural tasks, especially when paired with guided feedback and portfolio analysis.

Discussion. The proposed model aligns with the humanistic paradigm of higher education, emphasizing personal growth, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. It views language education as a means of fostering ICC. By embedding assessment into the learning process, educators can transform evaluation from a summative control mechanism into a formative dialogue between teacher and student. Assessing ICC in non-linguistic faculties should not be seen as an additional burden but as a strategy to enhance the relevance and



quality of foreign language education. When students are guided to reflect on their attitudes, values, and communicative behaviours, they develop not only linguistic proficiency but also the moral and cultural maturity necessary for professional success in a globalized world.

Conclusions. In the context of globalization, digitalization, and the growing demand for intercultural collaboration, the development and assessment of ICC among students of non-linguistic faculties has become a strategic priority in higher education. This study confirms that ICC is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive understanding, affective openness, behavioural adaptability, and reflective awareness, which are essential for effective communication in multicultural environments.

The proposed diagnostic model, structured across diagnostic, formative, and summative stages, provides a flexible yet rigorous framework for evaluating ICC. It encourages both objective measurement and reflective engagement, ensuring that assessment is not merely evaluative but also developmental.

Empirical data from a cross-faculty study involving 68 students revealed significant variation in ICC levels. Geography students demonstrated the highest competence, followed by Arts and Engineering, with international exposure and culturally integrated curricula emerging as key predictors of success. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating intercultural elements into foreign language instruction, particularly for students whose academic focus lies outside of linguistic disciplines.

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