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Evaluating Multicultural Educational Experiences and Intercultural Communication Competence in an Arab Context

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Abstract: As an expatriate-majority state with a diverse multicultural and multilingual environment, Kuwait offers a distinctive opportunity for examining intercultural communication competence (ICC). This study examines the extent to which cognitive, affective, and behavioral predispositions toward ICC are present within the context of higher education by examining multilingual student populations at three local universities. Using survey data from over 800 respondents, the study explores ICC correlates such as linguistic abilities, formal educational experiences, and other sociodemographic factors. Analyses of variance demonstrate that some expected factors, such as multilingualism or expatriate status, contributed positively to ICC measures, while others did not—including attending English-language universities. Years of university experience positively correlated with both affective and behavioral aspects of ICC, while the cognitive component was least affected. Practical implications include the opportunity for universities to incorporate more cognitive-oriented intercultural lessons into their curricular objectives, which can add both educational and social value.

<u>**Keywords**</u>: Intercultural Communication, Competence, Higher Education, Multilingualism, Expatriate-Majority State, Kuwait.

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1. Introduction

Educational institutions in Europe and the United States have long offered international study opportunities to provide students with direct exposure to other cultures with a view to enhancing their linguistic and intercultural communication skills. In the Arabian Peninsula, intercultural and multilingual exposure is a daily reality for local inhabitants, as several Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are expatriate-majority states, with foreign workforces constituting 75% or more of the population. Moreover, the GCC has attracted European and North American higher educational institutions to open branches or affiliate with local universities to provide Western-style, English-medium programs complete with curricula, teaching, and assessment methods, as well as faculty primarily trained in the US or Europe. Given local students' systematic and prolonged exposure to multicultural values in private, public, and educational settings, their predispositions toward intercultural communication competence are likely to be affected. However, little is known about the extent to which ICC is present within the local student population, specifically in relation to its underlying behavioral, cognitive, and affective components. The purpose of this study is to examine the degree to which ICC predispositions can be attributed to variables such as multicultural exposure, linguistic ability, formal education, and other characteristics by applying a model proposed by Arasaratnam (2009) within a novel, expatriate majority context.

2. Theoretical framework

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) can be defined as the ability to both *appropriately* establish common ground and to *effectively* achieve desired outcomes. However, both aspects depend on the underlying, individual-level characteristics that may contribute to communication competence in general and to ICC skills specifically (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Remove Ruben, 1976; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). By examining these characteristics, culture-general traits can be evaluated on a broad scale and independent of a particular interaction or situation that is otherwise necessary to evaluate exhibited levels of appropriateness and effectiveness.

A focus on the underlying elements of ICC is consistent with a wide array of indirect assessment tools often used to measure intercultural competence in commercial, industrial, and

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educational contexts (Aba, 2015; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Gjoci & Gjoci, 2020; Sinicrope, Norris & Wantanabe, 2008), as well as in frameworks such as the pyramid model of intercultural competence Deardorff, 2006) or Chen and Starosta's (1996) triangular model of ICC. The measurable components identified as best suited for the current study included *cognitive*, *affective,* and *behavioral* dimensions (Cui & Van den Berg, 1991; Kim, 1991; Sercu, 2004), which are commonly examined in ICC as well as intercultural sensitivity research (Sunendar, Darmawangsa, & Sukmayadi, 2021; Peng, 2006). The current study applies Arasaratnam's (2009) proposed model to a unique cultural condition of a country with a greater number of expatriates than nationals. Arasaratnam's (2009) model was selected because it had been applied in a number of contexts and because it includes a measurement of all three dimensions that many scholars have conceptualized within the framework of ICC.

The *cognitive* aspect is a product of the relationship between communicative competence and cognitive complexity (Arasaratnam, 2009). Previous studies have found that higher levels of cognitive complexity are associated with enhanced communicative competence, in particular with persuasive and integrative skills (Leighty & Applegate, 1991), and with the ability to adapt messages to other's needs in intercultural interactions (Chen 1991), as cognitively complex individuals tends to be more perceptive in discerning nuances and subtleties in the environment and more adept at interpreting behavioral cues and relating to others (Adams-Webber, 2001; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). This ability is especially pertinent when attempting to communicate across cultural divides. Moreover, early multilingual exposure fosters social skills such as taking the speaker's perspective, which in turn helps to facilitate an understanding of the speaker's intended meaning (Fan, Liberman, Keysar & Kinzler, 2015). Thus, additional language skills may also have added cognitive benefits.

The *affective* component of ICC is the second dimension of interest. From a culture-general approach, the focus here is less about personal feelings toward specific cultural groupings and more about regulating emotional reactions by reducing the amount of uncertainty one would generally feel when relating to culturally different others (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005). While some consider empathy and perception of connectedness in intercultural interactions as key affective dimensions of ICC (Redmond, 1985; Arasaratnam, 2009), others conceptualize it in terms of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 2009) or a "positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences" (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Successful intercultural interaction relies on the individuals' willingness to learn and accept cultural differences, which requires such traits as self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, interaction involvement, and suspension of judgment (Chen & Dai, 2014). Thus, the affective aspect of ICC explores the person's ability to emotionally relate to individuals from other cultures.

The *behavioral* element of ICC is based on a person's readiness to engage in interpersonal interactions with people of different cultural backgrounds. The aspects of intercultural and interpersonal competence underpinning this behavioral dimension are the willingness to interact with people from other cultures (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005) and the ability to adjust communicative behaviors (Rubin & Martin, 1994), which typically requires a competent use of a foreign/second language or a lingua franca in order to successfully participate in a range of settings and reach a variety of communicative goals. In combination, these three dimensions—cognitive, affective, and behavioral— underpin competent intercultural communication that is appropriate to the context and effective at reaching its intended goals. This study aims to evaluate these dimensions as they might apply in an intercultural setting that is particularly saturated.

2.1. The Context of an Expatriate-Majority State

The current study investigates intercultural competence in a setting where the local environment has become multicultural and multilingual due to the presence of greater numbers of expatriates than citizens. We refer to such cases as *expatriate-majority states* (EMS), which are in part a product of industrial and social projects funded by oil revenues since the mid-20th century in the Arabian Peninsula. While studies frequently examine immigrants' intercultural competence within the context of their host culture (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007; Kim, 2005, 2012; Sam, 2000; Sheldon, 2010), fewer studies have examined how individuals within a local cultural group might be influenced by the presence of enveloping multicultural influences. It is here that countries of the Arabian Peninsula offer distinctive opportunities for examining "immersive" intercultural interactions occurring on a national scale.

According to the World Bank (2018), the three countries containing the world's highest percentage of expatriates are Qatar (89.9%), the United Arab Emirates (88.5%), and Kuwait (69.4%), with Bahrain and Oman both approaching 50%. Migrants in the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council account for approximately 10% of global migration, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE hosting the 4th and 5th largest migrant populations in the world (United Nations, 2016). According to Kuwait's Central Statistical Bureau (2017), expatriate (non-Kuwaiti) residents were estimated at over 70% of the total population of 4.1 million. A sizable portion of these expatriates—nearly 40% of the total workforce—are employed in either domestic, household labor roles or in the field of education (Central Statistical Bureau, 2011). As such, Gulf nationals are consistently exposed to people from different cultural backgrounds starting at an early age in their homes, continuing throughout their educational experience, and carrying on into the workplace (Hopkyns, Zoghbor & Hassall, 2018).

Although exposure alone will not necessarily foster greater levels of intercultural competence or even tolerance (Binder et al. 2009; Dixon & Durrheim, 2003), it can be presumed that both Kuwaiti and expatriate

residents who have higher degrees of intercultural understanding are more likely to experience a higher quality of social interaction in many domains of daily living. The main interest of this study is members of the local population who have interacted with significant numbers of expatriates their entire lives, including in formal educational settings. While multiple aspects of a population's intercultural experiences are worthy of examination (Aba 2015; Deardorff 2006), it is the impact of formal education within an EMS on people's ICC predispositions that forms the primary investigation here. School environments are designed to intentionally condition both cognitive and behavioral dimensions, both of which are relevant to intercultural communication competence. By focusing on university-age students, a majority of whom are locals, it can be assumed that they have consistently interacted with expatriates throughout their entire educational experience, as well as in many other aspects of their lives. This leads to an initial question about the possible impacts such a situation may have on their collective predispositions toward ICC.

RQ₁: *To which extent do students in Kuwait exhibit cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of ICC?*

ICC studies, since their origins, have primarily focused on so journers' or migrants' experiences as they adapt to travel or life abroad. However, Kuwait, like many other Arabian Peninsula countries, offers an interesting opportunity to study the somewhat unique phenomenon of nationals adapting to the influx of multiple foreign cultural worldviews, values, and norms into their own countries. One point of difference in such a context is that, unlike visitors to a new country who may experience apparently consistent dominant cultural norms toward which they can learn to adapt, in a country with a population primarily comprised of expatriate residents, there are few consistently predominant sets of cultural norms shared by the majority of the population. The deliberate encouragement of a lingua franca, such as English, is one way that such countries try to foster conditions for better communication between groups, leading to an expectation that additional language skills can facilitate better ICC.

H₁: *Multilingual students in Kuwait will score higher on all three ICC dimensions than monolingual students.*

Many options for education exist in the Arabian Peninsula, staffed primarily by expatriate teachers. Free public education is available to nationals from primary (required) through university education (dependent on academic performance). Also, there are private options, including international educational systems, such as British, American, French, German, Indian, and Pakistani schools, among others, catering to both the local Kuwaiti population and the diverse climate of expatriates. Higher education, too, is split between the mainly Arabic-speaking government universities and the private universities and colleges, some of which are overtly marketed with the names of the foreign country's educational system they seek to emulate.

H₂: *Students with higher levels of formal education will score higher on all three ICC dimensions.*

Demographic variables provide additional contextual considerations of relevance when examining intercultural communication competence. The three primary interests in this study include gender, age, and nationality. While gender and age are typical demographic indicators used in the social sciences, nationality is also important in an EMS context.

RQ₂: *What are the effects of gender, age, and nationality on the types of ICC exhibited by students in Kuwait?*

3.   Methods

Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) argue for the importance of an understanding of ICC that is "culture-general" (p. 143). In addition to incorporating several perspectives into its construction, the conceptualization of ICC used in this study has been tested in several cultural settings (Arasaratnam, Banerjee, & Dembek, 2010). As such, the methods section applies a published instrument (Arasaratnam, 2009) to examine the underlying cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of ICC within the Kuwaiti context.

3.1.   Participants

A total of 858 participants affiliated with three universities in Kuwait responded to an online questionnaire distributed by email or in classes. A snowball sampling technique was employed to include participants from among undergraduate and graduate students at two mid-sized American-style institutions and one large university. After non-student participants were eliminated, the number of respondents was 829, from which 797 completed the survey by providing valid results to all the questions. Most of the respondents were female (66%), reflecting a social trend in Kuwait universities. Further, 76% of the students were between the ages of 20-24, with a mean age of the overall sample of 22.75, with a standard deviation of 6.87, and values ranging from 17 to 77 years of age.

3.2.   Procedures

The core evaluation measures used for the current study are collectively referred to as the Intercultural Communication Competency Instrument or ICCI (Arasaratnam, 2004; Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Arasaratnam, 2009). The ICCI examines the underlying components of ICC in terms of cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions while allowing for customization and culture-specific adaptations. Though the instrument originally contained 15 items (Arasaratnam, 2004; Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005), after testing it among Australian students representing 32 countries (Cronbach's alpha = .77, M = 4.79, SD = .88), the researchers conducted a factor analysis with varimax rotation using a primary loading selection criterion of .50 or higher and no secondary

loading over.30 and reduced the number to 10 items. This final 10-item ICC scale, as designed by Arasaratnam (2009), is used in its entirety for the present study.

The resulting questionnaire measures intercultural competence in relation to cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. In the instrument, cognitive items pertained to a person's ability to employ cognitive constructs in intercultural contexts (Arasaratnam, 2009), affective items probed one's ability to emotionally connect across cultures, while behavioral items measured self-reported abilities to seek interactions with those who are culturally different, adapt behaviors or changing communication patterns accordingly, and hold friendships with people from other cultures (Arasaratnam, 2005; 2009).

The researchers developed the English and the Arabic versions of the instrument using a back-translation method and renamed it the Intercultural Communication Assessment Project (ICAP). The expanded survey consisted of 3 additional items targeting the effect of higher education on ICC, plus 15 demographic and experiential questions eliciting information about the participants' age, gender, nationality, ethnic identity, university, number of years in higher education, as well as years spent in English-language or bilingual education prior to university.

3.3. Scale

As per Arasaratnam (2009), the ICCI scale included four items to measure the affective component and three items to measure the behavioral and cognitive components. For completeness, the reliability and validity of the instrument were verified against the dataset under consideration, which can be found in Appendix A. However, Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) and Arasaratnam (2009) completed this analysis and have found the measures to be reliable and valid, thus driving the current study's design. As per Juniper (2009), we did not modify any of the questionnaires or scales to ensure the further applicability of this research.

4. Results

The first research question investigates the extent to which students in Kuwait exhibit cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of intercultural communication competence. Participants responded to a series of items related to each of the three dimensions of ICC on a 5-point Likert scale. Based on the coding, higher scores indicate higher levels of disagreements with the questionnaire items—except where reversed. Overall, higher mean scores reflect greater levels of ICC. All computations were performed using the R statistical computing software version 3.4. 3, and the confirmatory factor analysis was computed using the lavaan contributed package version 0.5-23.1097. All R code can be obtained from the authors to ensure reproducibility.

4.1. The Influence of Language

The first hypothesis examines the influence of language on affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of intercultural communication competence among students in Kuwait. The questionnaire asked respondents (n=797) to report the number of languages in which they are fluent. The majority (60%) of the respondents are bilingual (n= 551), 14% are trilingual (n=128), while 10.2 percent of the respondents are fluent in only one language (n=94). A mere 2.6 percent of the respondents (n=24) reported fluency in four or more languages.

An analysis of variance determined how the varying linguistic fluency of respondents influenced their intercultural communication competence with regard to cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. The test was conducted three times with the three components of intercultural communication competence as a dependent variable. In all three cases, statistical significance was achieved. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test were then used to discover specifically how multilingualism affects the various components of intercultural communication competence.

First, there was a significant effect on the *cognitive* component of intercultural communication competence at the $p < 0.01$ level for the various number of languages in which a respondent is fluent [$F(df=3, 793)=4.21$, $p=0.006$]. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that the mean score for respondents fluent in two (M=3.51, SD=0.61) languages significantly differed than those fluent in only one language (M=3.34, SD=0.53). However, the mean score for those fluent in three (M=3.54, SD=0.57) or 4 or more languages did not statistically differ from those fluent in one language (M=3.22, SD=0.77). Below, Table 1 demonstrates the mean differences found in the post hoc analysis. Thus, there is a curvilinear relationship whereby being fluent in two languages increases one's intercultural communication competence at the cognitive level, allowing them to better understand differences among cultures.

Second, there was a significant effect on the *affective* component of intercultural communication competence at the $p < 0.05$ level for the various number of languages in which a respondent is fluent [$F(df=3, 793)=6.68$, $p <0.001$]. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that the mean score for respondents fluent in two (M=3.40, SD=0.67) or three (M=3.46, SD=0.64) languages significantly differed than those fluent in only one language (M=3.09, SD=0.58). However, the mean score for those fluent in 4 or more languages did not statistically differ from those fluent in one language (M=3.36, SD=0.70). Table 1 demonstrates the results of the comparison of means in the post hoc analysis. Once again, the results show that fluency in two languages improves one's feelings of comfort in intercultural communication.

Finally, there was also a significant effect on the *behavioral* component of intercultural communication competence at the $p< 0.05$ level for the various number of languages in which a respondent is fluent [$F(df=3, 793)=5.71$, $p<0.001$]. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that the mean score for respondents fluent in two ($M=2.96$, SD=0.69) or three ($M=3.11$, SD=0.74) languages significantly differed than those fluent in only one language ($M=2.71$, SD=0.73). However, the mean score for those fluent in 4 or more languages did not statistically differ from those fluent in one language ($M=3.00$, SD=0.78). Table 1 demonstrates the results of the comparison of means in the post hoc analysis. Therefore, fluency in two languages predicts behaviors that demonstrate intercultural communication competence. Bilingualism is the best predictor of intercultural communication competence in all three dimensions, which is a clear advantage over monolingualism.

Table 1. Mean differences from the post-hoc analysis of the ICC component depend on the degree of multilingualism.

Cog	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference (I-J)	Tukey's HSD Sig.
1 language	94	3.3404	.53988	Compared	
2 languages	551	3.5166	.61074	-.17621*	.044
trilingual	129	3.5452	.57575	-.20479	.060
4 or more languages	24	3.2222	.77189	.11820	.827
Total	797	3.4916	.60632		
Aff	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference (I-J)	Tukey's HSD Sig.
1 language	94	3.0957	.58900	Compared	
2 languages	551	3.4034	.67879	-.30761*	.000
trilingual	129	3.4671	.64452	-.37131*	.000
4 or more languages	24	3.3646	.70703	-.26884	.289
Total	797	3.3763	.67135		
Beh	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference (I-J)	Tukey's HSD Sig.
1 language	94	2.716	.735	Compared	
2 languages	551	2.936	.697	.21956	.029
trilingual	129	3.115	.748	.39827	.000
4 or more languages	24	3.000	.786	.28369	.303
Total	797	2.941	.719		

Source: by the author

4.2. The Influence of Formal Education

The second hypothesis examined the impact of the level of formal education on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of ICC for university students in Kuwait. Questionnaire items related to formal education included the number of years a student has been at an institution of higher education, the institution's primary language, and whether or not the student had been in a bilingual school for two years prior to university. Regarding the number of years at a higher education institution, 26.9 percent (n= 214) of the respondents were enrolled for four or more years, 23.7 percent (n= 189) for three years, 19.9 percent (n=159) for less than a year, 11.0 percent for one year (n=88), and 18.5 percent (n= 147) of the respondents were enrolled for two years.

Three one-way analyses of variance were conducted to assess the influence of the length of one's experience in an institution of higher education on intercultural competence. A significant influence was found on the affective component of intercultural competence at the $p<0.05$ level [$F(df=4,792) =3.41$, $p=0.026$]. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that the mean score for respondents with less than one year ($M=3.22$, SD=0.61) of university experience significantly differed from those with 2 years of university experience ($M=3.44$, SD=0.72) and those with four or more years ($M=3.43$, SD=0.66) of university experience. This indicates that students may feel more comfortable interacting with different cultural groups upon entering the university. However, there were no differences in affective intercultural competence with one year ($M=3.34$, SD=0.59) or those with three years ($M=3.38$, SD=0.70) of university experience. Table 2 demonstrates the mean differences among the groups based on the length of their experience in higher education. Finally, the results revealed no statistical significance for the behavioral [$F(df=4,792) =1.12$, $p=0.34$] and cognitive [$F(df=4,792) =1.08$, $p=0.36$] components of ICC. These results show that students did not measurably learn to behave or think differently about intercultural communication as a result of their time at the university.

Table 2: Mean differences for the Affective Component of ICC

	N (%)	*M*	SD	Mean Difference	Tukey HSD Sig.
less than 1 year	147 (18.4%)	3.22	0.61	Compared	
1 year	88(11.0%)	3.34	0.60	-0.12664	0.624
2 years	159 (20.0%)	3.44	0.71	-0.22061*	0.032
3 years	189 (23.7%)	3.38	0.71	-0.16478	0.166
4 or more years	214 (26.9%)	3.43	0.66	-0.20945*	0.029
Total	797	3.37	0.67		

Source: by the author

Of the 797 participants that responded to the questionnaire item, 38.5 percent (n=307) had attended an English-language or bilingual school for two or more years prior to university. Three independent sample t-tests were conducted to assess differences in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of intercultural communication competence. The cognitive component did not differ between those who did (*M*=3.51, SD=0.62) or did not (*M*=3.47, SD=0.59) attend a bilingual school for two years prior to university [t(*df*=628.88) =0.85, p=0.39]. There were, however, statistical differences between those who did (*M*=3.45, SD=0.65) and those who did not (*M*=3.32, SD=0.67) attend a bilingual school for two years prior to university with regard to their affective aspect of ICC [t(*df*=670.31) =2.37, p=0.01]. Similarly, those who did (*M*=2.61, SD=0.65) attend a bilingual school for two years prior to university scored higher on their behavioral aspect of ICC [t(*df*=603.95) =4.16, p<0.001] than those who did not (*M*=2.38, SD=0.55). These findings suggest that while students may feel more comfortable and can function within the context of intercultural communication if they practiced it in earlier life stages, they are no more cognitively competent in their intercultural understanding than those who lack early exposure.

4.3.   Demographic Factors

The second research question examines how varying demographic factors, such as gender, age, and nationality, influence the intercultural competence of students in Kuwait. The majority of the respondents (n=528) were female at 66.2 percent, and only 33.8 percent of respondents identified as male (n=269). Independent sample t-tests revealed there were no differences among males and females with regard to the affective [t(*df*=596.01) =0.57, p=0.57], behavioral [t(*df*=565.2) =0.99, p=0.32], or cognitive [t(*df*=529.94) =1.01, p=0.31] ICC components. Thus, the gender of the students did not influence their ICC scores.

Since the age ranged between those born in 1940 to 2000, respondents were categorized into four categories: those born before 1993 (n=172, 21.5 percent), those born between 1994 through 1995 (n=200, 25.2%), those born between 1996 through 1997 (n=243, 30.5%), and those born after 1997 (n=182, 22.8%). Analyses of variance were then conducted to examine the effect of age on affective, behavioral, and cognitive components of intercultural competence. Statistical significance was not achieved on any of the measures: Affective [F(*df*=3,793) =1.21, p=0.30]; Behavioral [F(*df*=3,793) =1.37, p=0.25]; and Cognitive [F(*df*=3,793) =1.68, p=0.16]. Thus, the age of the students did not affect their ICC scores.

At 88.5 percent, the vast majority (n=705) of the respondents identified as Kuwaiti with regard to nationality, and 11.5 percent (n=92) identified as non-Kuwaiti. Non-Kuwaiti citizens (M_{aff}=3.60, SD_{aff}=0.60, M_{cog}=3.59, SD_{cog}=0.61, M_{beh}=2.87, SD_{beh}=0.63) scored higher than Kuwaiti citizens (M_{aff}=3.34, SD_{aff}=0.67, M_{cog}=3.47, SD_{cog}=0.60, M_{beh}=2.42, SD_{beh}=0.58) with regard to all of the intercultural components: affective [t(*df*=122.54)=-3.82, p<0.001], behavioral [t(*df*=111)=-7.08, p<0.001] and cognitive [t(*df*=115.42)=-1.77, p<0.07]. These findings may reflect a situation whereby expatriates are more likely to rely on intercultural communication competence than nationals.

5.   Discussion

The current study expands the understanding of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) by applying the concept to a condition in which expatriates make up the majority of a country's population, specifically, Kuwait. It also makes a modest contribution to a growing body of ICC research conducted outside of a North American and European setting while introducing new Arabic language scales. The results demonstrate that linguistic, educational, and demographic factors each may influence the degree to which one is interculturally competent. Our findings reveal certain nuances worth noting.

Overall, respondents exhibited relatively high degrees of cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of ICC in descending order, respectively, all of which achieved statistical significance. The inference is that such competence may generally be a conventional and valuable skill for those who live in an expatriate-majority setting. That the cognitive scores were the highest of the three may attest to the impact of long-term exposure to educational and societal influences on the ways that people are collectively taught to think about culture and difference. People's feelings (level of affect) were also demonstrably accommodating of cultural differences, with the belief that people from other cultures have valuable things to teach them measured as the single highest-scoring answer. Whereas the lowest-scoring dimension, behavior, is more likely shaped by individual experiences and therefore subject to greater variation. Put another way, it is probably easiest for most people to conceptualize the benefits of cultural openness, followed by expressing the associated feelings of cultural sensitivity, than it is to regularly demonstrate such actions in daily practice.

Language, too, played a discernible role. To begin with, almost 90% of the respondents spoke two or more languages. In an expatriate-majority state, the ability to communicate using a lingua franca, which, as Baker (2018) observes, is already "deeply intercultural" (p. 25), is obviously an asset and one for which the sampled population clearly takes advantage. In comparison, bilingual and trilingual individuals exhibited increasingly higher levels of intercultural competence on the affective dimensions than their monolingual counterparts. The trend was clear that as the number of languages rose from one to three, the level of overall ICC progressed correspondingly. Knowing additional languages was expectantly correlated with competence scores. The exception to this trend was found in respondents who self-reported the ability to speak four or more languages. It was presumed that this group may not have the same level of proficiency for all of the recorded languages as

compared to those who reported only two or three languages. So, the resultant effect of speaking four languages moderately may not be as influential as speaking two or three languages well. It could also be the case that respondents reporting four or more languages could have understood this in terms of dialects rather than different language families, the former having fewer overall benefits in ICC than the latter.

Interestingly, for those who attended a bilingual high school for at least two years, their affective and behavioral outcomes were higher (in that order), with the affective component strongly outscoring the behavioral. Cognitive outcomes were not statistically significant. Perhaps there are multiple factors to explain this. Foremost, private primary education in Kuwait is explicitly based on curricular and cultural norms of specific nations (American, British, French, Indian, etc.). As such, languages other than English are used in bilingual educational settings, and cultural components from diverse geographies are embedded into their curriculum, not simply those most associated with English-speaking countries. Teachers at these schools are also more likely to be culturally homogenous due to the formal certifications required to teach in the different school systems (e.g., Indian nationals teaching at Indian schools, British nationals at British schools, and so on). This contrasts in comparison to a university environment where the diversity of instructors' national backgrounds is considerable, possibly helping to explain why university experience produced different ICC outcomes than secondary education. More generally, there may also be different levels of cultural "receptivity" at younger ages, which could help explain the higher degrees of empathy (emotional connection with a different culture) and different behaviors (more diverse friends from other cultures) that were observed. That cognition was not significantly affected by a person's secondary school experience further supports the idea that cognitive adaptation requires a more sustained effort across several domains, early education perhaps only serving as one sphere of influence.

The last set of variables examined the relationship between demographic factors and respondents' ICC. There were no significant differences according to gender. So whatever overarching cultural forces may be differentially at play between men and women in Kuwait, these did not manifest in cognitive, affective, or behavioral variance in people's cultural competence. In terms of age, no differences were detected. Finally, with regard to nationality, only 10% of the sample identified as non-Kuwaiti. This expatriate subset scored higher on all three dimensions of ICC than the Kuwaiti students. Given the differences in power and privilege between these groups, expatriates are clearly under greater overall pressure to adapt to the host nation's environment in a way that even exceeds the significant intercultural adaptation necessary for the nationals from within an expatriate-majority state.

5.1.   Implications

One implication of these findings is support for the idea that a strong relationship exists between language and cultural learning. Many researchers recognize the role of culture in teaching languages as a way to enhance the learners' communicative competence (Nguyen, 2017; Hendon, 1980; Piątkowska, 2015). As Fenner (2002) argues, developing cultural competence as part of language education creates opportunities to raise awareness of the targeted culture as well as the learners' own. This approach recognizes a clear interdependence between learning about both languages and cultures, which in the current study manifested most profoundly for two of the three dimensions of ICC measured. The third dimension, behavior, did not appear to be noticeably affected by a person's multilingual capabilities. Despite such a rich intercultural environment in Kuwait, the ability to communicate in different languages does not necessarily translate to behaviors in which students actively seek out intercultural interactions and friendships.

Another important implication of this study relates to the idea of an expatriate-majority state. The findings illustrate some interesting consistencies across the sample in terms of people's predispositions toward ICC, for which the unique conditions of an EMS could contribute by encouraging a broad cross-section of people to develop intercultural coping strategies (beyond the use of a lingua franca) to help them deal with the daily presence of so many different cultural influences. A general cognitive awareness proved to be the most consistent outcome, with affect trailing close behind. However, ICC behaviors were less commonly practiced. Here, education may play a role. Unsurprisingly, students who attended a secondary school system based on a foreign national curriculum (British, American, Indian, etc.) had higher degrees of ICC affect and behavior. Our findings also reveal that intercultural competence generally rose with additional years of university experience. It comes to reason that schools remain an important location for broadening people's intercultural competence skills across all three dimensions and may be particularly important in fostering positive behavioral outcomes. Schools and universities located in an EMS that introduce sustained intercultural training starting at the early stages could positively contribute to the broader development of intercultural knowledge and behavior in society. In addition, universities in countries like Kuwait that incorporate more cognitive- and behavioral-oriented intercultural lessons into their curricular objectives—the areas where universities in this study had the least measurable impact—could further enhance both their educational and social value.

5.2.   Limitations and Future Directions

As with all research, there are notable limitations to this study. This includes the generalizability of findings due to the fact that data collection came from only one country. Further, the student sample used may not accurately reflect the broader labor market of Kuwait in which they will most likely be employed. Despite such limitations,

the current study expands our understanding of intercultural communication competence within education by examining the phenomenon in the relatively unique sociocultural and demographic environment of an EMS, where the proportions between expatriates and nationals are unusual compared to other parts of the world. Given the limitations inherent in the inclusion of only one country, the authors will seek to conduct similar future studies across the Arabian Peninsula and encourage other intercultural researchers to consider the same. One would expect a clearer picture of intercultural communication competence to develop when additional research can provide longitudinal findings against which to compare these results. Likewise, the inclusion of additional expatriate-majority countries—such as Qatar or the United Arab Emirates from the Arabian Peninsula, or others—would add valuable insight into the possible influences of such a national context on people's intercultural outcomes.

Data availability statement: The survey questions and the data that support the findings of this study are openly available from the Intercultural Assessment Project at http://icaproject.org/explore_the_data1.html

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Appendix

To assess the reliability and validity of the ICCI on this data a brief evaluation is included here. Overall, participants ranked highest with regard to the cognitive ICC component (*M*=3.49, SD=0.61, Cronbach's α =0.13), followed by affective components (*M*=3.37, SD=0.67, Cronbach's α =0.55) and finally behavioral components (*M*=2.94, SD=0.71, Cronbach's α = 0.53). Table 3 shows the respondents' responses for each of the items and the relevant component.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Components of Intercultural Communication Competence (n=797)

Cognitive Component of Intercultural Communication Competence	*M*	SD
I often find it difficult to tell the difference between similar cultures (Ex: Asian cultures, European cultures, African cultures, etc.)	3.67	1.02
I find it easier to categorize people based on their cultural identity rather than on their personality	3.41	1.10
I often notice similarities in personality between people who belong to completely different cultures (reversed)	3.38	0.89
Average Cognitive	*3.49*	*0.61*
Affective Component of Intercultural Communication Competence	**M**	**SD**
I feel more comfortable with people from my own culture than with people from other cultures	2.85	1.11
I usually feel closer to people who are from my own culture because I can relate to them better	2.48	1.10
I feel that people from other cultures have many valuable things to teach me (reversed)	4.25	0.96
I feel more comfortable with people who are open to people from other cultures than with people who are not (reversed)	3.91	0.93
Average Affective	*3.38*	*0.67*
Behavioral Component of Intercultural Communication Competence	**M**	**SD**
Most of my close friends are from other cultures (reversed)	2.78	1.06
Most of my friends are from my own culture	2.32	1.02
I usually look for opportunities to interact with people from other cultures (reversed)	3.70	0.90
Average Behavioral	*2.90*	*0.72*

To explore how these measures fit the constructs proposed by Arasaratnam (2009) in the context under study, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was also conducted to ensure the items measure the intended underlying construct. The CFA model is found in Figure 1. Here, the CFA produced a Comparative Fit Index of 0.723, a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation of 0.119, and a Tucker-Lewis Index of 0.610. These fit indices show that the model may not be ideal for the population under study; however, the developers of the instrument validated it (Arasaratnam and Doerfel, 2005; Arasaratnam, 2009).
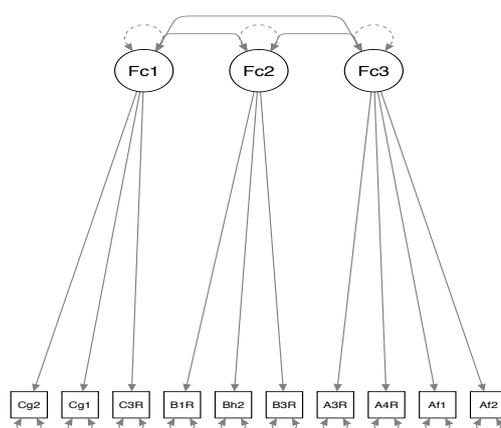

Figure 1: Model for Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive Constructs.