The Effectiveness of an Intercultural Communication Course in Increasing International and European Studies Students' Intercultural Sensitivity

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Abstract: The present study examines the effectiveness of an intercultural communication course in increasing international and European studies students' intercultural sensitivity. In order to determine this effectiveness, the study considers the pre and post data obtained from administering the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) devised by Chen and Starosta (2000) to a group of Greek International and European studies majors. More specifically, 29 fourth-year university students studying in a department of International and European studies in Greece completed the ISS at the onset and at the end of the intercultural communication course. The results indicate that there is not a statistically significant difference in the pre and post data obtained with the exception of two constructs, where a statistically significant difference was found. The findings obtained herein are used to draw conclusions and consider the practical implications. Moreover, potential limitations and suggestions for further research are discussed. Overall, the current study attempts to respond to the calls for the context-specific (Greece) research. In other words, this study aims to contribute to an existing knowledge base by reporting on an enquiry undertaken to quantitatively determine the levels of intercultural sensitivity among the sample group.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, European and international studies students

1. Introduction

The present study examines the effectiveness of an intercultural communication course in increasing international & European studies students' intercultural sensitivity (IS). What fused this study is acknowledging that the prominence of communication skills in a world where nations and markets have become interdependent is unquestionable. Hence, the ability for these students and potentially future professionals to function effectively and appropriately in international contexts (i.e. international organizations, institutions, NGOs etc) is imperative. The success of communication in these contexts depends immensely on the ability of these future professionals to develop their intercultural communication competence (ICC) so as to act appropriately and successfully in the aforementioned culturally diverse environments. Therefore, this increased need to be able to deal effectively and constructively with cultural diversity within the framework of globalization has become a reality; the ability to develop adaptability to culturally diverse environments is becoming a sine qua nom "qualification". To this effect, Graf (2004) identifies effective intercultural communication skills as a significant

determinant for success in intercultural contexts.

Examining the body of existing relevant literature indicates that research conducted addressing ICC or IS within a Greek educational context is poor. This study is a preliminary attempt to start redressing this balance and hence it attempts to respond to the calls for the context-specific research. In other words, this research aims to contribute to an existing knowledge base by reporting on an enquiry undertaken to quantitatively determine the levels of intercultural sensitivity (IS), which is a determining factor for ICC (Chen and Starosta, 2008) among the sample group. The findings obtained herein are used to draw conclusions and consider the practical implications.

In essence, this paper first puts forward the main research question and the key hypothesis that will be addressed herein followed by a literature review, which creates theoretical scaffolding. Moreover, the methodology and research design proposed for investigation in this research are presented followed by a presentation and a discussion of the results.

1.1. Hypothesis

The present investigation was triggered by a hypothesis. Namely: There will be a statistically significant difference in the pre and post data measuring IS gathered from international & European studies students' at the start of a four-month intercultural communication course and after its completion.

1.2. Research Question

Based on the aforementioned hypothesis, the research question put forward is: To what extent does a course in intercultural communication increase international & European studies students' IS?

2. Literature Review

In order to address the issue at hand, a review of recent literature pertaining to ICC and IS will be considered in general as well as how they relate to the particular cultural context of Greece.

2.1. Background to Intercultural Communication Competence

Today's globalized world is characterized by the importance of living with differences at various levels including culture, ethnicity, attitudes, and value systems, which obviously influence the way we communicate and thus these differences should be respected (Alred & Byram, 2002; Tesoriero, 2006). Naturally, this integration is not an automatic process but a rather transformative one (Taylor, 1994). The reality of a globalized society has triggered the need to be able to communicate effectively and appropriately in different cultural contexts. Chen and Starosta (1996) stressed the critical nature of this ability in surviving in today's global world.

This globalization has driven many scholars to research and write about ICC in general and

what it entails (cf. Bennett, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 1998; Deardorff, 2004, 2006; Fantini, 2006; Mascardi, Brownlee, Walker & Alford, 2016; Shaules, 2007; Spenser-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Taylor (1994) stresses the fact that a person who seeks to become competent in intercultural communication has to develop an adaptive capacity and change his/her perspective so as to better understand and accommodate the demands of the host culture. Similarly Huang, Rayner, and Zhuang (2003), as cited in Penbek, Yurdakul and Cerit (2009, p. 2) state:

> A person who has the ability of intercultural competence can develop relational competence with people from different cultures, manage to solve complicated conflicts by moving around alternatives that arise as a result of cultural differences and improve the ability of doing business with counterparts from different cultures.

With regards to ICC, one must bear in mind that it is important to underscore its two-fold properties: communication competence and intercultural competence. Communication competence itself is not clearly defined, as there have been two distinct views on this type of competence. First, according to Chen and Starosta (1996), scholars' views vary on whether competence is an inherent ability (trait) or an acquired ability (state). Another controversial issue is whether competence is associated with performance—a behaviorally-oriented view (cf. Spitzberg, 2000), or whether it is based on knowledge—a cognitive orientation (cf. Chomsky, 1965). The former view places importance on the behaviors that lead to appropriate ICC while the latter sees knowledge of various aspects of intercultural communication as essential. More recent literature (cf. Chen & Starosta, 2008) argues in favor of the integration of both views -knowledge and performance—as both are fundamental elements of ICC. Many other scholars (Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 2008; Gudykunst and Kim, 1984; Ting-Toomey, 1999) have referred to "attitudinal", which refers to one's overall attitude towards the host culture and the members belonging to it, as another component necessary in developing ICC. This attitudinal component is also referred to as "affect" (Chen & Starosta, 2000), which forms the basis of intercultural sensitivity. In essence, one could claim that all these components are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they complement each other.

In essence, the overall superordinate term "communication competence" refers to one's ability "to effectively and appropriately execute communication behavior to elicit a desired response in a specific environment," as defined by Chen (1990, p. 12). Defining communication competence in such a way has a dual purpose. The first is to convey one's communicative intent or message and the second one is to generate a desired reply. Though these purposes may seem easily achievable, one should bear in mind that during an intercultural communication process the two parties (the sender and receiver) are by definition of distinct cultural backgrounds and thus their beliefs, attitudes and value systems influence the way they perceive and respond to messages.

On the other hand, intercultural competence, as defined by Deardorff (2004), can be considered a subfield of communication competence. Fantini's (2006, p. 12) definition of ICC as "a complex of abilities needed to perform *effectively* and *appropriately* when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" highlights the notions of "effectiveness" and "appropriateness" as the two building blocks of ICC. Another definition

is that of Alredand and Byram (2002) who see ICC as one's capacity to change or adapt his/her attitudes, behaviors and knowledge in order to be open and flexible to other cultures different from his/her own. It is this marriage of intercultural and communication competences that has brought about the field of intercultural communication competence. To this end, Chen and Starosta (1998) provide the following definition of ICC: "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors that negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment".

Moreover, Vuckovic (2008) listed a number of factors affecting one's intercultural communication effectiveness. These factors include personality, communication styles, perceptions, roles and identities. Similarly, Kim (1991) introduced three dimensions of ICC with regards to adaptability: the affective dimension (emotions involved when facing cultural difference), the cognitive dimension (discerning meaning), and finally the operational dimension (behavioral flexibility).

2.2. Intercultural Sensitivity

As previously noted, a line of literature has connected intercultural communication competence with intercultural sensitivity. Intercultural sensitivity represents the affective side of ICC in the subjects' desire to motivate themselves so as to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among the various cultures (Chen & Starosta, 1998). Chen (1997) has highlighted the crucial role intercultural sensitivity plays in one's ability to effectively manage in a culturally diverse society, but also to appreciate and enjoy this diversity. Intercultural sensitivity is a requisite for ICC and cross-cultural adaptation when living and working together with people from different cultures (Landis & Bhagat, 1996; Zhao, 2002). IS is also a valid predictive and determinant factor for intercultural effectiveness (Cui and Van den Berg, 1991). In addition, Landis and Bhagat predict that one's sensitivity to cultural differences as well as the ability to adapt his/her behavior to these differences will become more and more important. This prediction is very reasonable on the basis of the widespread globalization and market merging.

At this point it would be beneficial to put forward some definitions of intercultural sensitivity. Chen (1997, p. 6) states that:

> Intercultural sensitivity can be conceptualized as an individual's ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes an appropriate and effective behaviour in intercultural communication. This definition shows that intercultural sensitivity is a dynamic concept. It reveals that interculturally sensitive persons must have a desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures, and to produce a positive outcome from intercultural interactions.

Bennett (1986) defines intercultural sensitivity as one's capacity to transform himself/herself behaviourally, affectively, but also cognitively, and move along the development process of intercultural communication (the denial stage to integration stage). Bhawuk and Brislin (1992, p. 346) provide a straightforward definition by asserting that IS is a "sensitivity

to the importance of cultural differences and to the points of view of people in other cultures". Despite the fact that the above-mentioned definitions are quite distinct, there is a common ground: mainly the importance of success in dealing with culturally-different people.

In essence, the quality of accommodating, understanding and appreciating cultural differences, and the ability to enhance one's self-awareness that leads to appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication are what is termed "intercultural sensitivity" (Bennet, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 1998, as cited in Penbek et al., 2009, p. 5). Chen (1997) sees the basic components of intercultural sensitivity as empathy, self esteem (sense of self-value), self-monitoring, interaction involvement, open-mindedness, and non-judgment. These affective elements are considered prerequisites for an individual to be interculturally sensitive (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Chen and Starosta's (1998) work highlights four personal attributes of IS: *self concept* (characterized by confidence in intercultural interactions); *openmindedness;* (keeping an open attitude and accepting others' explanations); *nonjudgmental (*withholding judgment and prejudices—requisites of effective listening in intercultural situations); and *social relaxation* (one's capacity to overcome uncertain emotions during intercultural communication). The scholarly literature indicates there is a positive correlation between ICC and IS: the more interculturally sensitive a person is, the more interculturally competent he/she can be (Bennet, 1993; Chen, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1998). This belief has an underlying constructivist assumption in that as one experiences more cultural difference in a more complex and sophisticated manner, his/her potential competence in intercultural relations increases (Bennett, 1993).

The notion of empathy as it relates to IS has also been discussed by Barnlund and Namura (1985). They argued that to uphold communication in culturally diverse contexts, one must possess a certain level of empathy. Bennett (2001, p. 7) defines empathy as "a mode or relating in which one person comes to know the mental content of another, both affectively and cognitively, at a particular moment in time and as a product of the relationship that exists between them." Bennett (2001) sees empathy as a multidimensional phenomenon as his definition involves affective/emotional and cognitive/intellectual components, an approach that (Davis, 1996) also espouses.

Penbek et al. (2009) argue that individuals who have been socialized in monocultural contexts mostly have access only to their own cultural worldview, so they cannot distinguish between their own perception and that of people who are culturally different. Therefore, the key purpose in developing IS is attaining the ability to construe cultural difference in more complex ways. Thus the importance of being exposed to different cultural contexts through traveling, or even through schooling for example, is important.

It is interesting to note that in other cases, ICC has been used as an alternative term to sensitivity as in the case of Bhawuk and Brislin (1992, p. 414) who, in reference to their work, state that "When the context clearly refers to intercultural interaction, the shorter term *sensitivity* will be used in further discussions of the concept". Nonetheless, Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003, p. 422) attempt to delineate intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence by providing the following clarifying definitions. With regards to cultural sensitivity, they claim that it is "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" whereas,

intercultural competence refers to "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways". It appears that they interpret intercultural sensitivity as the ability to know and understand cultural differences while being able to apply this knowledge and understanding appropriately in practice as something more closely related to intercultural competence. By implication, it would hence be reasonable to claim that sensitivity is part of the construct of intercultural competence, a point also raised by Blue, Kapoor, and Comadema (1996-7) and that sensitivity is a prerequisite to developing intercultural competence. Similarly, others see intercultural sensitivity as a fundamental element for effective intercultural relations to emerge (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Cushner, 1989). In essence, it appears that the area of intercultural sensitivity is in need of further conceptual clarification and resolution.

Despite the fact that from a theoretical standpoint intercultural sensitivity plays a critical role in the study of intercultural communication, gauging it still poses problems. Kapoor, Blue, Konsky, and Drager, (2000, p. 215) emphasize that "while intercultural sensitivity has considerable theoretical significance for the study of intercultural communication, researchers have failed to develop sound measures of the construct" on the one hand, and on the other hand, theorists and practitioners disagree "on the relative importance of, and actual attention to, intercultural sensitivity in understanding people's behavior in cross-cultural encounters" (Kapoor, et al., 2000, p. 216). It becomes immediately obvious that there is much murkiness surrounding conceptualizations of ICC, let alone trying to develop sound measures of its construct.

In summation, and in spite of the lack of a complete agreement of the scholarly community on IS, it is a requisite for understanding that in intercultural encounters or culturally diverse contexts, the way one conducts him/herself is but one of several possible approaches, which is the result of one's personality traits as well as the preferences and perspectives perhaps imposed by one's cultural background. Bearing these notions in mind will help people more easily adjust and more effectively communicate when dealing with culturally diverse people.

2.3. What Other Studies Have Shown

Various studies (some longitudinal) have been conducted in connection to ICC and IS and how they relate to various demographic factors (e.g. age, gender, level of education, etc). The research foci of these studies have not only been on business contexts, but various other contexts such as study abroad programs and the effectiveness of international education (cf. Langley & Breese, 2005; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Redden, 2007; Williams, 2005). An indicative account of some of these studies is provided in this section. More specifically, although as a predictor of IS, gender has not been frequently researched, there have been studies which have shown no statistical correlation between gender and levels of IS (cf. Hammer et al., 2003). Nonetheless, studies conducted, for example, by Berryman-Fink (1997) and Hodge (2000) in the area of business showed that female executives tended to be better communicators compared to their male counterparts. Likewise Hammer's et al. (2003) research found no significant differences regarding intercultural sensitivity and age. Furthermore, The lack of statistical significance of one's level of education and his/her level of IS was shown in Wiseman's work (2003).

With reference to one's international experience and how it affects his/her overall ICC

Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004, p. 52) argues in her study that "study abroad programs play a key role in the development of intercultural sensitivity of U.S. university students studying abroad". Moreover, research carried out by Langley and Breese (2005) showed the positive correlation of international living experience and one's tolerance and openness. In other words, more international exposure leads to more acceptance and less judgement towards culturally different situations. Along the same lines, Williams (2005) concluded that students who studied abroad generally showed an increase in ICC compared to their counterparts who did not study abroad. International awareness and hence the necessary skills to adjust to culturally distinct environments and the gaining of knowledge of other cultures can be achieved through international experience (Gage, 2001; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004).

A survey of the literature shows studies that have been conducted to investigate one's overall foreign language knowledge and ICC. Studies regarding knowledge of the host language indicate that it helps one's ICC as it shows one's effort to learn about the host culture and communicate with host nationals, which in turn reduced the incidents of miscommunication and misunderstanding (Eschbach, Parker & Stoeberl, 2001). Moreover, Cui and Van Den Berg's (1991), as well as Kim and Slocum's (2008) studies report a positive relationship between international assignee adjustment and foreign language skills. Similarly, Fish (2005) emphasized the importance of knowing the host language in cultural adjustment. As such, it appears to be safe to claim that the ability to speak foreign languages is one of the predictive factors of ICC.

3. Methods

The theoretical underpinnings presented above serve as a sound basis for this investigation, which in turn create fertile ground for the research. In this section, the research design is presented. More specifically, the tools the investigator utilized for the quantitative analysis (questionnaire) of the study are discussed and justification is provided.

Many empirical studies into ICC which have used quantitative approaches through the use of tools designed to measure various conceptual dimensions, for example, intercultural sensitivity (cf. Deardorff, 2004; Kapoor et al., 2000; Peng, Rangsipaht, & Thaipakee, 2005) have been based on self-report questionnaires. The present study also relied on the quantitative research tradition. More specifically, a research survey was conducted so as to provide a numeric description of the level of intercultural sensitivity (as noted earlier IS is a strong predictor of ICC) of Greek international and European studies students by studying a sample of this population. The intent was to draw some generalizations from a sample to a population (Babbie, 1990; as cited in Creswell, 2009). This study specifically used the normative approach, which is characterized by the use of a Likert-scale questionnaire. The chosen research approach reflected this researcher's ontological and epistemological assumption, which, in turn, was reflected in the research paradigm. With reference to the former assumption, the stance held was that there is a 'reality' that can be apprehended. This research endeavored to find meaningful indicators of what was happening in the particular context. Hence, to this end, the abovementioned type of inquiry method of investigation (a quantitative tool) was chosen to more fully examine this study's hypothesis and provide answers to the research question.

3.1. The Quantitative Design: Instrumentation

The quantitative data gathered for this study were analyzed using mainly descriptive statistics, which helps reduce data matrices in a way that renders them more conducive for analysis and subsequent interpretation. To begin with, the quantitative research methods in the normative approach provide "clarity and precision through the use of well-designed questionnaires and descriptive statistics, and can include a large number of respondents and afford them anonymity" as posited by Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005, p. 7). To achieve this goal, I opted for the use of a well-established questionnaire: the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) devised by Chen and Starosta (2000), which was designed to "integrate features of both cross-cultural attitude and behavioral skills models" (Fritz, Möllenberg & Chen, 2002, p. 54).

This scale was selected because it takes into account all the dimensions of intercultural communication competence, and measures intercultural sensitivity of any given group of people. Moreover, the literature supports that this scale has been found to be valid and reliable. Chen and Starosta (2000), for example, purport that their scale has demonstrated strong reliability and appropriate concurrent and predictive validity. Chen's and Starosta's claim is further strengthened by studies conducted by Fritz et al. (2002), who used the ISS and tested the validity on a group of German students and found it to be reliable and valid. Likewise, Peng et al. (2005) measured the intercultural sensitivity levels of Chinese and Thai nationals and again showed the results were valid and reliable.

A further advantage of the ISS is that it is not culturally biased. On the contrary, it favors culture-general approaches (Fritz et al., 2002) as it was tested in other cultural contexts (i.e. German) and was found to be valid, despite the fact that it was noted that "future research can further refine the instrument" (Fritz et al., 2002, p. 14), a point that does not undermine the quality of this tool as it could be claimed that most instruments have their weakness and are subject to scholarly scrutiny.

The ISS is a questionnaire where respondents use a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Chen and Starosta (2000, p. 10) explain that "higher scores of this measure are suggestive of being more interculturally sensitive". These researchers first developed an instrument to investigate the concept of intercultural sensitivity. To this effect, the empirical construction and validation of the ISS were conducted in three distinct stages. During the first stage, a pre-study was conducted to produce items corresponding to the conceptual meaning of intercultural sensitivity. Following this conceptualization, the model was tested by using exploratory factor analysis. Finally, the ISS was evaluated for concurrent validity.

To test (pre-test study) the ISS, 168 American college students majoring in communication studies were given the original 73-item intercultural sensitivity questionnaire so as to produce a subsequent reduced version (Chen & Starosta, 2000). The data obtained underwent factor analysis and the items were reduced to 44 (with > 0.50 factor loadings). Further analyses were carried out (a final concurrent validity of the instrument was evaluated against several other valid and related instruments and produced satisfactory results) and a 24-item questionnaire comprising of five factors/constructs resulted (this final version of the questionnaire was used in this study). More specifically, items 1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, and 24 have been grouped and

labeled Interaction Engagement items; Respect for Cultural Differences items are 2, 7, 8, 16, 18, and 20; Interaction Confidence items are 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10; The items that comprise Interaction Enjoyment are 9, 12, and 15; and finally Interaction Attentiveness items are 14, 17, and 19. Some examples of the statements the ISS include: "I am quite sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures" and "I respect the values of people from different cultures". It should also be noted that items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20, and 22 are reverse-coded before summing the 24 items. The ISS was used in its 24-item version and the only intervention for this study was the substitution of the personal pronoun "I" with "He/She" preceded by the following statement: "To what extent do you consider yourself as being like the following person". This change was made in accordance with an approach Schwartz (2006, p. 299) takes so as to avoid responses that are in compliance with social desirability as "problems of self-presentation arise in response to direct questions about importance to self".

Before completing the ISS, respondents were asked to provide some demographic data (age, gender, the number of foreign languages spoken, and traveling experience) so as to have some background knowledge to factor into the research and also to measure differences between groups and the factors possibly affecting the participants' intercultural sensitivity. The statistical analysis was conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

Before administering the questionnaire to the respondents, it was piloted in its English version with five students (whose responses were later excluded from the research) so as to tackle any language or conceptual problems. All respondents reported that both the level of English used in the questionnaire as well as the wording of the statements did not pose any particular difficulties. Therefore, the need to translate the ISS into Greek or provide any clarifications regarding the content of the statements was deemed unnecessary and the questionnaire was subsequently administered in its original language (English) to all research participants.

3.2. Setting and Participants

In order to investigate the research question put forward, the ISS was administered to N=40 fourth-year students of a university in Greece majoring in international & European studies during the first day of the participants' intercultural communication class—a required course for all fourth-year students of the department. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire using a pseudonym to secure anonymity and to also be able to match the questionnaire with the subsequent questionnaire they were to complete. With regards to the selection process for individuals, it should be noted that it was a nonprobability sample (convenience sample), where participants were chosen based on availability and convenience (Babbie, 1990, as cited in Cresswell, 2009). Furthermore, this study did not involve stratification of the population before selecting the sample.

The questionnaire was readministered during the last lesson of the course four months later. The completed second questionnaire was matched with the first by pairing up the pseudonyms students had used. The total number of participants was N=29 (25 female and 4 male). 11 participants from the original body of participants either did not appear in class the day of readminstration or did not complete the questionnaire and thus were excluded from the study.

3.3. The Intercultural Communication Course

The course attended by the participants is a three-hour required course taught once a week. It expands over 14 weeks. The course is taught in English and covers a vast array of areas. More specifically, it provides a survey of various theories regarding the notions of culture and intercultural communication and various cultural dimensions that have been proposed by scholars. There are several simulation and role-playing activities in which participants had to actively engage. Finally, classroom discussions were carried out based on various case studies.

4. Results

This section presents the results pertaining to the research question put forward. The research question aimed to identify and measure the reported levels of intercultural communication competence among the research participants (middle managers of various companies in Greece).

Firstly, the reliability of the ISS factors is examined in order to assure its internal consistency (see Table 1 below). It is obvious tfrom the value of Cronbach Alpha (0.929) that the internal consistency shows high reliability.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.929	58

4.1. Demographic Factors

A series of tests have been conducted in order to examine any statistically significant factors that may arise based on demographic factors.

4.1.1. Gender

Regarding gender, no statistically significant analysis could be performed by using non-parametric t-test due to the fact that the vast majority of participants were female (see table 2) and the sample was small.

Table 2. Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Male	4	13.8	13.8	13.8
Valid	Female	25	86.2	86.2	100.0
	Total	29	100.0	100.0	

4.1.2. Age

The age factor was also not taken into account as the vast majority of participants (see Table 3 below) were around the age of 21.

Table 3. Age

N	Valid	29
	Missing	0
Mean		21.34
Median		21.00
Mode		21
Minimum		21
Maximum		26

4.1.3. Languages Spoken

As Table 4 indicates, the vast majority of participants are multilingual, speaking two foreign languages and above.

Table 4. How Many Languages Spoken?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	3.4	3.4	3.4
	2	14	48.3	48.3	51.7
	3	12	41.4	41.4	93.1
	4	2	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	29	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 below shows values, as the Mann-Whitney U test indicates, which are indicative of statistically significant differences.

Table 5. Test Statistics[a]

	He/she is quite sure of him/herself in interacting with people from different cultures (I)	He/she gets upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures (I)	He/she is very observant when interacting with people from different cultures (I)	He/she is quite sure of him/herself in inter-acting with people from different cultures (II)
Mann-Whitney U	51.000	53.000	59.000	40.000
Wilcoxon W	171.000	158.000	179.000	160.000
Z	-2.507	-2.456	-2.186	-2.974
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.014	.029	.003
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.018[b]	.023[b]	.046[b]	.004[b]

a. Grouping Variable: How many languages spoken?
b. Not corrected for ties.

It appears that the more languages the participants speak, the higher their ISS scores. It is noteworthy that participants who speak three or more foreign languages have an even bigger statistically significant difference compared to those who speak one or two (see Table 5). To be more specific, with regards to the first statement (see Tables 5 & 6) there is a statistically significant difference between the participants who speak three or more foreign languages (Mean Rank=18.86) compared to those who speak one or two (Mean Rank=11.40 and U=51, p-value=0.012*). Regarding the second statement, there is a statistically significant difference between the participants who speak three or more foreign languages (Mean Rank=11.29) compared to those who speak one or two (Mean Rank=18.47 and U=53, p-value=0.014*). As far as the third statement is concerned, there is a statistically significant difference between the participants who speak three or more foreign languages (Mean Rank=18.29) compared to those who speak one or two (Mean Rank=11.93 and U=59, p-value=0.029*). Finally, the fourth statement presents a statistically significant difference between the participants who speak three or more foreign languages (Mean Rank=19.64) compared to those who speak one or two (Mean Rank=10.67 and U=40, p-value=0.003**). According to Table 6 below, the participants who speak three or more languages have a greater mean rank. These results are in line, for example, with the Kim and Slocum's (2008) study referred to earlier (Section 2).

Table 6. Ranks

	How many Languages Spoken?	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
He/she is quite sure of him/herself in interacting with people from different cultures (I)	1 or 2	15	11.40	171.00
	3 or more	14	18.86	264.00
	Total	29		
He/she gets upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures (I)	1 or 2	15	18.47	277.00
	3 or more	14	11.29	158.00
	Total	29		
He/she is very observant when interacting with people from different cultures (I)	1 or 2	15	11.93	179.00
	3 or more	14	18.29	256.00
	Total	29		
He/she is quite sure of him/herself in interacting with people from different cultures (II)	1 or 2	15	10.67	160.00
	3 or more	14	19.64	275.00
	Total	29		

4.1.4. Traveling Abroad Experience

Several studies (cf. Langley and Breese, 2005; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Williams, 2005) have found a positive correlation between traveling and IS. However, as evident from

Table 7 below, only two of the respondents have not traveled abroad (either for leisure or on short Erasmus placements); hence, due to the lack of relevant data, no statistical analysis can be performed to compare those who have traveled and those who have not.

Table 7. Do You Travel Abroad?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	**Yes**	27	93.1	93.1	93.1
	No	2	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	29	100.0	100.0	

4.1.5. Class Attendance

Participants also had to indicate the frequency of attending classes during the semester the course was delivered. The average class attendance was 67.96%. 70% claimed that they had not missed any classes.

4.2. Comparison of the Pre- and Post-tests Scores

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the overall scores of the pre- and post-tests (all the probabilities of the asymptotic 2-tailed test are greater than 0.05). However, when looking at the various constructs and comparing the pre- and post-tests (pre-test is indicated with "I" and post-test is indicated by "II"), it is apparent that for the construct "Interaction Engagement" and "Respect for Cultural Differences" there is a statistically significant difference, where the values of the post-test are greater than those of the pre-test (see table 8 & 9). To be more specific, as for the first statement, there is a statistically significant difference between the results of the pre-test (Mean Rank=7.67) and the post-test (Mean Rank=14.79 and z=-3.999, p-value=0.000***). With regards to the second statement, there is a statistically significant difference between the results of the pre-test (Mean Rank=4.00) and the post-test (Mean Rank=13.68 and z=-3.735, p-value=0.000***)

Table 8. Test Statistics[a]

	Interaction Engagement Items (II) — Interaction Engagement Items (I)	Respect for Cultural Differences Items (II) — Respect for Cultural Differences Items (I)	Interaction Confidence Items (II) — Interaction Confidence Items (I)	Interaction Enjoyment Items (II) — Interaction Enjoyment Items (I)	Interaction Attentiveness Items (I) — Interaction Attentiveness Items (I)	More Items (II) — More Items (I)
Z	-3.999[b]	-3.735[b]	-.498[c]	-.931[c]	-.247[b]	-.924[c]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.618	.352	.805	.356

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
b. Based on positive ranks.
c. Based on negative ranks.

Table 9. Ranks

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Interaction Engagement Items (II) — Interaction Engagement Items (I)	Negative Ranks	24[a]	14.79	355.00
	Positive Ranks	3[b]	7.67	23.00
	Ties	0[c]		
	Total	27		
Respect for Cultural Differences Items (II) — Respect for Cultural Differences Items (I)	Negative Ranks	19[d]	13.68	260.00
	Positive Ranks	4[e]	4.00	16.00
	Ties	5[f]		
	Total	28		
Interaction Confidence Items (II) — Interaction Confidence Items (I)	Negative Ranks	10[g]	12.20	122.00
	Positive Ranks	13[h]	11.85	154.00
	Ties	5[i]		
	Total	28		
Interaction Enjoyment Items (II) — Interaction Enjoyment Items (I)	Negative Ranks	8[j]	11.19	89.50
	Positive Ranks	13[k]	10.88	141.50
	Ties	8[l]		
	Total	29		
Interaction Attentiveness Items (I) — Interaction Attentiveness Items (I)	Negative Ranks	9[m]	11.22	101.00
	Positive Ranks	10[n]	8.90	89.00
	Ties	9[o]		
	Total	28		
More Items (II) — More Items (I)	Negative Ranks	10[p]	9.85	98.50
	Positive Ranks	12[q]	12.88	154.50
	Ties	6[r]		
	Total	28		

a. Interaction Engagement Items (II) < Interaction Engagement Items (I)

b. Interaction Engagement Items (II) > Interaction Engagement Items (I)

c. Interaction Engagement Items (II) = Interaction Engagement Items (I)

d. Respect for Cultural Differences Items (II) < Respect for Cultural Differences Items (I)

e. Respect for Cultural Differences Items (II) > Respect for Cultural Differences Items (I)

f. Respect for Cultural Differences Items (II) = Respect for Cultural Differences Items (I)

g. Interaction Confidence Items (II) < Interaction Confidence Items (I)

h. Interaction Confidence Items (II) > Interaction Confidence Items (I)
i. Interaction Confidence Items (II) = Interaction Confidence Items (I)
j. Interaction Enjoyment Items (II) < Interaction Enjoyment Items (I)
k. Interaction Enjoyment Items (II) > Interaction Enjoyment Items (I)
l. Interaction Enjoyment Items (II) = Interaction Enjoyment Items (I)
m. Interaction Attentiveness Items (I) < Interaction Attentiveness Items (I)
n. Interaction Attentiveness Items (I) > Interaction Attentiveness Items (I)
o. Interaction Attentiveness Items (I) = Interaction Attentiveness Items (I)
p. More Items (II) < More Items (I)
q. More Items (II) > More Items (I)
r. More Items (II) = More Items (I)

5. Discussion

The findings have shed some light on the research question put forward. In fact, the results show that this study's original hypothesis was not completely confirmed in principle. What follows is a discussion regarding the findings, their importance, and some practical implications. Finally, some limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are put forward.

The findings reveal that there is no statistically significant difference regarding participants' ISS pre and post-test cumulative scores. These findings may be attributed to various reasons. A first interpretation may be the actual nature of the department, which draws students that are interested in potentially working and living abroad. In other words, students who choose to study in the field of international and European studies may have an *priori* interest in intercultural communication. This interest may be further fueled by the fact that the curriculum has several courses in international relations and communication, which could potentially explain why the medium score on the ISS pre-test was not low to begin with.

Another contributing factor may be foreign languages. More specifically, the department's heavy focus on the teaching of foreign languages (English, French, German, Chinese, Arabic) for six consecutive semesters as well as the students' advanced level of foreign language skills prior to the onset of their studies (there is an entrance exam students must score high on to enter the department) results in students being multilingual. Hence, all the participants of this study speak foreign languages and the majority is multilingual. Language is the vehicle of culture as Mukalel (1998) asserts, or a crucial channel of cultural information (Steers, Sanchez-Runde & Nardon, 2010), as cultural coding is carried with it, so having had an extensive language learning experience may have made the participants more aware of cultural differences and sensitive towards intercultural issues. Moreover, the positive role of knowing the host language has also been emphasized by Fish (2005, p. 228) who argued that "not having an ability with the host language may lead to serious problems associated with failure to appropriately adapt to a host culture". Fish's study is consistent with other existing conceptual and empirical research (e.g. Cui & Van Den Berg, 1991; Kim & Slocum, 2008). The findings then of this study may extend to those of other studies in that foreign language skills do significantly influence the IS one cultivates and the ICC one exhibits.

Another reason that may partially explain the results is the extensive travelling experience of the participants. The vast majority of participants (93%) reported to have travelled abroad.

Travelling to foreign countries is considered a contributing factor to ICC (cf. Gage, 2001; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Langley & Breese, 2005; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Parker & McEvoy, 1993; Williams, 2005) as travellers or sojourners become more tolerant of and open-minded towards differences that arise in culturally distinct settings. International awareness increases, appropriate and effective skills are gained, and knowledge of other cultures is obtained.

Although the overall scores of the pre- and post-tests do not appear to be statistically significant, it is interesting to look at the constructs "Interaction Engagement" and "Respect for Cultural Differences", where a statistically significant difference was found. Regarding the construct "Interaction Engagement", it is important to note that at its core, engagement implies meaningful interaction. Interaction involves reciprocal action and communication and engagement presupposes active involvement. The participants that took part in this study will potentially interact with people from different cultures and engage in professional encounters with people from the world over. Likewise, "respect" means being open to other cultures and accepting these cultures' norms, value systems, rules and conventions, even if they are quite distinct from one's own. Respecting a culture does not necessarily mean embracing it or following the norms and conventions it imposes or adopting its value system; instead it means that one has due regard for diversity. The results of the statistically significant differences that were found for the aforementioned constructs may lead to the encouraging assumption that the course the participants took in intercultural communication actually had an impact on the way they would potentially interact and engage with people of diverse cultural backgrounds, as well at the respect they exhibit for cultural differences. If this is the case, then, the course in intercultural communication is an important one for students of international studies, as it can help these students become more accepting of and open to cultural differences, which in turn will promote their interaction with people from diverse cultures, Moreover, courses of this nature will help students appreciate and respect this diversity. Respect and meaningful interaction are important requisites for these students as most of them aim at seeking work in international settings (e.g. the European Union, United Nations and other international organizations).

5.1. Importance of Findings and Practical Implications

From a practical point of view and given the results, this study provides fertile ground for some implications. The results give credence to the fact that learning foreign languages and traveling abroad do have an impact on the one's cultivation of IS. University departments in general and those focusing on international relations in particularly should place an increased focus on foreign languages in an attempt to help their students increase their levels of IS and overall ICC. Moreover, universities should strive to seek schemes that provide students with the opportunity to travel abroad. Within the context of the European Union program Erasmus, for example, students can study or find work placements for a fixed term. Similarly, universities have to make concerted efforts to also increase the flow of incoming students from foreign universities so as to create intercultural contexts within the university itself. On a practical level, the systematic administration of the ISS so as to have an indication of students' IS before

going abroad, for instance, on an Erasmus exchange programme may help them better prepare for their experience abroad.

The results also showed that students' interaction engagement and respect for different cultures increased after completing the ICC course. The notions of interaction engagements and respect for cultures have an even stronger value in these times of global turmoil. Especially in Mediterranean countries like Greece, where there has been an increase of immigrants and refugee populations during the last two years, interaction engagement and respect have a particularly prominent position in communication. Consequently, preparing students to face these new challenges is essential.

Despite their beneficial effects, intercultural communication courses are not frequently found in tertiary-level degree programmes in the Greek educational context. A quick survey of university programmes pertaining to international studies in Greece shows that little emphasis has been put on educating and training their students in areas of ICC. The particular departments either do not offer any specific courses in the area of ICC or offer only a rudimentary introductory course.

In general, this line of enquiry is expected to remain a priority since ICC plays a decisive role in intercultural contexts. Scholarship should constantly be reexamining and discussing theories that pertain to ICC, and educational institutions should strive to implement best practices for their students' future success.

5.2. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

Any study conducted does have its limitations. Consequently, caution should be practiced when making broad generalizations or drawing broad inferences from particular observations based on the results put forward. However, generalizations are often not the intent of a study. To this effect, Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008, p. 25, as cited in Richards, 2011, p. 215) vehemently claim that "It is far easier, and more epistemonologically sound, simply to give up on the idea of generalization". Bearing this stance in mind and following Richard's approach to research, which avoids going from a representative sample to generalizable findings, this study, or any study of similar nature for that matter, should not make generalizable claims across all populations or in all contexts. Partial generalizations may be possible to similar populations, as, according to Adelman, Jenkins, and Kemmis (1980), the knowledge yielded by research may be significant in its own right as tendencies do emerge and in this case, the results do offer some insight into the terrain of ICC in an educational context in Greece and may be generalized to other similar contexts in this country. One must bear in mind that the sample of this study was rather small and thus perhaps not representative In any case, it is important to reflect on these findings since the quantitative findings might form the basis for extrapolations.

The ISS is an instrument designed using the English language. The piloting of the instrument in this study showed that there were no significant language and comprehension issues. Nonetheless, the respondents' personal interpretation of the items may also lead to inaccurate responses on the one hand, while on the other hand, respondents may be providing answers which are socially acceptable or desirable rather than those which mirror their true feelings, attitudes and behavior.

As noted above (see section 3.1), the personal pronoun "I" was replaced by "he" or "she" so as to avoid responses that are in compliance with social desirability as problems of self-presentation and direct questions about importance to self (Schwartz, 2006) may trigger reservation or inhibition in a participant's response. However, this change may have potentially affected the construct and the factor loadings.

Another point to be made is that there is inherent difficulty in measuring such variables as intercultural sensitivity even under the most favorable circumstances and interpretive penetration is often difficult. In addition, ICC may be very difficult to research as there are varying and intricate specificities which are not necessarily easily identified. Generic properties should not be assumed, and thus this conceptually complex area should be approached from diverse angles and looked upon through various lenses. As such, adding a qualitative component to the study and triangulating the results would further enhance the accuracy, reliability, validity, and applicability of the ensuing findings.

Finally, another factor that needs to be addressed is the time lapse between pre- and post-tests. The four months that intervened and the fact that participants only took one course in IC may not have been enough for participants to have further developed their IS.

It ought to be noted that these limitations do not undermine the study. Its suggestive rather than conclusive findings provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of intercultural sensitivity and more generally intercultural communication competence of Greek managers in Greece and the knowledge claims give justification and merit to this study. As well, it is a pioneering study, meant to open the door to further and richer research into the area of ICC in a corporate environment in Greece.

Limitations of studies may offer insight into and direction for further research. Therefore, multiple issues stemming from this study can be explored as ICC is confounded by many variables. Hence, there are many areas that are conducive to further investigation, which can lead to a proliferation of various inquiry projects pertaining to the study of IS and generally ICC within a Greek corporate environment.

First of all, more empirical studies using qualitative instruments such as personal observation and interviews may be carried out. In addition to the quantitative data from the ISS, collecting qualitative data so as to culminate a deeper understanding of participants' feelings, attitudes and beliefs about issues pertaining to ICC may prove quite beneficial as more insight will be provided.

A further recommendation involves the ISS itself. Steps could be taken to further improve the reliability coefficients of its five constructs. Also testing for concurrent validity of the present scale (ISS) against other commonly used scales which are used to measure IS and considered reliable and valid (e.g. The Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory devised by Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992; or The Intercultural Development Inventory developed by Hammer & Bennett, 1998) would further enhance the reliability and validity of the ISS.

Finally, it would be of interest to involve students from other disciplines and conduct a comparative study to determine whether statistically significant differences arise. Finally, a longitudinal study that examines whether the results yielded in this study are time sensitive or constant over time could be carried out in the future.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that participants did not increase their levels of IS in general, but did increase their interaction engagement and respect for other cultures after completing an IC course. The findings of this study contribute to the poor body of knowledge on ICC and IS within the Greek educational context. While the results cannot be generalized across all university students outside the participants of this study, the findings presented here have provided an indication of a small sample of a population and have highlighted some issues pertaining to ICC and IS. The focus of this study on a Greek context makes it quite unique as a survey and thus it has provided a preliminary map of this extensive and diverse terrain of ICC in the abovementioned context.

Although ICC and IS are multidimensional and multifaceted, and have a complex contextual nature, it is hoped that this study has added to the scarce body of literature pertaining to context and has laid the foundation and stimulated attention for further exploration of its complex dynamics to the benefit of the discipline of intercultural communication.

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