# Exploring Intercultural Competence at the Macro and Micro Scale: A Case Study from Albanian University Students

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**Abstract:**
Globalization and increasing cultural diversity have resulted in the growing necessity of being able to communicate effectively across cultural and linguistic contexts—that is, of intercultural communication competence. This study adapted extant empirically-based scales to explore the constructs of communication competence at the macro (cultural) and micro (regional) scale, the variations based on demographic characteristics, and the relationship between macro and micro constructs. Participants from five Albanian universities in Tirana (Albania), Pristina (Kosovo), and Tetovo (Macedonia) completed the self-administered survey. The exploratory factor analysis generated two factors for intercultural items and three factors for regional items. The intercultural and regional measures were positively correlated. The results of this study suggest that a comprehensive definition of intercultural communication competence and culture general measurement could be conceptualized/designed as a macro-micro continuum.

Keywords: intercultural competence, Albanian students, dialect, language, regional identity

## 1. Introduction

Current efforts to further integrate the European Union have been met with a revival in regional identities at both the supra- and sub-state level (Paasi 2009). The emergence of such identities has also been compounded by globalization (Hall 1997). The sensitivity to regional identity and the intensification of intercultural encounters at regional level poses challenges for the application of the concept of intercultural competence as a "national" approach. Regional identity is especially fraught in South East European countries, where political borders do not reflect ethnic and cultural lines and been the source of ongoing conflict. In the Albanian context, this sensitivity has an added significance insofar as the Albanian national culture surpasses the current political borders to include Albania, Kosovo, Western Macedonia, and Southern Montenegro. Since 1991, the liberty to travel, relocate, study, and conduct business across political/physical borders has made intercultural encounters and interactions increasingly common. Meanwhile, the wave of liberalization in higher education has intensified the intercultural interaction within Albanian regions in every aspect of life—especially university settings. Interaction with other cultures due to the EU integration reforms and the liberalization of higher education system have turned Albanian universities into exciting spaces of intercultural interaction. This provides an ideal environment to explore intercultural communication competence constructs at both the macro and micro levels and investigate their relationship.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) refers to the ability to communicate across different cultural and linguistic contexts. Despite its seemingly simple definition, however, there is seldom consensus on what "competence" and "appropriate" intercultural exchange actually entails. Previous research has focused on characteristics of competence

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when communicating in intercultural settings and sought to create instruments for measuring ICC. Indeed, the various methodological perspectives on and approaches to intercultural communication have resulted in diverse definitions. Scholars have suggested that a comprehensive model of communication competence requires an investigation of the constructs that lead to competence (Arasaratnam & Doerfel 2005; Arasaratnam 2009) and that variations in the ICC constructs result in different understandings of intercultural competence (Rathje 2007). In addition, the conceptualization of the intercultural communication competence "are highly diverse in their disciplines, terminologies, and scholarly and practical objectives" (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009: 5).

The need for further research on the constructs of intercultural competence across various geographical areas is also well recognized by intercultural researchers by numerous disciplines (Rathje 2007; Arasaratnam & Doerfel 2005; Arasaratnam 2009, 2014). Research efforts to explore intercultural communication competence and cross-cultural comparative research have been conducted in different cultural contexts. Rathje (2007), for instance, has analyzed the debate on intercultural competence in the German speaking world and proposed a definition based on foundation, scope, application, and goal. Similarly focused on the German cultural context, Fritz, Möllenberg, and Chen (2002) replicated Chen and Starosta's (2000) ICC model. Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) have provided a model of competence generated from a multicultural perspective that contributes to a culture-general instrument. A new instrument was introduced by Arasaratnam (2009) to measure intercultural communication competence in diverse cultural contexts. Bennett's Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity has been revalidated and expanded by Hammer (2011), as well as adapted to examine the cultural and religious differences among Finnish students (Holm, Nokelainen & Tirri 2010) and the extent of intercultural sensitivity of domestic and international students at British universities (Barron & Dasli 2014). Meanwhile, Croucher (2013) has explored the relationship of religious identity and individualist/collectivist variables within the communication traits among French students.

Despite the range of research, however, none have simultaneously explored intercultural communication competence at both the micro and macro level using a large sample. Addressing this gap, this study explores the constructs of communication competence in the Albanian context at the macro (cultural) and micro (regional) scale, examining the demographic variations, as well as the relationship between macro and micro constructs. In addition, this study provides insights on how current instruments behave in a new cultural context. Using exploratory factor analysis, this study generates constructs that lead to perceived intercultural communication competence in a new geographical and cultural context. By investigating communication interactions within and beyond culture, this study contributes to our understanding of intercultural communication competence.

## 2. State of research and key terms

Various disciplines have conducted theoretical and practical research on intercultural communication. Originating with Eduard T. Hall's anthropological research on *The Silent Language* (1959), this research was intensified with Hofstede's notion of cultural dimensions (1984, 2001) and Schwartz's argument regarding cultural value orientations (2006). Intercultural communication refers to communication between people from different cultures (Gudykunst 2002). Culture is "a rich complex of meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms, and values prevalent among people in a society" (Schwartz 2006:138).

A variety of approaches have been developed and employed in intercultural interaction research. Gudykunst's (1995) anxiety and uncertainty management theory explains the "causes" of intercultural adjustments, while Kim's (2006; 2007) ideological approach reveals four intercultural relations positions with implications for cultural identity. Jackson's (2002)

cultural contracts theory explains how power dynamics and cultural boundaries impact the way in which individuals negotiate their identities when interacting with people from different cultures. Meanwhile, the intercultural rhetoric approach developed by Starosta (1984) and Gonzalez (2000; 2004) examines the rhetorical implications when messages cross different cultures. The ethnography of communication approach developed by Philipsen (1992) observes the portion of a culture that is devoted to communicative practices. Moreover, the dialectical approach explains intercultural competence from opportunities and constraints in the workplace (Martin & Nakayama 2015).

From the social scientific perspective, the study of intercultural interactions and communication is primarily interest in competence. There is a general consensus that intercultural competence has cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Spitzberg 1997). Briefly, ICC research can be categorized into three major perspectives.

First, the behavioral perspective of competence. Originally introduced by Ruben (1989), this perspective emphasizes the importance of behavior when conceptualizing competence. Kealey (1989) continued Ruben's behavioral approach and identified seven skills for intercultural competent behavior, while Martin (1993) emphasized the need for investigation of the competence's behavioral enactment dimension. In line with Ruben's view of competence as an individual attitude, Kim (2001) conceptualized intercultural competence as an internal capacity within an individual.

Developed by Wiseman, Hammer, and Nishida (1989), the second perspective uses an individual attitudinal approach to differentiate between cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions designed to measure the ability to develop a positive attitude toward a foreign culture. Along this line, Bennett's (1993b) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity provides a constructivist view and outlines a "continuum" of cultural awareness, understanding, and adjustment. This model views the experience of cultural difference as a process of the ethno-centric (denial, defense, and minimization) and ethno-relative (acceptance, adaptation, and integration) stages (Hammer 2011).

The third perspective concerns the Model of the Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), which conceptualizes the ability to appropriately and effectively negotiate cultural identities to achieve a given communication goal (Chen & Starosta 2002). Integrating the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of competence, this model conceptualizes ICC along two scales: intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication competence. Intercultural communication sensitivity (ICS) includes the cognitive and affective dimensions of ICC. Defined as "the emotional desire to acknowledge, appreciate, and accept cultural differences," ICS comprises six components: self-esteem, self-monitoring, empathy, open-mindedness, nonjudgmental, and social relaxation (Chen & Starosta 1997). Intercultural communication effectiveness (ICE) is the behavioral dimension of ICC and refers to "the verbal and nonverbal ability to attain communication goals." ICE comprises four components: message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, and interaction management (Chen & Starosta 2000; Portalla & Chen 2010).

Research pertaining to regional issues has been conducted from a variety of perspectives. With the resurgence of regional identity, there has been an increased interest in studies of regions and regional identity from scholars in numerous disciplines. This resurgence is particularly overt in the European Union, where the sub-state regions play a significant role on regional identification (Paasi 2009) as a result of policies of cohesion and regional development processes. Indeed, research has shown that regional attachments are positively correlated with the EU support of subnational development (Chacha 2012). Identity scholars have explored the relationship between regional, national, and supranational identities. Using French public opinion data, a study on regional and European identity demonstrated that cultural regional identity showed lower support for European identity,

while regional political identity had higher levels of support for the European (supranational) identity (Brigevich 2016). The role of regional identity has also been recognized a as a barrier to regional development in a study conducted in Norway (Semian & Chromy 2014). Similarly, a large survey of university students in Chile suggests that high levels of regional identity are a threat to national unity and that regional and national identities are inclusive and complementary (Asun & Zuniga 2013).

In addition, there has been a research boom to explore the Albanian linguistic development and history in the post-communist era, after 1990. Several of these studies have addressed the relationship between dialect-standard language and practice (Kolgjini 2017; Topalli 1998) and the role of standardized language in national identity (Qosja 2008; Shkurtaj 2014). Extant research suggests an increase sensitivity toward regional and local identities at the political and institutional level. However, researchers have yet to explore how regional identity impacts communication interactions and how this might translate to intercultural competence. This study addresses this gap by investigating the constructs that lead to perceived competence at the cultural and regional level, as well as their relationships and demographic variation. As such, this study is centered on the following research questions:

1. What are the underlying macro constructs that explain the Albanian students' intercultural sensitivity when interacting with people from other cultures?
2. What are the underlying micro constructs that explain the Albanian students' interregional effectiveness when interacting with people from different regions?
3. What differences occur as a result of age and gender?
4. What is the relationship between cultural and regional constructs?

To answer these questions, we selected third perspective's two dimensions of intercultural competence: intercultural sensitivity (ICS) and the effectiveness (ICE). For the intercultural aspect of this study, we adapted the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale developed and validated by Chen and Starosta (2000). This scale is intended to measure the cognitive and affective dimensions of competence. For the interregional part of this study, we adapted the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES) developed and validated by Portalla and Chen (2010), which includes the behavioral dimension of competence.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Subjects

This study disseminated a self-administered survey at five universities. The final sample comprised 460 students from three universities in Tirana, Albania; one in Pristina, Kosovo; and one in Tetovo, Macedonia. The students that attend these universities come from all Albanian regions. Respondents ranged from 18 to 27 years in age, and 62% were women. SPSS statistics software was used to conduct statistical exploratory analyses of survey results.

### 3.2 Instrumentation

The self-administered survey used in this study consisted of two parts: Part I comprised 24 items adapted from the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, while Part II contained 20 items adapted from Intercultural Effectiveness Scale. Only three demographic questions were included: age, birthplace, and gender. Every item was translated, back translated, and adapted to best address the contextual and cultural differences between the scale's original development and the Albanian context. Corresponding to inter-regional interaction effectiveness, Part II required more adaptation and editing to better fit the intended use. The adaptation to regional items included the use of "dialect" instead of "language," "region" instead of "country," and "regional" instead of "culture." The questionnaire was two pages in length (one page printed on both sides). Space was left before each question for students to record their answers using a number from one to five. On the top of each side of the paper, corresponding with each part of the questionnaire, an explanation table explaining the five-Likert options was included: 1, completely agree; 2, agree; 3, undecided; 4, do not agree; and 5, completely disagree.

### 3.3 Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to students during their regular lecture time. The purpose of the survey was explained to them. Given the nature of the survey, there were no concerns of confidentiality or anonymity. The survey was administered in five universities during the first week of June 2014, with one university visited each day. Classes were randomly chosen at the location, depending on the number of classes in session at the time. Instructions for completing the questionnaire explicitly stated that "other cultures" are defined as any culture other than Albanian, with "Greek, any Slavic, Italian, American, Chinese, or others" provided as examples. In Part II of the survey, the instructions clearly defined regions and dialects in terms of their traditional development rather than current political borders. Various Albanian regions were provided as examples, as they are named in Albanian, including "Diber, Shkoder, Peje, Prishtine, Tetove, Vlore, and Shkup," geographical regions with the respective English names as follows, Diber, Shkoder, Peja, Pristine, Tetovo, Vlora, and Skopje. These explanations were provided so that students clearly understood that our study investigates how they communicate with cultures other than Albanian, as well as the effectiveness of communication within Albanian culture based on regions defined by dialect and not administrative and political borders.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Factor analysis

#### 4.1.1 *Macro: Intercultural items*

Prior to running exploratory factor analysis to determine the underlying factors behind the variables, we determined if our dataset was suitable for the analysis in two stages. First, we checked that patterned relationships exist by referring to the correlation matrix, with each variable having at least one strong relationship ($r$ > +/- .3). We also checked whether our dataset had a multicollinearity problem. The determinant score for our dataset was .030, which indicates the absence of multicollinearity according to the general consensus that the determinant score must be above .00001 (Yong & Pearce 2013). Second, we checked for sampling adequacy. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .758, which meets the cut-off value of above .5 (Field 2000). Moreover, the anti-image correlation matrix (the superscripted "a") ranges between .857 and .644 in value—well above the cut-off limit of .5. Both the KMO value and the anti-correlation matrix indicate that our

datasets are suitable for factor analysis. There were 15 (5%) non-redundant residuals with absolute values above .05, which is significantly lower than the cut-off limit of less than 50%.

The data were analyzed using the Principal Axis Factoring extraction method and orthogonal Varimax with Kaiser Normalization rotation method. Factor analysis works by determining the correlation patterns between observed measures and their underlying common factors (Tucker & MacCallum 1997; Costello & Osborne 2005). Based on this study's research questions, we selected principal axis factoring because the factors are successively extracted up to significant accounted variance. We chose Varimax rotation to minimize the number of variables with high loading in each factor. The intercultural items were considered uncorrelated for the purpose of exploring latent constructs in a new cultural context.

The final number of factors was determined based on eigenvalues, interpretability, and the reliability testing. For the eigenvalues, we used Kaiser's criterion of above 1 (Kaiser, 1960). The Principal Axis Factoring and orthogonal Varimax rotation with an eigenvalue cut-off of 1.0 showed two factors that met this criterion (with five more factors which did not meet it) with cumulative variance of 50.641%. The interpretability of the variables in each loaded factor was decisive after rotation and suppressing low loadings. A rotated factor matrix with factor loadings above .4 was used initially, generating five factors where only three factors had three or more variables each. This was based on the content interpretability of the items, the use of cross loadings in some items, and how the items behaved during reruns. The final decision regarding the "meaningful factors" was made by performing reliability testing on the factors generated through the exploratory factor analysis. The reliability testing helped finalize the factors, with the standardized items having Cronbach's alpha of .748 and .636. The reliability testing added to the interpretability of dimensions within factors with the inter-item correlation. For example, we added item 1 and 23 to factor two, they were congruent in terms of content and helped obtain a better Cronbach's alpha value (from .610 to .636).

As a result, the 24 items of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale were organized into two factors: labeled "Discouraging Attitudes and Behaviors", Factor I has nine items; and Factor II, labeled "Encouraging Attitudes and Behaviors", comprises nine items. Table 1 summarizes the results for inter-cultural items.

**Table 1:** Inter-Cultural Loadings on the Two Factors and Respective Means and Standard Deviations

| Item no. | Item name | Factor loading | Mean | St. dev. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Factor I: Discouraging attitudes and behaviors; Cronbach's Alpha .748, M= 2.194** | | | | |
| 22 | I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with people from cultures different from mine. | .652 | 2.11 | 1.180 |
| 18 | I would not accept the opinions of people from other cultures. | .576 | 1.77 | 1.070 |
| 2 | People from other cultures are narrow-minded. | .536 | 1.97 | .952 |
| 9 | I get upset easily when interacting with people from other cultures. | .495 | 1.86 | 1.033 |
| 15 | I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures. | .469 | 1.99 | 1.152 |
| 4 | I find it very hard to talk to people from cultures different than mine. | .444 | 2.41 | 1.156 |
| 12 | I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures. | .440 | 2.65 | 1.114 |
| 20 | I think my culture is better than other cultures. | .414 | 2.84 | 1.427 |
| 7 | I don't like to be with people from other cultures. | .387 | 2.15 | 1.472 |
| **Factor II: Encouraging Attitudes and Behaviors; Cronbach's Alpha .538, M = 3.98** | | | | |
| 8 | I respect the values of people from different cultures. | .761 | 4.65 | .679 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | I feel confident when interacting with people from cultures different than mine. | .659 | 4.08 | .891 |
| 21 | I often give positive responses during interaction with people from other cultures. | .504 | 3.75 | .996 |
| 3 | I am pretty sure of myself when interacting with people from other cultures. | .488 | 3.88 | .946 |
| 23 | I often use verbal or non-verbal gestures during interaction with people from different cultures. | .459 | 3.87 | 1.008 |
| 5 | I always know what to say when interacting with people from other cultures. | .432 | 3.83 | 1.017 |
| 24 | I have a feeling of enjoyment toward differences between myself and people from different cultures. | .415 | 3.44 | 1.215 |
| 16 | I respect the ways people from different cultures behave. | .315 | 4.41 | .870 |

*Note:* Items 1, 6, 11, 13, 14, and 17 did not load. Items 13 and 19 loaded above .3 and were extracted as six factors alone with no other item, and item 13 was extracted as one factor with single item.

**4.1.2** ***Micro: Interregional items***

The micro analysis followed the process as the macro analysis described earlier. Here are the coefficients for inter-regional items. Each item had more than one value of *r* >. +/_3. The determinant score was .042. The KMO value was .792, while the anti-image correlation matrix had values from .862 to .714. There were 14 (7%) of non-redundant residuals with absolute values greater than .05.

The Principal Axis Factoring and orthogonal Varimax rotation with an eigenvalue cut-off of 1.0 showed four factors with cumulative variance of 47.772%. The scree plot confirmed three factors as well, a fact that was considered in finalizing the "meaningful factors" for inter-regional items. After rotation using a significant factor criterion of .32, the factor loadings showed four factors as well. The final decision on factors was made on the basis of scree plot, the interpretability and item content, and the reliability tests for a better Cronbach's alpha. Three factors were selected: the first two, as they loaded in Varimax rotation, and then what would appear to be three and four together, as they could not stand separately because each only two items that loaded above .4 in value. Reliability testing also demonstrated that these items work better together. Table 2 summarizes the results for interregional items.

**Table 2:** Inter-Regional Loadings on the Three Factors and the Respective Means and Standard Deviations

| No. | Item name | F.L. | Mean | S.D. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Factor I: Dialect and regional identification as obstacle to interaction; Cronbach's Alpha .722, M= 2.761** | | | | |
| 14 | I often act like a very different person when interacting with people from different regions. | .598 | 2.32 | 1.292 |
| 8 | I find it is difficult to find similarities with people from regions with different dialects than mine. | .549 | 2.81 | 1.155 |
| 4 | I behave differently when interacting with people from different regions. | .531 | 2.80 | 1.390 |
| 2 | I am afraid to freely express myself when interacting with people from different regions. | .492 | 2.37 | 1.239 |
| 16 | I always feel a sense of distance with people from different regions and dialects. | .458 | 2.81 | 1.235 |
| 10 | I have problems distinguishing between informative and persuasive messages when interacting with people from different regions and dialects. | .444 | 2.80 | 1.224 |
| 6 | I have problems with grammar when interacting with people from different dialects. | .444 | 2.88 | 1.345 |
| 12 | I often miss parts of what is going on when interacting with people from regions with different dialects. | .421 | 3.29 | 1.262 |
| **Factor II: Respect and openness to identification and interaction; Cronbach's Alpha .619, M= 4.563** | | | | |
| 20 | I always show respect for the opinions of people from different regions. | .630 | 4.56 | .881 |
| 15 | During interaction, I always show respect for people from different regions. | .596 | 4.60 | .759 |
| 18 | For me, being yourself is the best way of interacting with people from different regions. | .542 | 4.52 | .962 |
| **Factor III: Dialect and regional identification as enhancement of interaction; Cronbach's Alpha .678, M = 3.747** | | | | |
| 5 | I am able to express my ideas clearly when interacting with people with different dialects. | .604 | 3.94 | 1.086 |
| 17 | During our interaction, I find I have a lot in common with people from different regions. | .537 | 3.64 | 1.031 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19 | I find it is easy to identify with people from different regions. | .488 | 3.63 | 1.104 |
| 7 | I am able to answer questions accurately when interacting with people with different dialects. | .443 | 3.79 | 1.063 |
| 11 | I always know how to initiate a conversation when interacting with people from different Albanian regions. | .395 | 3.80 | 1.043 |
| 13 | I feel relaxed when interacting with people from different regions. | .386 | 3.19 | 1.109 |
| 1 | I find it is easy to talk with people from different Albanian regions. | .375 | 4.08 | 1.022 |
| 3 | I find it is easy to get along with people from different regions. | .331 | 3.91 | 1.095 |

*Note:* Item 9 did not load.

### 4.2 Demographic analysis

We used average factor rating to examine how students' age and gender affected their responses. The average factor rating was determined by summing the students' responses to all the items for a factor and dividing it by the number of items and responses. The average factor ranged between 1 and 5—that is, the available ratings on the five-point Likert scale. We divided age into three age groups: a) students younger than 20 years of age, b) students aged between the 20 and 23, and c) students older than 23. This age categorization was based on the assumption that 20-year-old students are midway through their undergraduate studies, that the second age category (20–23 years old) were the majority and likely at the peak of their college years, while the third category would cover older students. Descriptive analyses were conducted to compare gender and age for each factor on both inter-cultural items (see Table 3) and inter-regional items (see Table 4).

In terms of gender, 62.4% (280) of respondents were female and 23.6% (106) male, while 13.6% (61) did not report their gender. Regarding age, 29% (132) were younger than 20, 51.4% (231) were aged between 20 and 23, 10.9% (49) were older than 23, while 8.2% (37) of respondents did not indicate their age.

#### 4.2.1 *Macro: Intercultural items*

There were significant differences based on age and gender in Factor I, Discouraging Attitudes and Behaviors toward other cultures (see Table 3 below). While the first two age categories— "younger than 20" and "20–23"—were not significant, the third age category—students "older than 23"—ranked significantly higher. This difference was significant on items 7 ("I don't like to be with people from different cultures"), 9 ("I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures"), 12 ("I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures"), and 15 ("I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures").

Differences based on gender were less significant. Overall, male students ranked slightly higher than female students. The difference was significant on items, notably item 20 ("I think my culture is better than other cultures"), followed by items 2 ("People from other cultures are narrow-minded") and 9 ("I get upset easily when interacting with people from other cultures"). However, there is a significant difference in ratings for students who did not report their gender: they ranked high compared to those who recorded their gender. The highest differences for the non-reported group were on items 15 ("I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures"), 22 ("I avoid those situations where I have to deal with people from cultures different than mine"), 18 ("I would not accept the opinions of people from other cultures"), 4 ("I find it very hard to talk to people from other cultures"), and 7 ("I don't like to be with people from different cultures").

While there were slight differences based on age and gender in Factor II, Encouraging Attitudes and Behaviors toward other cultures, these were less significant than those in Factor I. The differences between age categories were not significant, with the exception of three items: 24 ("I have a feeling of enjoyment toward the differences between myself and people from different cultures"), 10 ("I feel confident when interacting with people from cultures different than mine"), and 5 ("I always know what to say when interacting with people from other cultures"). Table 3 provides a summary of the results for intercultural items.

The differences based on gender were similarly insignificant (see Table 3 below). Within this factor, only item 24 ("I have a feeling of enjoyment toward differences between myself and people from different cultures") ranked significantly lower among

male respondents, while item 8 (“I respect the values of people from different cultures”) had lower ranking among those who did not report their gender.

**Table 3:** Means and standard deviations of the two factors organized by gender and age

| Characteristics | | | Factor I | | Factor II | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number | Mean | SD | M | SD |
| Gender | Male | 106 | 2.22 | 1.17 | 3.89 | 0.981 |
| | Female | 280 | 2.09 | 1.115 | 4.03 | 0.914 |
| | Unreported | 63 | 2.67 | 1.193 | 3.95 | 1.046 |
| | Total | 499 | 2.19 | | 3.99 | |
| | | | | | | |
| Age | Younger than 20 | 132 | 2.08 | 1.084 | 3.95 | 0.952 |
| | 20–23 | 231 | 2.12 | 1.123 | 3.98 | 0.935 |
| | Older than 23 | 49 | 2.45 | 1.304 | 4.16 | 0.911 |
| | Unreported | 37 | | | | |
| | Total | 499 | 2.14 | | 3.99 | |
| | | | | | | |

Factor I. Order of age categories from largest to smallest proportion: older than 23, 20–23, younger than 20. Gender categories from largest to smallest proportion: unreported gender, male students, female students.
Factor II. Order of age categories from largest to smallest proportion: older than 23, 20–23, younger than 20. Gender categories from largest to smallest proportion: female students, unreported, male students.

### 4.2.2 *Micro: Interregional items*

Significant differences based on age and gender were found in the three factors with dialect and region items. Factor I, Dialect and Regional Identification as Obstacle to Interaction, differed according to age (see Table 4 below). The average factor ratings were higher in the age category “older than 23,” and the lowest rating in the “20–23” category. While the difference between these two categories were consistent on all the items within Factor 1, some items stood out. Item 6 (“I have problems with grammar when interacting with people with different dialects”) had the highest difference between age categories; “older than 23” was the highest (3.42) and “younger than 20” was the lowest (2.69). Item 2 (“I am afraid to freely express myself when interacting with people from different regions”) had significantly higher ratings in the “older than 23” age group as well, while the “20–23” group ranked the lowest. Item 10 (“I have problems distinguishing between informative and persuasive massages during interaction with people from different regions with a different dialect than mine”) had a significantly different ranking, with the older age category ranking the highest (3.15) and youngest category the lowest (2.64). The older age category had consistently higher ratings for each item with the exception of item 14 (“I often act like a very different person when interacting with people from different regions”), which ranked the lowest.

While there were no differences based on gender in Factor I, the average factor ranking was higher for those who did not report their gender. The following items showed significant difference in Factor 1. Item 2 (“I am afraid to express myself when interacting with people from different regions”), in which the “unreported” gender group ranked highest and males ranked lowest. In both item 4 (“I behave differently when interacting with people from different regions”) and item 16 (“I always feel a sense of distance with people from regions with different dialect”), the “unreported” gender group were ranked higher while female students had the lowest ranking. For item 14 (“I often act like a very different person when interacting with people from different regions”), the “unreported” gender group ranked high compared to both male and female groups, the latter of which showed no difference. In the gender-based comparison for Factor I, only item 12 (“I often miss parts of what is going on when interacting with people from regions with different

dialects") had the highest rating compared to all other items, and there were no differences between the unreported (3.36), female (3.33), and male (3.22) gender groups.

There were no significant differences based on age or gender in Factor II, Respect and Openness to Identification and Interaction (see Table 4 below). There were slight differences in item 18 ("For me, being yourself is the best way of interacting with people from different regions") of Factor II. In terms of age, "older than 23" ranked higher (4.76) than the other two categories. In terms of gender, the female (4.61) group ranked high in comparison to the unreported (4.21) and male (4.46) groups.

There were no differences based on age or gender in Factor III, Dialect and Regional Identification as Enhancement of Interaction (see Table 4 below). There was only one slightly significant difference in terms of gender: in item 1 ("I find it easy to talk with people from different Albanian regions"), the unreported gender group ranked higher than the other two. There were greater differences between age categories in several items for Factor III. In item 19 ("I find it easy to identify with people from different regions") and item 1 ("I find it easy to talk to people from Albanian regions), the "older than 23" age group ranked significantly higher than the other two groups. Item 11 ("I always know how to start a conversation when interacting with people from different Albanian regions") had the highest mean for the "older than 23" category. In contrast, in Item 7 ("I am able to answer questions accurately when interacting with people that use different dialects")—which varied significantly among age groups—the "older than 23" group ranked significantly lower than the other two groups. Table 4 provides a summary of the results for interregional items on age and gender.

**Table 4:** Means and standard deviations of the three factors organized by gender and age

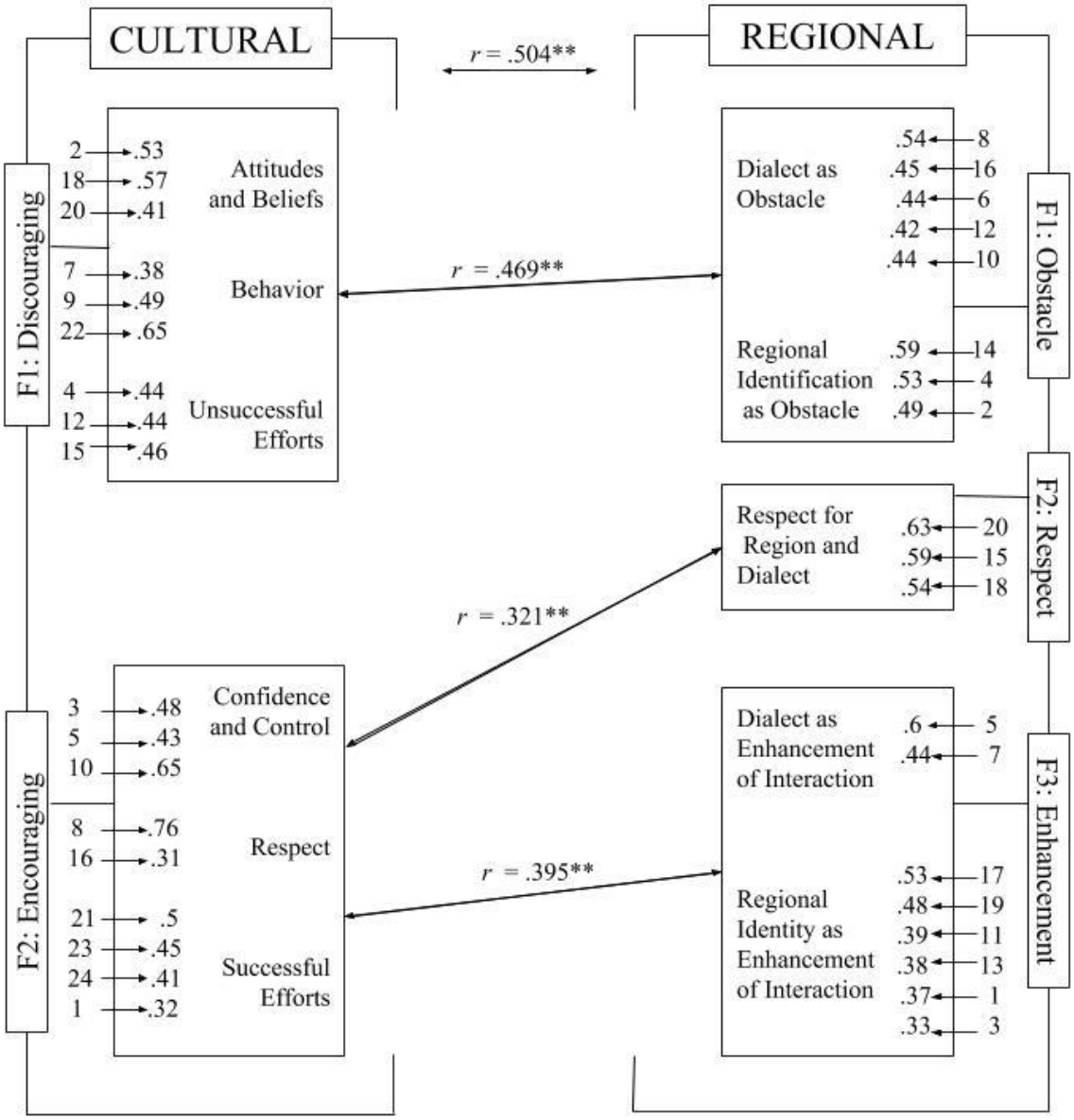
| Characteristics | | | Factor I | | Factor II | | Factor III | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | N | Mean | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Gender | | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 106 | 2.76 | 1.255 | 4.47 | 0.89 | 3.72 | 1.074 |
| | Female | 280 | 2.73 | 1.263 | 4.62 | 0.795 | 3.74 | 1.05 |
| | Not reported | 63 | 2.94 | 1.299 | 4.4 | 1.015 | 3.76 | 1.134 |
| | Total | 499 | 2.76 | | 4.56 | | 3.74 | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Age | Younger than 20 | 132 | 2.79 | 1.237 | 4.59 | 0.831 | 3.76 | 1.069 |
| | 20–23 | 231 | 2.66 | 1.266 | 4.54 | 0.869 | 3.71 | 1.057 |
| | Older than 23 | 49 | 3.05 | 1.239 | 4.66 | 0.663 | 3.81 | 1.046 |
| | Unreported | 37 | | | | | | |
| | Total | 499 | 2.75 | | 4.57 | | 3.74 | |
| | | | | | | | | |

Factor I. Order of age categories from largest to smallest proportion: older than 23, younger than 20, 20–23. Gender categories from largest to smallest proportion: unreported, male students, female students.
Factor II. Order of age categories from largest to smallest proportion: older than 23, younger than 20, 20–23. Gender categories from largest to smallest proportion: female students, male students, unreported.
Factor III. Order of age categories from largest to smallest proportion: older than 23, younger than 20, 20–23. Gender categories from largest to smallest proportion: unreported, female students, male students.

### 4.2.3 *Macro/Micro relationship*

The correlation analysis showed a strong positive value of $r = .504$ at the $p = .01$ level. Figure 1 shows the correlations for the two scales and their respective factors. See the Appendix for Tables 5 and 6, which show the correlations for scales and factors respectively.

**Figure 1:** Cultural and regional scale and factor correlations (dimensions are shown with the respective item and factor loading).




## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Using a large sample of university students in Albania, this study explored the constructs of intercultural communication competence at the macro (cultural) and micro (regional) scale, investigating the macro/micro relationship and the variations based on demographic characteristics. In doing so, this study posed four research questions: 1) What are the underlying macro constructs that explain the Albanian students' intercultural sensitivity when interacting with people from other cultures? 2) What are the underlying micro constructs that explain the Albanian students' interregional effectiveness when interacting with people from different regions? 3) What differences occur as a result of age and gender? 4) What is the relationship between cultural and regional constructs? The exploratory factor analysis indicated the following.

First, at the macro level, the analysis determined two constructs that explain the interaction with people from other cultures: namely Factor I, "Discouraging Attitudes and

Behaviors"; and Factor II, "Encouraging Attitudes and Behaviors." Factor I comprised the dimensions of negative attitudes and beliefs, negative behavior, and unsuccessful efforts for intercultural interaction. Factor II comprised three dimensions of confidence and control, respect, and encouraging efforts and behavior. Students ranked low in the Factor I and high in Factor II. As such, the two-factor structure generated by this study did not confirm the original Chen and Starosta (2000) five factor intercultural sensitivity scale structure.

Second, at the micro level, the analysis determined three main constructs that explain interactions with people from different regions within the Albanian national culture: Factor I, "Dialect and Regional Identification as Obstacle to Interaction," comprised dialect and region dimensions; Factor II, "Respect and Openness to Identification and Interaction," which had no internal dimensions; and Factor III, "Dialect and Regional Identification as Enhancement of Interaction," which comprised with dialect and region dimensions. Students ranked low in the obstacle (I) factor and high in the respect (II) and enhancement (III) factors. The original intercultural effectiveness scale of six-factors held reasonably well in its application to a new cultural context, with two or more factors from the original scale loaded under one factor in the structure used in this study, and only two items not loading with the original group. As such, application to a new context—Albania—reinforced the inter-dependability between factors, which generated fewer factors in our study.

Third, the demographic characteristics were significant on both the macro and micro scales. Students "older than 23" and those who did not report their gender ranked higher on Factor I of both the macro/intercultural ("Discouraging Attitudes and Behavior") and micro/interregional ("Dialect and Region as Obstacle") level, and low in the factors that encourage interactions on both the cultural and regional scales.

Fourth, there is a strong positive correlation between macro (cultural) and micro (regional) constructs, as shown in Figure 1. Specifically, the "discouraging attitudes and behavior towards other cultures" macro-construct is positively correlated with the "dialect and regional identification as an obstacle to interactions" micro-construct. The macro-factor of "encouraging attitudes and behaviour" is positively correlated with the micro-factors of "enhancement" and "respect for dialect and regional identification."

This study contributes to the literature on intercultural communication by exploring constructs of intercultural communication competence in a new cultural context. The lower number of factors generated at both the macro and micro scales is better at accommodating the cultural differences and regional variations. As such, a culture neutral measure could be developed with fewer factors that accommodate a larger cultural context, leaving room for culture specific items within these dimensions. Based in the context of Albanian university students, the results of this study suggest that intercultural interaction occurs based on attitude, behavior, and effort, translating into confident/difficult and successful/unsuccessful intercultural interaction. The factors generated by this study reinforce this idea and contribute to a better understanding of how cultural variations produce different levels of competence.

The strong positive correlation between the macro and micro measures indicate that there is no significant variation between cultural and regional perceived competence. Rathje argues for an ICC definition based on a cohesive concept of culture, where "intercultural" is actually produced "culture" by establishing normality among various collectives (2006:263). This is demonstrated by the results of this study: the positive micro-macro relationship suggests that achieving ICC is a "generic competence," as being more competent at the regional level translates to better communication capabilities at the cultural (national and international) level. The results of this study suggest that a

comprehensive definition of intercultural communication competence and culture general measurement could be conceptualized and developed as a macro-micro continuum, as this successfully accommodates cultural and regional variations.

Given the exploratory nature of this analysis, we were satisfied with the relatively low Cronbach's alpha values in some of the items, which could be considered as a limitation. However, this was not a confirmatory analysis. The constructs generated offer a better understanding of how intercultural communication competence works in different cultural context. While the variations in the results of this study could be an indication of macro-micro exposure, the impact of age and gender need to be examined further with greater attention to cultural, political, and historical context. Another important direction for future research is to investigate how dialect influences regional identification and communication, as the results of this study indicate higher variation in dialect than region.

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