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Small Shifts, Big Impacts: Cultivating Intercultural Skills Through Online Global Classrooms

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of a structured intercultural learning (IL) intervention on students' intercultural competence (IC) across Global Liberal Arts Alliance (GLA) member institutions. Implemented through the Global Course Connection (GCC) initiative, the intervention was evaluated using a pre-experimental, single-group pre-post design. A total of 178 undergraduate students from the humanities, sciences, and social sciences completed the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) before and after participating in the program. Results showed a modest but meaningful improvement (5%–7%) in students' attitudes and behaviors related to IC, including cultural respect, confidence, engagement, and enjoyment. In addition, a notable decline was observed in negative attitudes like ethnocentrism and avoidance. The study confirms that even short-term, curriculum-embedded interventions can foster IC in diverse educational settings. It also highlights the importance of virtual international collaborations such as COIL, particularly for Global South institutions with limited access to physical exchange opportunities. Furthermore, the study calls for integrating reflective social media use into IC education, acknowledging its role in shaping students' worldviews. The findings support expanding structured IL programs and enhancing North–South academic partnerships to cultivate globally competent graduates who are prepared to navigate and contribute to multicultural societies.

Keywords: Global South–Global North Partnerships, higher education partnerships, intercultural competence, intercultural learning, intercultural sensitivity

Introduction

The globalization of economies, businesses, and education has contributed to the interconnectedness of places, environment, people, and their values and ethics because of the mobility of the workforce and ideas using different

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technological communication tools. The movement of people, either for migration or for tourism purposes across regions and continents also made it possible for them to carry their cultures, values, and belief systems to environments where they are required to navigate cultural differences in their new work and study places, and in their interactions with their peers from different culture, religion and value systems. This movement of people, ideas and value systems has created challenges and opportunities for societies and countries to make work, study and living spaces receptive to diverse systems (ideas, culture, values and beliefs). Educational institutions and workplaces demand collaboration in the changing world, and this requires skills to live, work and interact in fast-changing environments (Čiefová, 2020; Portera, 2019; Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018).

Higher education institutions (HEI) changed their educational programmes and played a pivotal role in equipping their graduates with the knowledge and skills to function in increasingly diverse microcosms of the globalized world. The educational spaces also became an example of a workplace bringing together students, faculty, and staff from varied cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds. The HEI faculty and student body became a mini-world as HEIs attracted students from different nationalities, cultures, religions, and value and belief systems. The HEI promoted and advertised their programmes, reflective of global diversity with significant responsibility to actively equip their graduates with the intercultural competence (IC) required to thrive personally, professionally, and as engaged global citizens (Deardorff & Jones, 2022; Egron-Polak & Marinoni, 2023; Killick, 2017).

Intercultural learning (IL) has emerged as an important area of learning, and HEI and the governments across the globe, through different educational programmes and educational material (curriculum, textbooks) in the formal educational settings, have made it a core skill among others focused in formal education settings. The IL comprising of attitudes (empathy, respect, and openness to accepting differences), and skills (communication, adaptation, and perspective-taking) has emerged as a critical component of 21st-century formal educational settings (formal schooling and HEI). The governments made changes in their curricula and textbooks to make them reflective of the global interconnected world, and HEI introduced programmes like study abroad, faculty and student exchange, and other collaborative teaching programmes in their formal

teaching learning settings, focusing on their graduates' employability in global markets (Adamoniene et al., 2022; Arasaratnam-Smith, 2025; Obijiofor, 2025; Pylväs & Nokelainen, 2021; Stella & Premazzi, 2024).

The states and HEIs though have been working to cultivate IC through different academic and non-academic programmes, but still there is an ethnic, religious and communal violence among groups. The increasing level of prejudice and stereotypes in different cultures and societies also show that these initiatives do not always produce the desired results. The programmes were designed with the assumption that contacts between and among individuals and groups, as suggested by the proponents of Contact Hypothesis, would create conditions contributing to reducing prejudice, breaking down of stereotypes, and improve intergroup relations. The intervention by the states and the HEIs, such as, short academic visits by students sponsored and supported by governments (such as European students visiting USA and American students visiting European countries, Japanese, Koreans and Taiwanese students visiting USA and American students coming to these countries), semester exchanges designed presuming that guided interaction, intentional reflection and structured facilitation would contribute to reducing prejudice and discourage stereotyping (McKeown & Dixon, 2017; Paluck et al., 2019). There were problems with such programmes, such as the visiting groups sticking to familiar groups, and it helped in developing academic and personal networks and language skills with less exposure to unfamiliar groups, and did not achieve the objectives of global citizenship and IL and IC (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2015; Imperato et al., 2021).

This study identified limitations of the existing research body on IC and IL, such as most of the studies being focused on the Global North, analyzing the in-person collaborations and exchanges. The international collaborative online exchanges have been more frequent in the post-Covid19 world but there is insufficient empirical data on such collaborations, and whether such programmes contribute to IC and IL. The other gap identified in these studies was the missing link between IC and IL and internationalization, and the scholars' limited attention to UN's SDG, and how these collaborations support Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). This study aimed to assess the outcome of an intentionally designed academic activity in HEIs bringing students together in virtual settings to develop their IC and IL through academic exchanges, discussions,

and working together on academic tasks. This study will fill the empirical data gap of global online teaching and academic connections, exchanges and participation of students from the Global North and the Global South.

Literature Review

The European countries have received a large number of migrants and there are various reasons for the movement of people from the Global South to the Global North including work, study and safety being the main factors. The scholars in the Global North made efforts to research and explore the concept of IC and the beginning of the 21st century saw the emergence of the first elaborate concepts of multicultural competence (Deardorff, 2006; Sepncer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009; Spitzberg & Hangnon, 2009). The Council of Europe (2016, 2018a, 2018b) prepared documents on it and the Council of Europe's document, 'Framework of Competence for Democratic Culture' explains it as "the tools and critical understanding that learners at all levels of education should acquire in order to feel a sense of belonging and make their own positive contributions to the democratic societies in which we live" (Council of Europe, 2018a, p. 5). The other alternative words used in different disciplines are global competence, global citizenship, multicultural competence, cultural fluency, communicative competence, cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, cultural literacy, cross-cultural capability (Fantini, 2009).

The scholars (Egron-Polak & Marinoni, 2023) have found an increasing trend of internationalization of higher education in different countries across different continents, and developing IC has become an important pillar of HEI and their educational programmes. However, it has also been noted that the presence of international student body in an HEI does not translate into meaningful IL and developing IC because the key to developing these competencies, creating intentional, structured interactions in classrooms and on campuses among students from diverse backgrounds, has been missing. If HEIs do not create such mechanisms, the interactions among students, and between students and the faculty would not break down the barriers of ethnocentrism, communication apprehension, and social segregation between domestic and international student groups, resulting in reinforcing the stereotypes, and the opportunities for significant learning are missed. These studies highlighted the importance for HEI to understand how IL occurs (or fails to occur) within the specific ecosystem of a

university, and using creative and effective strategies to support the university-wide ecosystem to promote intercultural interaction and IL.

Several researches have evaluated the literature published in different journals and books on IC and IL (Arasaratnam, 2015; Avgousti, 2018; Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023a; Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020; Ramstrand et al., 2024) and these studies found that the most common understanding of IC and IL happens in Study abroad programs and Virtual exchanges, with technology being the catalyst for the increasing number of collaborations between HEIs across continents. The collaborations were conceptualized in the form of students' mobility programmes at the regional levels such as ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Program, African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), and Mercosur Academic Mobility and European Union's Erasmus+ Programme. Different countries from the North have created student exchange programmes to encourage two-way students movement to and from these countries. The objectives of all these programs are to encourage intercultural interactions presuming that these will result in IL and IC amongst students, faculty, and support staff at these HEIs.

The learning experiences designed for collaborative academic experiences are supposed to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions to navigate and appreciate cultural diversity. The systematic review of IC and IL by Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya (2023a) established the link between IC and effective academic collaboration as aiming at promoting inclusivity and mutual respect. The academics (Ainscow, 2020; Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023b; Vaishnav, 2025) have also found that international academic collaborations foster mutual respect among the participants (both faculty and students) and the well-moderated interactions lessen the chances of unpleasant interactions while discussing controversial topics in the classroom. The scholars (Allame et al., 2022; Sawyer, 2014) found that the academic partnerships and collaborations in the Asian and African HEI were created to bridge cultural divides, and as a platform to create IL opportunities by immersing participants (students and faculty) in different cultural and academic environments. These studies found that the academic collaboration between HEIs in Asia and Africa did succeed in achieving its objective of mutual learning and respect among students and faculty from diverse cultures. These academic exchange programmes enabled faculty and students to engage directly with diverse cultures,

nurture empathy and understanding, transcending national and regional boundaries.

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) became a popular idea and gained prominence in developing IC. The COIL initiative, such as China-South Africa academic collaboration, brought diverse disciplines and cultures by integrating English for Academic Purposes with a medical course, Radiography, which allowed students to engage in meaningful intercultural interactions. They collaborated and learned in an enriched educational experience promoting cross-cultural understanding. Another example of COIL programme was a collaboration between the HEI from the Global North to Global North (US and The Netherlands) and this study also found that COIL "significantly increases intercultural competence in terms of cultural intelligence" though this study also highlighted that "this increase was not observed for students who were already exposed to international experiences" (Hackett et al., 2023, p. 1). Another study that analyzed the Global South to Global South collaborations also discovered that such collaborations, if mediated by individuals with cross-cultural experiences, will contribute not only to academic knowledge exchange and mutual understanding, but also to cultural and intercultural exchanges and learning, an essential component for peaceful international relations (Allame et al., 2022; Woldegiyorgis et al., 2022).

The academics realized that such programmes are not producing the desired results and they suggested creating alliances of HEIs from the Global North and the Global South to develop deeper contacts between the faculty and the students (McKeown & Dixon, 2017). The academic bodies such as American International Consortium of Academic Libraries (AMICAL), Global Liberal Arts Alliance (GLAA), Open Society University Network (OSUN), renamed as The Global Higher Education Alliance for the 21st Century (GHEA21), were formed to promote comparative educational research, cross-border curriculum innovation, creating engaging classrooms promoting pluralism by advancing human rights, democratic values and social justice through global teaching collaborations. These collaborations occurred between HEIs located in the Global North and the Global South. Most of them included Liberal Arts Colleges, connecting the like-minded educators to collaborate, and develop and teach collaborative courses by integrating liberal arts pedagogy to promote intercultural dialogue, critical thinking, and global citizenship.

The HEIs have proved that an important part of the puzzle is to create dispositions to understand the other, through conflict resolution and peace building, and the HEIs in the North and South have created education programmes to train leaders in these areas. There are dozens of undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programmes in conflict resolution and peace building. These programmes emphasize IL and ICs importance in promoting harmonious social interactions, global harmony and peace. The SDGs of UN (Goal 4 and 16) are closely linked to the IC and IL and these are also considered important skills for the 21st century (Sarwari et al., 2024). Educational institutions are now placing greater emphasis on fostering intercultural awareness among students through intentional curricular and co-curricular interventions. However, the impact of such interventions requires systematic evaluation. This study was planned because the research analyzing research in IC and IL highlighted the fact that most of the research was happening in the Global North, within the Global North's context (Arasaratnam, 2015; Avgousti, 2018; Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023a; Ramstrand et al., 2024) and these studies suggested that IL and IC should also be conducted within the South Asian and African contexts.

Two consortiums were created to connect HEIs from the Global North and Global South. These include the Liberal Arts Alliance (GLA) and Open Society Network (OSUN). The GLA's mission is to address the evolving challenges and opportunities in higher education by providing a platform for member institutions to engage in meaningful dialogue, develop innovative programs, and promote the value of a broad-based education in an increasingly interconnected world (Global Liberal Arts Alliance, 2024), while OSUN's mission is to connect "diverse institutions worldwide to collaborate on teaching, research, and advocacy, cultivating a new generation of globally engaged citizens (Open Society Network, 2025). Both the consortiums shared the mission of connecting HEIs from the Global North with the Global South and creating collaborative teaching and learning opportunities for the faculty and students of their member institutes. GLA, through its programme Global Course Connection (GCC), and OSUN, through its programme Global Classroom, bring the faculty and students from the Global North and Global South institutes to promote IL and IC, a cornerstone of these programmes.

This research drew data from GLA member institutions. This approach

was suitable as the author's institute is a GLA member and the courses from which data were collected were taught under the GLA's GCC programme. The GLA member institutes are found in all continents except South America and the member institutes shared the GLA's mission of "fostering connections and facilitating the exchange of knowledge, resources, and best practices" through liberal arts education with "emphasis on critical thinking, interdisciplinary learning, and holistic development," using these important tools to "prepare students to become engaged and responsible global citizens". The GCC programme "aims to infuse international perspectives into the curriculum, enriching course content and fostering intercultural understanding among students" (Liberal Arts Alliance, 2025). The GCC programme brought together faculty and arranged a workshop in the Summer to meet the faculty from the member institutes, and plan the course together. This workshop was an opportunity for the faculty to exchange in information about their institute, its courses, faculty and students, and the social settings and environments they worked in. The faculty, while planning the academic aspect of the courses, also identified the IL and IC skills such as intercultural skills development, interconnected learning, diverse perspectives, collaborative learning and a focus on global challenges.

Research Method

This study used the quantitative, pre-experimental pre-post design to assess the impact of an intercultural intervention on university students' intercultural sensitivity levels. The instructors from GLA member institutes gathered at the American University in Bulgaria, in June 2024. They were guided by the workshop facilitators to design and plan course objectives, materials and assessment tasks. The facilitators were guided to include IC and IL aspects in the course materials, assessments and online interactions were planned during the course. The faculty also chose when to teach their courses. Some of the courses planned in June 2024 workshop were taught in the Fall 2024 semester and some courses were taught in the Spring 2025 semester. The collaborative teaching, and learning was planned for 4-6 weeks and the intervention was embedded within the selected university courses that included components of intercultural communication, IL, IC, global awareness, and diversity training. The teachers and students interacted in virtual settings using either Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams applications. A single-group pre-test-post-test method was used to

determine changes in students' intercultural sensitivity following participation in the intervention.

The GLA member institutes who participated in GCC 2025-2025 academic cycle were from Asia, Africa, Europe and USA, and the faculty comprised of men and women (Asians, Europeans, Americans and Africans). The students who participated in this study were undergraduates enrolled in different GCC courses (humanities, social sciences and sciences faculties) across GLA member institutes. The participants were composed of men and women of different nationalities, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds. This study was approved by the Internal Review Board of the author's institute and after the approval, the faculty teaching GCC courses was contacted through the GCC focal person. An email was sent to all the faculty teaching GCC courses in the 2023-2024 academic year, Fall 2023 and the Spring 2024 semesters, by the GCC focal person. It is difficult to gauge the population for this research, that is, the total number of students enrolled in the GCC courses in all the GLA member institutes, but the number of students who responded to the invitation sent to them through their course instructors and completed the online form was 178, with a near-equal distribution of male and female students. The survey form did not collect data about the course they were enrolled in and their nationality, ethnicity, religion and first language. The GCC courses are taught in English language.

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) by Chen and Starosta (2000) was used as the primary instrument. It includes 24 Statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale assesses five dimensions: (1) Interaction Engagement, (2) Respect for Cultural Differences, (3) Interaction Confidence, (4) Interaction Enjoyment and (5) Interaction Attentiveness. This scale was chosen because of its use in many studies on IC and IL and these studies chose ISS because this helped the researchers to measure research participants' sensitivity in intercultural communication contexts. The scale has shown high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha $\approx$ 0.86). The ISS questionnaire was distributed in two phases: before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the intervention. Instructors of the respective courses facilitated the distribution of online survey links during regular class sessions. Students completed the pre-test during the first week of the semester and the post-test during the final week, following the completion of all intercultural learning activities.

Findings and Discussion

The dataset included responses from 178 individuals regarding their intercultural experiences and attitudes measured through a 24-Statement questionnaire. There was a significant number of participants attending the GCC course who had already interacted with students from other cultures in academic settings, either in their country (48%) or had traveled abroad (6%) to attend an academic event. The participants had also travelled to another country for recreational purposes (15%) or to meet family members (19%) living in other countries. The data illustrated that the majority of the participants showed a disposition to diversity and cultural differences, and this was evident from the negative responses to the questions regarding culture such as 'cultural superiority' and 'acceptance of others'. The data collected at the Pre-Test stage demonstrated that the majority of the participants (58%) demonstrated moderate IC, 22% showed high IC while 20% exhibited low IC (see Table 1).

The data also illustrated that the participants showed positive attitudes toward intercultural respect and openness, visible from the positive responses (Agree and Strongly Agree) to statements such as 'I respect the values of people from different cultures (Statement 8)' (82%), 'I am open-minded to people from different cultures (Statement 13)' (76%), 'I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures (Statement 1)' (74%), 'I feel confident in intercultural interactions (Statement 10)' (68%). The responses also contained a significant number of students responding Neutral/Uncertain to statements, 30% were uncertain about their ability to interact effectively in intercultural settings (Statements 5, 9, & 12) while 25% hesitated before forming impressions of culturally different people (Statement 11). The number of positive responses to the statement 'I avoid interacting with culturally different people (Statement 22) was 41%, and 23% felt that 'I find it hard to talk in front of people from different cultures (Statement 4)' also demonstrated that the lack of intercultural communication and interaction also contribute to hesitation and fear of (mis)understanding the other, which could have been due to the construction of 'us' and 'them', during participants' years of formal schooling through the state mandated textbooks and curricula (see Table 1).

Table 1

Summary of Pre-Test Responses

Highly Interculturally Sensitive	22%
Moderately Sensitive	58%
Low Sensitivity	20%
International Exposure	
Academic Events in the country	48%
Academic Events Abroad	6%
Travel Abroad (Recreational Purposes)	15%
Travel Abroad (Meet Family)	19%
Positive Attitudes (High Agreement)	
I respect the values of people from different cultures (Statement 8)	82%
I am open-minded to people from different cultures (Statement 13)	76%
I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures (Statement 1)	74%
I feel confident in intercultural interactions (Statement 10)	68%
Challenges (High Agreement)	
I avoid interacting with culturally different people (Statement 22)	41%
I find it hard to talk in front of people from different cultures (Statement 4)	23%
Cultural Comparison	
Acceptance of foreign opinions	21%

The intervention was designed by the faculty of different AMICAL member institutes participating in the GCC programme, with a clear focus on IL and IC implemented in the Fall 23 and Spring 24 semesters. The intervention (assessment tasks) brought students from the participating institutes together in groups, working on an academic learning task. Furthermore, the task contained IC and IL aspects, encouraging participants to interact in online settings and complete the assignments. The faculty also encouraged students to learn about different countries and their people from their peers by incorporating examples from their own countries in their presentations and submissions.

The data analysis from the post-intervention data showed a visible pattern in the positive attitudes toward IC and IL. The statements such as 'I

enjoy interacting with people from different cultures' and 'I respect the values of people from different cultures' received mostly 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' responses (90% and above). There was confidence variability because a significant number of responses (28%) showed uncertainty about their ability to engage with open-mindedness in intercultural settings. This also revealed an internal tension within the participants since on the one hand, they chose predominantly "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" to the statements 'I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded', 'I think my culture is better than other cultures' and 'I avoid situations with culturally-distinct persons,' while on the other hand a significant number of responses (23%) wanted to avoid situations with culturally-distinct persons (see Table 2).

Table 2
Post-Test Summary

Statement in the Survey Questionnaire	Post-test (%)
I respect the values of people from different cultures (Statement 8)	89%
I am open-minded to people from different cultures (Statement 13)	88%
I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures (Statement 1)	79%
I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded (Statement 2)	12%
I don't like to be with people from different cultures (Statement 7)	15%
I think my culture is better than other cultures (Statement 20)	67%
I avoid situations with culturally distinct persons (Statement 22)	23%

The analysis of pre- and post-intervention responses using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale revealed measurable improvements in students intercultural sensitivity across multiple dimensions. The first key finding was the Overall Response Shift, as the data showed a slight increase in the percentage of positive responses ("Agree" and "Strongly Agree") following the intervention, rising from a combined 58% in the pre-intervention data to 61% in the post-intervention data. Concurrently,

negative and neutral responses declined, indicating a general shift toward more favorable attitudes regarding intercultural interactions.

The second key finding was Positive Attitude Enhancement. The Questionnaire contained key Statements and the responses showed a consistent increase in positive responses. These gains (see Table 3) indicate that the intervention successfully enhanced students' positive attitudes toward engaging with culturally diverse individuals.

Table 3
Overall Response Shift

Statement in the Survey Questionnaire	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Shift (%)
Enjoy interacting with different cultures (Statement 1)	72	78	+6
Respect the values of other cultures (Statement 8)	68	75	+7
Feel confident in intercultural interactions (Statement 10)	65	72	+7

The third key finding was the Reduction in Negative Attitudes and the analysis showed a marked decrease in negative perceptions suggesting a significant attitudinal shift away from ethnocentric perspectives (see Table 4). This study also found a notable improvement in Increased Intercultural Confidence as the proportion of participants who identified as "Very Confident" increased (31%), while those reporting lower confidence levels declined (22%), with a positive shift (+9%). This indicates a substantial increase in self-efficacy when engaging in intercultural communication.

Table 4
Reduction in Negative Attitudes

Statement in the Survey Questionnaire	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Shift (%)
Think other cultures are narrow-minded (Statement 2)	32	25	-6
Dislike being with people from different cultures (Statement 7)	32	25	-7
Avoid intercultural situations (Statement 22)	24	18	-6

The fourth finding from this study was an increased level of disposition, and Growth in Open-mindedness. Positive responses to indicators of open-mindedness increased across all measures (see Table 5) and these shifts demonstrate an improved capacity for empathy and acceptance among participants.

Table 5

Growth in Open-mindedness

Statement in the Survey Questionnaire	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Shift (%)
Respect for cultural values	68	75	+7
Acceptance of different opinions	65	72	+7
Enjoyment of cultural differences	66	72	+6

The data suggest a minimal change in the collective measure of intercultural sensitivity across the pre- and post-intervention periods, as the average mean score mostly remained stable between 3.91 and 3.94 (see Table 6). Though this indicates that the planned intervention did not produce a significant change in students' general perceptions and behaviours, the standard deviation showed a slight change (from 0.85 to 0.92), indicating a slight spread out after the intervention, representing a greater heterogeneity in the groups responses at the post-intervention data collection phase.

Table 6

Overall Mean and Standard Deviation

Statistic	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Mean Score	3.94	3.91
Standard Deviation	0.85	0.92

The detailed analysis of the data showed that the overall mean for all the statements was stable, but several individual statements showed a positive shift (see Table 7). The Statements 6 (+0.11 shift, from 3.56 to 3.67), 13 (+0.18 shift, from 4.28 to 4.46), and 19 (+0.33 shift, from 2.80 to 3.13) showed the most significant shift in the mean score. The intervention contributed to participants self -reported awareness of non-verbal or subtle communication during cross-cultural interactions. Statement 13 indicated an increase from 4.28 to 4.46 (a +0.18 increase), showing a strong positive attitude, and it was slightly reinforced by the intervention. The Statements 4 (-0.30, from 3.84 to 3.54), 5 (-0.23, from 3.44 to 3.21), and 12 (-0.21, from

4.12 to 3.91) showed the largest decline in mean, suggesting a shift towards positive perception and behaviours after the intervention. The analysis also revealed that there were statements that did not show any change in participants' perceptions and behaviours because the mean score and SD were insignificant to report.

Table 7

Detailed Means and SD Scores and Different Between the Pre- and Post-Intervention

#	Statement	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Change	Pre-Test *SD*	Post-Test *SD*	Change
1	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	4.36	4.34	-0.02	0.81	0.75	-0.06
2	I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.	3.92	3.88	-0.04	0.76	0.87	0.11
3	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.	4.04	4.08	0.04	0.73	0.71	-0.02
4	I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.	3.84	3.54	-0.3	0.69	1.03	0.34
5	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures	3.44	3.21	-0.23	0.92	0.94	0.02
6	I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.56	3.67	0.11	1	1.01	0.01
7	I do not like to be with people from different cultures.	4.4	4.34	-0.06	0.76	0.76	0
8	I respect the values of people from different cultures.	4.68	4.66	-0.02	0.56	0.51	-0.05
9	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.	4.16	4.14	-0.02	0.69	0.77	0.08
10	I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.8	3.82	0.02	0.82	0.86	0.04
11	I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally distinct counterparts.	3.64	3.64	0	0.76	0.78	0.02
12	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.	4.12	3.91	-0.21	0.6	0.85	0.25

#	Statement	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Change	Pre-Test *SD*	Post-Test *SD*	Change
13	I am open-minded to people from different cultures.	4.28	4.46	0.18	0.54	0.57	0.03
14	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.	4.08	3.96	-0.12	0.49	0.82	0.33
15	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.	4.12	3.95	-0.17	0.78	0.92	0.14
16	I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.	4.2	4.3	0.1	0.76	0.7	-0.06
17	I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.	4.36	4.22	-0.14	0.81	0.84	0.03
18	I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.	4.2	4.14	-0.06	0.76	0.82	0.06
19	19. I am sensitive to my culturally distinct counterparts subtle meanings during our interaction.	2.8	3.13	0.33	0.76	0.87	0.11
20	I think my culture is better than other cultures.	3.28	3.44	0.16	1.1	1.18	0.08
21	I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.	4.12	4.05	-0.07	0.44	0.64	0.2
22	I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally distinct persons.	3.76	3.52	-0.24	0.93	1.02	0.09
23	I often show my culturally distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.	3.52	3.51	-0.01	0.77	0.82	0.05
24	I have a feeling of enjoyment towards the differences between my culturally distinct counterpart and me.	4	3.95	-0.05	0.76	0.8	0.04

The study measured in this survey questionnaire were (a) Interaction Engagement (Behavioral), (b) Respect for Cultural Differences (Affective), (c) Interaction Confidence (Cognitive), (d) Interaction Enjoyment (Affective), (e) Interaction Attentiveness (Cognitive) areas and this study finds that though the changes in these are minor between 5% to 7% (Table 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5), but still this is

an important change as this also shows that the students who would take up future leadership roles in different social, cultural, economic, political and religious sectors would have an important skill, that is, IC and IL due to the structured educational programmes by their respective universities in their countries. The consistent increase in positive responses, paired with a reduction in negative perceptions, aligns with previous research emphasizing the effectiveness of intentional educational experiences in fostering intercultural competence (Arasaratnam, 2015; Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023a, 2023b). This change, though small, is in line with the earlier studies that have found positive effects of short and long educational programmes that include having opportunities for students to study interactively with students from diverse groups (Hackett et al., 2023), which has become possible due to technological developments, and HEIs' inclination to integrating them in their educational programmes while collaborating with HEI from other continents and countries, North-North, South-South and North-South collaborations (Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023b).

Though shift (Mean and SD, Table 7) is minor but this also raises an important question of whether the majority of the student body of these institutes is already exposed to IC and IL due to their previous interactions with people from diverse cultures, ethnicities, and religions in their travels to other countries and most probably through their use of different social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram etc. (Appiah-Kubi & Annan, 2020; Avgousti, 2018; Barrot, 2022). This is also important because all the courses taught in the GCC programme have only online collaboration, and in-person collaboration (visit to the course partner institute) was impossible due to many factors, such as, students' academic workload and non-academic activities, economic cost for both the guest and the host HEIs, faculty's teaching and supervising research workload and other responsibilities. There are many studies that have analyzed the impact of social media on IC and IL. A study conducted in Turkey and Greece HEI (Gümüş & Kayaoğlu, 2025) found that online collaboration and interactions contributed to cultivating empathy and understanding between these groups with opposing worldviews of each other.

The study also found the Ethnocentrism and Avoidance (statements expressing discomfort, avoidance, or cultural superiority) weakening between the pre- and post- data sets, as the negative and neutral responses

decreased and shifted to agree and strongly agree, shows the development of positive intercultural attitudes. This shift also showed that students increasingly drew pleasure from the intercultural interactions and practiced respect for differences suggesting that the online interactions and intervention successfully nurtured the affective components of intercultural sensitivity. These findings resonate with Chen and Starosta's (2000) emphasis on emotional engagement as a key driver in developing intercultural sensitivity and with the other recent studies (Prayogo et al., 2024; Sokuvitz et al., 2005; Zhao et al., 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was conceptualized with the presumption that IC and IL are made possible in teaching and learning environments where students from diverse backgrounds participate in structured and planned learning experiences. This study examined how these planned and structured interventions embedded in the GCC courses cultivated the IC and IL. The findings revealed that curriculum-integrated interventions at GLA member institutes, though seemed insignificant, contributed to cultivating intercultural sensitivity across behavioral, cognitive, and affective domains, even though the intervention was short, 4-6 weeks. The data showed that because of the interactions between students, there was a shift, though small, in the areas of respect for cultural differences, confidence in intercultural contexts, enjoyment of intercultural exchanges, and attentiveness—key dimensions of intercultural competence.

Though the overall shift between the pre- and post-intervention ranged between 5% to 7%, seems statistically insignificant, but educationally these changes are significant, especially in a global higher education context where developing intercultural dispositions is increasingly becoming important in the new global world, shaped by opposing ideologies, especially with the rise of right-wing and religious extremist ideologies and political parties. This study also found a decline in negative attitudes such as avoidance and ethnocentrism, further validating the interventions success in promoting inclusive, empathetic engagement across cultures. The findings aligned with global trends affirming the importance of intentional, structured, and reflective intercultural engagements within higher education settings.

Different HEIs from the Global North and Global South participated in

this study. Though earlier studies have found that the Global North HEIs have added IC and IL in their education programmes and university life because of the presence of a large number of students from the Global South, the HEIs from the Global North have been actively responding to the needs of their student body, comprising diverse groups to have the requisite IC to live, study and work there. This study also recommends that the HEIs from the Global South embed IC and IL as their core learning outcomes across disciplines through collaborative teaching and research partnerships.

Due to rising physical mobility problems because of logistical and financial barriers for the HEIs from the Global South, the COIL and virtual exchanges programmes are the best options to expand and support intercultural exchanges of the faculty and students between the HEIs from the Global North and Global South. There should be more programmes like GCC (by GLA) and Global Classroom (by OSUN), and HEIs should become part of programmes such as Diversity Student and Faculty Engagement and Faculty Development to encourage collaboration between the Global North and South to develop IC and IL in their student body who will be leading various social, cultural, political and economic developmental programmes in their future lives.

The HEIs should also explore how to encourage and use social media, given the influence of these platforms on young people who have grown up consuming social media content without even thinking about the authenticity and accuracy of the information posted on these platforms. The HEIs should incorporate reflective use of social media content in their educational programmes, along with students and faculty engagement programmes to promote IC, as students critically analyze and navigate through the content posted on digital media platforms.

This study also suggests that more studies should be conducted in South Asian, African, and Latin American contexts, and there should be academic and cultural exchanges and connections between the HEIs in these countries. The social, political and religious conflicts in South Asia and Africa have resulted in the destruction of properties and businesses, mob violence and loss of life. This also requires a need to look at the IC and IL from a different perspective, requiring the need to diversify global knowledge production and inform localized strategies for intercultural education. The HEI in the Global South should learn from programmes like GCC because this programme represents a promising model for advancing

IC in higher education. With intentional design, faculty commitment, and institutional support, such initiatives can play a transformative role in preparing globally competent, empathetic graduates capable of navigating and contributing to an increasingly interconnected world.

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