

Exploring the Multidimensional Nature of Intercultural Sensitivity in a Ghanaian University Context

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Abstract

Intercultural sensitivity is a critical component of effective communication in increasingly diverse higher education environments. This study examines the structure of intercultural sensitivity among Ghanaian university students and explores how affective dimensions shape engagement across cultural differences using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS). Data were collected from undergraduate students at a public university and analyzed with Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and correlation analysis. The findings revealed a refined five-factor structure comprising 17 items: intercultural emotional stability, engagement and enjoyment, confidence, awareness and mindfulness, and responsiveness, which differs from the original ISS dimensions. All factors were positively correlated, suggesting that intercultural sensitivity operates as an integrated system of affective competencies. These results underscore the importance of emotional regulation and affective readiness in shaping intercultural interactions and highlight the influence of cultural values on students' experiences. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on intercultural competence in African higher education. It emphasizes the need for holistic, experience-based approaches that foster emotional openness, confidence, and reflective engagement. By adopting such strategies, universities can enhance the quality of intercultural interactions and better prepare students to become inclusive, globally competent graduates.

Keywords

Intercultural Sensitivity, Multidimensional Construct, Ghanaian University Students, Intercultural Competence, Higher Education Environments

1. Introduction

Intercultural sensitivity is widely recognized as a critical competency for promoting inclusive campus environments and fostering constructive relationships among diverse student populations (Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006). It refers to an individual's ability to recognize, appreciate, and respond appropriately to cultural differences (Chen & Starosta, 2000). This competency is especially important in higher education, where students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds interact daily. Because universities are key spaces for intercultural engagement, examining the factors that shape students' perspectives on cultural diversity is critical to cultivating equitable and supportive academic communities (Kuranchie & Obeng, 2023). While diversity offers valuable opportunities for intercultural learning and personal development, it can also pose challenges, including stereotyping, ethnocentrism, and communication difficulties that can impede effective interaction (Elias & Masouri, 2020; Martin & Nakayama, 2021). Agyeman et al. (2021) further note that although cultural heritage fosters identity, continuity, and social cohesion, certain traditional expectations may sometimes discourage students from engaging across ethnic lines.

These considerations are especially pertinent within Ghanaian universities, which bring together students from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, creating environments where intercultural interactions are both frequent and impactful (Kuranchie & Obeng, 2023). The expansion of the higher education sector, along with increasing urban cosmopolitanism, has contributed to more diverse campus populations where students regularly encounter peers with differing cultural experiences (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). At the same time, enduring cultural norms continue to influence perceptions of identity, belonging, and social boundaries (Agyeman, Tamanja, & Bingab, 2021). In some cases, when these norms are applied in inflexible ways within multicultural academic settings, they may contribute to social separation or limit opportunities for meaningful engagement (Agyeman et al., 2021). Consequently, students often find themselves navigating complex intercultural dynamics shaped by the interplay between longstanding cultural traditions and the realities of diverse campus life (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013).

Hofstede (2001) explains that cultural value orientations, including dimensions such as collectivism, individualism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, play an important role in shaping how individuals interpret and respond to cultural differences. Although these concepts have been extensively studied in Western and Asian contexts (Elias & Masouri, 2020; Huang, 2013; Ichikawa & Kim, 2025; Mao, 2022), there remains relatively limited empirical research examining their relevance in African higher education settings. Within Ghana, existing scholarship on diversity has primarily concentrated on ethnic relations and multiculturalism, with less emphasis on how underlying cultural values influence intercultural sensitivity (Osei-Hwedie, 2002; Mensah, 2019). Given that cultural

value orientations can either facilitate or hinder openness toward individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Hofstede, 2001; Matsumoto, Yoo, & Nakagawa, 2008), greater attention to this area can enhance understanding of intercultural sensitivity within Ghanaian higher education.

2. Literature Review

As higher education institutions worldwide become increasingly diverse, intercultural sensitivity has emerged as a key area of scholarly inquiry (Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006). This diversity is reflected in ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional differences, which underscores the importance of affective processes in shaping how students engage in cross-cultural interactions (Chen & Starosta, 2000). These processes influence whether cultural differences are approached with openness and curiosity or met with anxiety and avoidance.

In this regard, Chen & Starosta's (2000) model provides a useful lens for understanding intercultural dynamics in higher education settings, where students routinely navigate multiple cultural identities (Deardorff, 2006). The model conceptualizes intercultural sensitivity as an affective component of intercultural communication competence, characterized by dispositions such as empathy, respect, and openness that support constructive engagement across cultural boundaries. This emphasis distinguishes it from more cognitively or behaviorally oriented frameworks, such as Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model, which focuses on how individuals interpret and respond to cultural differences.

Within this framework, intercultural sensitivity operates alongside intercultural awareness (cognitive) and intercultural adroitness (behavioral), forming a comprehensive model of intercultural competence (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Individuals with high intercultural sensitivity tend to exhibit positive emotional responses such as curiosity, enjoyment, and acceptance when encountering cultural differences, which fosters sustained intercultural interaction. Empirical studies across diverse regions consistently link higher levels of intercultural sensitivity to more favorable attitudes toward diversity, reduced prejudice, and greater willingness to engage with culturally different others (Fritz et al., 2002; Graf & Harland, 2005; Hammer et al., 2003; Tompkins et al., 2017).

Research also indicates that students who demonstrate strong interaction engagement and respect for cultural differences are more likely to form meaningful intercultural relationships, participate actively in multicultural groups, and pursue international opportunities such as study abroad (Anderson et al., 2006; Williams & Johnson, 2011). Conversely, low levels of interaction confidence or enjoyment are associated with communication apprehension, avoidance behaviors, and reduced intercultural contact (Gudykunst, 2005; Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). These patterns underscore the central role of affective readiness in shaping everyday intercultural behavior.

Intercultural sensitivity has further been linked to broader psychological and educational outcomes. Higher sensitivity is associated with reduced ethnocen-

trism, greater flexibility in identity negotiation, and higher satisfaction in intercultural communication (Bennett, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 2000; Hammer, 2015). Developmental perspectives, particularly Bennett's (1993) DMIS, highlight the progression from ethnocentric to ethno-relative orientations, emphasizing the emotional openness required to navigate cultural differences effectively.

Despite the cultural heterogeneity present in many African universities, research on intercultural sensitivity in African contexts remains relatively sparse. Existing studies often focus on macro-level issues such as ethnic relations, national integration, and language policy (Lentz, 2013). While valuable, these perspectives pay less attention to the affective and psychological processes that shape students' everyday intercultural encounters. In Ghana specifically, scholarship has largely centered on ethnic politics and social cohesion (Arthur, 2008; Tonah, 2007), leaving limited empirical insight into how students emotionally respond to cultural diversity within academic and social settings.

Cultural value orientations offer a useful lens for understanding variation in intercultural sensitivity among students. Theoretical frameworks proposed by Hofstede (2001) and Schwartz (1992, 2006) suggest that value priorities such as universalism, benevolence, tradition, and conformity shape how individuals interpret and respond to cultural differences. Self-transcendence values (e.g., universalism and benevolence) are generally associated with greater appreciation of diversity, whereas conservation values (e.g., tradition and conformity) may correspond with discomfort or resistance when encountering unfamiliar cultural practices. Empirical research across regions including East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East indicates that universalism and benevolence are positively related to intercultural sensitivity, while factors such as high-power distance and strong in-group favoritism may inhibit it (Matsumoto et al., 2008; Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). Although context-specific, these findings underscore the value of examining cultural orientations alongside intercultural sensitivity to better understand students' readiness for intercultural engagement.

Given these considerations, Chen & Starosta's (2000) model and the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) offer a strong foundation for examining intercultural sensitivity among Ghanaian university students. The ISS is particularly relevant to university life, where affective factors such as confidence, enjoyment, and respect shape interactions in classrooms, residence halls, and student organizations. When combined with measures of cultural value orientations, this framework enables an exploration of how value priorities relate to different dimensions of intercultural sensitivity in the Ghanaian context, offering insights that can inform strategies for fostering inclusive campus environments.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Chen & Starosta's (2000) model of intercultural communication competence, which conceptualizes effective intercultural interaction as a multidimensional construct encompassing affective, cognitive, and behavioral

components. The model identifies intercultural sensitivity, awareness, and adroitness as interrelated dimensions that together support competent cross-cultural communication. Among these, intercultural sensitivity is central, as it reflects individuals' emotional readiness to acknowledge, appreciate, and respond constructively to cultural differences, thereby underpinning the development of cognitive understanding and behavioral skills.

To operationalize the affective dimension, [Chen & Starosta \(2000\)](#) developed the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), which comprises five dimensions: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. These dimensions capture key emotional dispositions that shape individuals' engagement in intercultural encounters. The ISS has demonstrated strong validity and reliability across diverse cultural contexts and is consistently associated with related constructs such as empathy, self-esteem, and intercultural effectiveness ([Chen & Starosta, 2000](#); [Fritz, Möllenberg, & Chen, 2002](#); [Graf & Harland, 2005](#)). Accordingly, it offers a robust and theoretically grounded approach to assessing the affective component of intercultural competence.

Against the backdrop of increasing cultural diversity on Ghanaian university campuses, this study adopts the ISS framework as a critical lens for understanding how students' emotional orientations toward cultural difference shape their everyday interactions and communicative experiences. By focusing on the affective dimension, the study highlights the often-underexplored role of emotions in facilitating or constraining meaningful intercultural engagement within higher education contexts. Therefore, drawing on this theoretical and empirical background, the present study uses factor-analytic and correlational methods to investigate how cultural value orientations relate to intercultural sensitivity among Ghanaian university students. By identifying key value dimensions and examining their associations with intercultural attitudes and behaviors, the study seeks to clarify how traditional cultural norms intersect with the demands of increasingly multicultural academic environments.

3. Method

3.1. Study Design

This study utilized a cross-sectional quantitative research design to assess intercultural sensitivity among participants at a single point in time. Data were collected through a structured, self-administered survey, enabling numerical measurement and statistical analysis of participants' attitudes toward cultural differences. Intercultural sensitivity was measured using the 24-item Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) developed by [Chen & Starosta \(2000\)](#), a validated instrument designed to capture five key dimensions: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging

from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater levels of intercultural sensitivity.

The cross-sectional design allowed for efficient data collection without manipulation of study variables, making it appropriate for describing and quantifying relationships among constructs. In the present study, the ISS demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .70, indicating that the scale was sufficiently reliable for assessing intercultural sensitivity within the study sample.

It is important to note that the primary empirical objective was to validate the factor structure of the ISS and examine the relationships among its dimensions. Cultural value orientations provided the overarching theoretical lens guiding conceptualization and interpretation; however, they were not included as statistical predictors in the primary analyses. Accordingly, while cultural value orientations informed the study's theoretical framing, the methodological focus remained on assessing ISS factors and their interrelations.

3.2. Participants

Participants were recruited from a public university in Ghana through classroom announcements, departmental notice boards, and the institution's online learning platforms. Recruitment materials provided a brief overview of the study and invited interested students to contact the lead researcher for additional information. To be eligible, individuals were required to be full-time undergraduate students, Ghanaian citizens or long-term residents, and at least 18 years of age. Only those who met these criteria and expressed interest were enrolled in the study.

Before data collection, all participants were provided with an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality protections, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and were encouraged to ask questions before providing written consent. The study protocol, including recruitment procedures, consent materials, and data management practices, was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the lead researcher's university, with additional approval secured through a formal letter of agreement from the participating institution.

The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in **Table 1**. The gender distribution was nearly equal, with males comprising 50.1% and females 49.9% of respondents. The sample was predominantly composed of younger adults, with the largest proportions aged 18 - 20 years (43.1%) and 21 - 23 years (32.4%), and smaller representations across older age groups.

The sample reflected ethnic diversity, although the Ewe (49.6%) and Akan (31.3%) groups constituted the majority, with several other ethnic groups represented in smaller proportions. Academically, most participants were in the early stages of their studies, with freshmen (level 1) (61.6%) and sophomores (level 2) (22.6%) comprising the largest segments. Students were drawn from a range of

health-related disciplines, with Public Health representing the largest proportion (53.7%) of the total population.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of study participants (N = 367).

		n	%
Gender	Male	184	50.1
	Female	183	49.9
Age Range (in years)	18 - 20	158	43.1
	21 - 23	119	32.4
	24 - 26	35.4	9.5
	27 - 29	21	5.7
	30 - 32	16	4.4
	33-plus	18	4.9
Ethnicity (which ethnic group)	Adangbe	16	4.4
	Akan	115	31.3
	Akwamu	2	.5
	Dagomba	5	1.4
	Ewe	182	49.6
	Frafra	3	.8
	Guan	12	3.3
	Other	32	8.7
Level at the University	Freshman/level 100	226	61.6
	Sophomore/level 200	83	22.6
	Junior/level 300	30	8.2
	Senior/level 400	28	7.6
Field Study at the University	Allied Health Sciences	22	6
	Basic and Biomedical Sciences	50	13.6
	Medicine	27	7.4
	Nursing	29	7.9
	Pharmacy	42	11.4
	Public Health	197	53.7

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine the latent structure of the measurement items and assess construct validity. Sampling adequacy was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, which yielded a value of .81, exceeding the recommended threshold of .60. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(276) = 1660.31$, $p < .001$, indicating that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis (see **Table 2**).

Factors were extracted using principal component analysis (PCA), followed by

PCA with orthogonal Varimax rotation. This method was selected because the ISS factors were theoretically expected to be distinct and minimally correlated, making an orthogonal solution the most appropriate and interpretable choice. Factor retention was guided by eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and the conceptual coherence of the solution. Items with factor loadings of .50 or higher were retained, whereas items with low communalities or substantial cross-loadings were removed. Although one factor showed modest internal consistency ($\alpha = .50$), it was retained because factors with few items often yield lower alpha values, and the items demonstrated coherent content and stable loadings; accordingly, interpretations of this factor emphasize its conceptual contribution rather than its precision.

Subsequently, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among the dimensions identified in the EFA: intercultural emotional stability, intercultural engagement and enjoyment, intercultural confidence, intercultural awareness and mindfulness, and intercultural sensitivity and responsiveness.

Table 2. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	.811
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	
χ^2	1660.31
Df	276
<i>P</i>	<.001

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using an orthogonal extraction method with Varimax rotation yielded a five-factor solution (see **Table 3**). This structure aligns with theoretical perspectives that conceptualize intercultural competence as a multidimensional construct. However, the 17 retained items exhibited notable cross-loadings across factors, suggesting that the original Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) may not fully capture distinct dimensions within the Ghanaian context. This pattern highlights the potential cultural specificity of the construct and suggests that the ISS may not be fully applicable in this setting.

The extracted factors were interpreted based on the magnitude of their loadings and corresponding internal consistency estimates. Factor 1, intercultural emotional stability, reflected discomfort and negative affect during intercultural interactions ($\alpha = .640$). Factor 2, intercultural engagement and enjoyment, captured positive involvement and enthusiasm in intercultural encounters ($\alpha = .610$). Factor 3, intercultural confidence, represented perceived self-efficacy in cross-cultural communication ($\alpha = .630$). Factor 4, intercultural awareness and mindfulness, emphasized attentiveness and reflective judgment in intercultural exchanges ($\alpha = .600$). Factor 5, intercultural sensitivity and responsiveness, reflected attunement to subtle intercultural cues and supportive behaviors ($\alpha = .500$). Although

the internal consistency for this factor was relatively low, it was provisionally retained due to its theoretical relevance. Overall, the findings provide partial empirical support for a multidimensional structure of intercultural competence. While the refined 17-item scale demonstrates a coherent and interpretable factor solution, the presence of cross-loadings and modest reliability coefficients indicates the need for further refinement and validation within the Ghanaian context.

Table 3. Exploratory factor analysis of the intercultural sensitivity scale (five-factor solution).

Item	Description	IES	IE&E	IC	1A&M	IS&R
Factor 1: Intercultural Emotional Stability ($\alpha = .640$)						
15	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures	.704				
12	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures	.635				
7	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures	.596				
9	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.	.557				
18	I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures	.542				
Factor 2: Intercultural Engagement and Enjoyment ($\alpha = .610$)						
23	I often show my culturally distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues		.762			
24	I have a feeling of enjoyment towards the differences between my culturally distinct counterpart and me		.733			
17	I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.		.501			
Factor 3: Intercultural Confidence ($\alpha = .630$)						
5	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures			.671		
3	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures			.640		
10	I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.			.640		
	I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.			.513		
Factor 4: Intercultural Awareness and Mindfulness ($\alpha = .600$)						
14	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures				.647	
11	I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally distinct counterparts				.583	

Continued

13	I am open-minded to people from different cultures	.554
	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures	
Factor 5: Intercultural Sensitivity and Responsiveness ($\alpha = .500$)		
19	I am sensitive to my culturally distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction	.654
21	I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterparts during our interactions	.532

Note: Loadings below .40 are suppressed. IES = Intercultural Emotional Stability; IE&E = Intercultural Engagement and Enjoyment; IC = Intercultural Confidence; IA&M = Intercultural Awareness and Mindfulness; IS&R = Intercultural Sensitivity and Responsiveness. α = Cronbach's alpha.

4.2. Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among intercultural emotional stability, intercultural engagement and enjoyment, intercultural confidence, intercultural awareness and mindfulness, and intercultural sensitivity and responsiveness. These were constructs derived from the factor structure identified through the exploratory factor analysis conducted in the current study.

As shown in **Table 4**, the descriptive statistics indicate generally moderate to high levels across the five dimensions of intercultural competence. Intercultural emotional stability has the highest mean ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .66$), suggesting that students tend to report relatively strong emotional regulation in intercultural contexts. Regarding Factor 1, although the items in **Table 3** are negatively worded (“feel useless”, “get discouraged”, “get upset easily”), the factor loadings indicate that higher scores represent lower endorsement of these statements. In this context, a higher mean ($M = 4.12$) appropriately reflects stronger emotional regulation, as respondents are reporting that these negative emotional experiences occur infrequently. Because the scale is already oriented in this direction, reverse-scoring was not required. In contrast, intercultural sensitivity and responsiveness have the lowest mean ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .82$), indicating comparatively lower levels of responsiveness to cultural differences.

The correlation results show that most dimensions are positively related, though the strength of these relationships varies. Intercultural engagement and enjoyment dimension is moderately associated with intercultural confidence ($r = .34$, $p < .01$), intercultural awareness and mindfulness ($r = .30$, $p < .01$), and intercultural sensitivity and responsiveness ($r = .31$, $p < .01$).

This suggests that greater enjoyment and participation in intercultural interactions are linked to higher confidence, awareness, and responsiveness.

Intercultural confidence is positively related to emotional stability ($r = .26$, $p < .01$) and awareness ($r = .35$), indicating that students who feel more confident in intercultural settings also tend to have better emotional control and greater at-

tentiveness to cultural differences.

Intercultural awareness and mindfulness dimension is moderately correlated with emotional stability ($r = .25, p < .01$) and engagement ($r = .30, p < .01$), suggesting that being attentive to cultural differences is associated with both emotional regulation and active involvement in intercultural interactions.

In contrast, intercultural emotional stability shows a weak and non-significant relationship with intercultural sensitivity and responsiveness ($r = .06$), indicating that emotional control is largely independent of responsiveness to cultural differences.

Overall, the pattern of correlations suggests that while the dimensions are related, they are not strongly overlapping, reflecting a partially interconnected but distinct structure of intercultural competence.

Table 4. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the five intercultural dimensions.

	Mean	SD	IES	IEE	IC	IAM	ISR
Intercultural Emotional Stability	4.12	.66	-				
Intercultural Engagement and Enjoyment	3.76	.72	.18**	-			
Intercultural Confidence	3.78	.68	.26**	.34**	.-		
Intercultural Awareness and Mindfulness	3.93	.64	.25**	.30**	.35	-	
Intercultural Sensitivity and Responsiveness	3.48	.82	.06	.31**	.21	.22	-

Note. $N = 366 - 367$. Values are Pearson correlation coefficients (two-tailed). $p < .01$. Variables were derived based on exploratory factor analysis conducted in the current study. With respect to sample size, the slight variation between $N = 367$ in **Table 1** and $N = 366 - 367$ in **Table 4** reflects routine item-level missingness. Descriptive statistics in **Table 4** were computed on a per-item basis; therefore, the number of valid responses varies slightly when respondents omit specific items. This approach is standard in reporting descriptive statistics and does not indicate the use of any unreported case-deletion method.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the dimensional structure of intercultural sensitivity and assess how it manifests among students in a Ghanaian university context. The findings clearly demonstrate that intercultural sensitivity is not a unidimensional construct but rather a multidimensional system comprising interrelated yet distinct components. Moreover, the results reveal patterns that are context-specific, shaped by both the cultural environment and the institutional setting. These findings both affirm and extend established theoretical perspectives by showing how intercultural sensitivity is operationalized within a localized African higher education context.

5.1. Multidimensionality of Intercultural Sensitivity

The Exploratory Factor Analysis produced a five-factor structure that partially aligns with [Chen & Starosta's \(2000\)](#) model while also refining it. Specifically, the dimensions identified intercultural emotional stability, engagement and enjoyment, confidence, awareness and mindfulness, and responsiveness highlight a more differentiated organization of the construct in this context.

A notable contribution of the results is the emergence of intercultural emotional stability as a distinct factor. This suggests that students' ability to manage anxiety, discomfort, and uncertainty is a central component of intercultural sensitivity in this setting. This aligns with Gudykunst's (2005) anxiety-uncertainty management theory (AUM), which positions emotional regulation as essential for effective intercultural communication. At the same time, the moderate internal consistency estimates ($\alpha = .50 - .64$) indicate that while the factors are meaningful, their expression may be more nuanced and contextually embedded than typically observed in Western validation studies. This likely reflects the interaction between enduring cultural norms and increasing exposure to diverse intercultural experiences within Ghanaian higher education.

5.2. Internal Coherence and Interrelationships

The pattern of associations observed among the dimensions of intercultural competence reinforces the view that these components function as an interconnected system rather than as independent traits (Chen & Starosta, 2000). At the same time, the variation in the strength of these relationships suggests that the construct is only partially integrated, with some dimensions more closely aligned than others.

A particularly notable feature of the findings is the central role of engagement and enjoyment within the broader network of intercultural competencies. The consistent links between this dimension and others imply that a positive affective orientation may serve as a catalyst for the development of related competencies, including confidence, awareness, and responsiveness. This supports existing theoretical perspectives that emphasize the importance of emotional engagement in facilitating meaningful intercultural interaction (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

The observed interconnections among confidence, awareness, and engagement further highlight the mutually reinforcing nature of these components. Prior research suggests that individuals who feel more confident in intercultural contexts are more likely to attend to cultural cues and engage constructively with others, thereby enhancing communication effectiveness (Hammer et al., 2003). The current findings are consistent with this perspective, pointing to the dynamic interplay between affective and perceptual processes in shaping intercultural competence.

However, the weaker linkage between emotional stability and responsiveness introduces an important nuance. This pattern suggests that internal emotional regulation may not be sufficient to produce outwardly responsive or adaptive behavior in intercultural settings. In other words, the capacity to remain calm or composed does not necessarily translate into empathy, attentiveness, or behavioral flexibility. This distinction underscores the multidimensional nature of intercultural competence and suggests that different components may develop along separate pathways.

Taken together, these findings highlight both the interconnectedness and dif-

ferentiation of intercultural competence dimensions. They suggest that while certain affective and perceptual elements operate in tandem, others remain comparatively independent, reinforcing the need to conceptualize intercultural competence as a complex and multifaceted construct.

5.3. Theoretical and Contextual Implications

The present findings extend theoretical understandings of intercultural sensitivity in several important ways. First, they reinforce the central role of affective processes, particularly emotional stability and enjoyment, in shaping intercultural engagement, consistent with [Chen & Starosta \(2000\)](#). However, the results also show that these affective components are differentiated and unevenly related to behavioral responsiveness.

Second, the multidimensional structure and varying strength of relationships among factors support developmental models of intercultural competence, which posit that intercultural abilities evolve across interrelated but distinct domains ([Bennett, 1993](#); [Hammer et al., 2003](#)).

Third, the study highlights the importance of examining intercultural sensitivity within underrepresented contexts. The Ghanaian university setting illustrates how intercultural competence develops at the intersection of local cultural traditions and increasing global influences ([Deardorff, 2006](#)). In particular, the prominence of emotional stability and engagement suggests that affective readiness may play a unique role in contexts where intercultural exposure is expanding but uneven.

Additionally, variation in engagement, enjoyment, and attentiveness points to the possible influence of cultural value orientations, consistent with [Schwartz's \(1992, 2006\)](#) framework. Although not directly measured, these patterns suggest that value systems may shape how students experience and enact intercultural sensitivity.

5.4. Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings indicate that enhancing intercultural competence in Ghanaian universities requires more than promoting awareness alone. Given the central role of engagement and enjoyment, interventions should aim to strengthen students' positive emotional orientation toward intercultural interaction.

The distinct role of emotional stability further suggests the need to support students in managing discomfort and uncertainty in culturally unfamiliar situations, as this may influence their willingness to engage ([Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005](#); [Fritz et al., 2002](#)). At the same time, the lack of association between emotional stability and responsiveness indicates that programs must also explicitly target behavioral skills such as attentiveness and adaptive communication.

Experiential learning approaches, including intercultural group work, dialogue-based activities, and reflective exercises, are particularly effective in foster-

ing both affective engagement and behavioral competence (Deardorff, 2006; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Developing mindfulness and awareness further enhances students' ability to interpret cultural cues and respond appropriately (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

5.5. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of this study warrant consideration. First, the use of a single institutional sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Given Ghana's considerable ethnocultural diversity (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021; National Commission on Culture, 2025), future research should employ multi-site designs to capture broader contextual variation. Second, the modest reliability coefficients suggest the need for further refinement of the measurement instrument to enhance its cultural relevance (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Third, reliance on principal component analysis constrains the depth of theoretical interpretation; future studies should utilize confirmatory factor analysis to validate the underlying structure (Hair et al., 2019). Finally, subsequent research should more directly examine cultural value orientations and adopt longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to better understand the development of intercultural sensitivity over time (Deardorff, 2006; Schwartz, 1992, 2006).

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that intercultural sensitivity among university students is a multidimensional and contextually embedded construct, characterized by distinct yet interrelated components. The uneven pattern of associations among these dimensions makes clear that intercultural competence cannot be treated as a unified trait; rather, it reflects a differentiated system in which affective engagement, emotional regulation, and behavioral responsiveness develop in complex and sometimes disconnected ways.

By empirically examining these relationships, the study not only reinforces foundational theoretical frameworks (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Bennett, 1993) but also challenges assumptions of coherence within intercultural competence, revealing important context-specific nuances. In particular, the findings position engagement and enjoyment as pivotal drivers of intercultural interaction, while underscoring a critical gap between emotional stability and observable responsiveness.

Looking ahead, these insights call for a shift in both research and practice. Future work must move beyond relying on generalized models and instead prioritize culturally grounded frameworks that reflect the lived realities of diverse student populations. Similarly, higher education institutions should adopt more intentional, evidence-based strategies that go beyond fostering positive attitudes to actively developing students' capacity for responsive and adaptive intercultural behavior. Advancing this line of inquiry will be essential for preparing students to engage effectively in increasingly complex and diverse educational and social environments.

Conflicts of Interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose. The work was completed during my sabbatical leave, which the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay granted; its support is gratefully acknowledged.

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