Intercultural Competence in a Homogeneous and Monocultural Foreign Language Learning Group: Chances and Limits (A Case Study)

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Abstract

The growing cultural diversity among language learners has led to an increased recognition of the importance of developing intercultural competence for both foreign language teachers and learners. This is particularly important when introducing foreign language learners to a new culture without underrating or underestimating their original one. Intercultural competence is generally considered a useful and necessary tool among multi- or intercultural learning or working groups. Yet, what is the opportunity to develop intercultural competence in the context of a monocultural learning group? German as a Foreign Language (GFL) is offered at three main universities in Jordan as a major subject and as a compulsory course for exchange year purposes. The teaching of GFL at these universities is based on commercial GFL textbooks, with a significant focus on content representing German culture. This content varies in many aspects of Jordanian culture, which raises the question of whether learning a new language through exposure to another culture necessarily implies the embrace or practice of intercultural competence. As part of the author's doctoral research on teaching GFL at Jordanian universities and dealing with what is considered taboo in Jordan due to its cultural and religious background, this article discusses the chances and limitations of improving intercultural competence when the target learning group is monocultural and homogeneous, based on the results of a case study of exchange students living in Germany, half of whom are Jordanian, and on Darla Deardorff's intercultural competence model.

Keywords: Monocultural Learning Group, Intercultural Education, Exchange Students, Darla Deardorff, Intercultural Competence Model

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Introduction

Wissenschaft Weltoffen's statistics for the year 2023 show that until winter semester 22/23, Germany has a total of 367.578 international students coming from all over the world to continue their studies and research as well (DAAD & DZHW, 2023). Considering the increasing numbers of international incoming students, it is reasonable and essential to focus on improving intercultural competence among these students so they can communicate and understand one another despite cultural and background differences. Yet gaining and improving intercultural competence is not as simple as talking about or discussing it, specifically for those students coming from a totally different culture and staying for a short period of time abroad to complete their study requirements.

The importance of intercultural competence caused many researchers to develop various models to view and clarify the structure of intercultural competence and how the process of being interculturally competent starts in the first place by understanding oneself and one's own culture. Therefore, this article discusses the possibilities and limitations of gaining and/or improving intercultural competence among exchange students who are staying for one to two semesters in Germany, focusing on students who originally studied GFL in their own country in a monocultural learning group and comparing their experiences with those of other students who studied in a multicultural learning group in Germany, considering German lectures as the main medium for cultural content. Before looking at the main aspects of research in relation to intercultural competence, it is important to understand when something can be described as intercultural and what competence is.

Intercultural Competence

The reply "it is culture" is commonly used to address or justify something that has been done in a certain way, such as the way people dress, eat, act or behave, yet culture is not limited to these things. It can go beyond them to the way people form their ideologies or control their actions. Kashima (2019) defines **culture**: "a set of information that is (a) socially transmissible; (b) potentially capable of influencing psychological processes (e.g., thought, emotions, motivations, and behavior) and, in this sense, is humanly meaningful; and (c) shared to some extent within a group of people." (Kashima, 2019, p. 124). To categorize something as a cultural thing that means it has been transmitted or inherited and not affected by recent or rapid changes in ideas or inventions, like using technology, although it is not definite that by next generations these ideas will not be considered as part of traditional culture, therefore Kashima believes that culture is a timeless information (cf. Kashima, 2019, p. 125).

However, Naik et al. (2023) simplifies the definition of culture and assure that culture form and structure the way "people think, feel, wish, value, and how they behave" in a certain setting, specifically the region, where people share traditions, social norms and beliefs (cf. Naik et al., 2023, "What is Culture?" section). Another term close to culture is *Society*, Kashima believes that new ideas or current commonly used technology (cf. previous para.) together with inherited culture form a society, where culture is part of it but not the same (cf. Kashima, 2019, p. 125). That is also seen by Naik et al. and they emphasize that culture gathers foundational elements of society, among others "language, education, religion, government, and the identity and personality of the people who are part of that culture." (cf. Naik et al., 2023, "What is Culture?" section).

Understanding the term *Culture* is a guide to understand and differentiate between the following terms: Monocultural, multicultural, intercultural as well as transcultural, also when to describe a group of people (e.g. working or learning group) with these characteristics. The following figure shows that all these terms are connected to each other in a way or another:
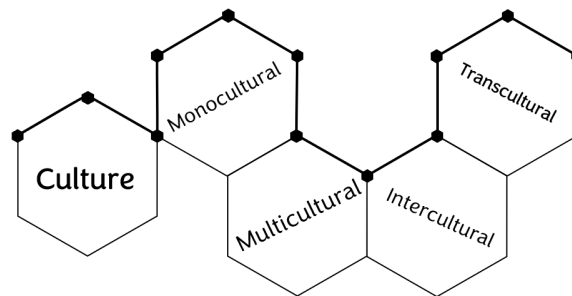
Figure 1: Culture and CO.

A **monocultural** group is a group of people who are **homogenous** by sharing the same culture and the contrast between these people, is barely visible and does not signify an obvious difference. When two or more monocultural groups gather in one place (e.g. society or institute) but they are neither connected nor interfering together and it is easy to spot the difference between them, in this case this will be referred as a **multicultural** group. When more than one monocultural groups get to know each other, begin to interact, exchange views, show understanding for the differences and learn about one another, in this case it is called **intercultural** group; coming to **transcultural** group, when people not only get to know each other but also learn and adapt from the other cultures and form a cultural blend, without completely switching their own culture (cf. Kultur Konfetti, 2016; Schriefer, 2016).

Intercultural competence as a target to achieve, one should work on both, understanding own and others' cultures as well as working on the skill to deal, act and interact with cultural differences, this being confirmed in the recommendations of the council of the European Union (2018) on key competences for life-long learning by defining **competence** as "a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes" these to be considered as competence pillars, which basically are:
- **Knowledge**: Anything that helps with understating something, including facts, figures, concepts, ideas and theories.
- **Skills**: ability and capacity to handle something (e.g. cultural situation) along with using foreknowledge to achieve the required aim (here to manage a cultural situation).
- **Attitudes**: Mindset and disposition to respond to thoughts, people or situations (The Council of the European Union, 2018).
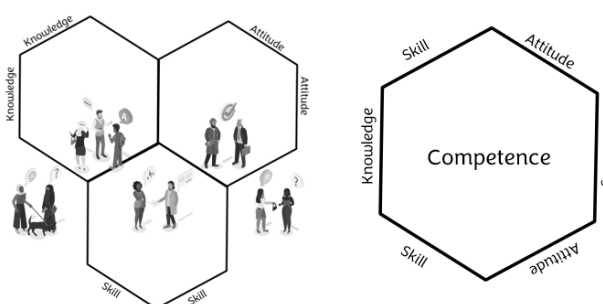
Figure 2: What Is a Competence.

Stemming from both definitions, intercultural group and competence, and according to the official page for Council of Europe intercultural competence can be defined as: "the ability to understand and respect each other across all types of cultural barriers." (cf. Council of Europe, 2023, para. 1).

Intercultural Competence Models

The first intercultural competence model started back in the 80's by Milton Bennett (Bennett, 1986, p.182) and followed by many researchers developing various models to cover intercultural competence in different occasions, among others is the intercultural competence model by Darla Deardorff, which was developed between 2004 and 2009, which emphasizes the role of educating oneself, self-awareness and attitude control to be able to manage cultural situation and be interculturally competent. Figure 3 shows Deardorff's Pyramid Model of intercultural competence for the year 2004 (cf. Deardorff, 2006, p. 254):
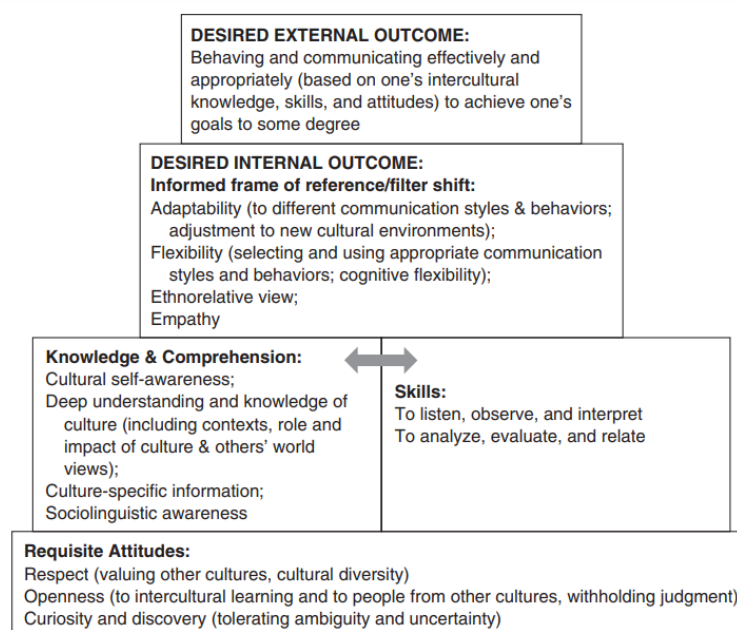

Figure 3: Darla Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Model (2004).

Looking into the base of this pyramid, it depends on the first place on established attitude and the behaviour of the person regarding being respectful, have the motivation to know about others and showing respect. Which means, if the person cannot behave well and not accepting the idea of the existence of the differences, it will be quite challenging to develop other skills, like listening and interpreting, which comes parallel with building knowledge about why something is culturally being done in a certain way, most importantly to understand one's own culture first then reflect or compare it to other cultures to understand, where similarities and differences to be found and how to deal with it (cf. Deardorff, 2006, p. 247).

On the top of the pyramid is the "desired external outcome" which represents what the people see as a result of processing both, working on building cultural competence and reaching the internal outcome, by knowing what to proceed when facing cultural differences; achieving the top, shows that the person can behave and communicate with others from different cultures in tolerating and welcoming way (cf. Figure 3).

Being Interculturally Competent in a Monocultural Leaning Group

When it comes to intercultural context and interactions, monocultural and monolingual learning groups are usually neglected despite their role in understanding (inter)cultural context (cf. Colvin et al., 2015, p. 430); and to understand how monocultural and monolingual students enhance their intercultural understandings and interactions Colvin et al. (2015) examined a university-level learning group based on Bourdieu's social field theory[1]. Their study highlighted that other than the personality of the students and their openness to other cultures, there were coexisting, interdependent, and frequently conflicting structural and contextual components, which play a role to co-shape intercultural encounters among monocultural and monolingual local students by involving these students in learning activities, where they act and reflect on intercultural activities (cf. Colvin et al., 2015, p. 414; 418). This has revealed to students their actual position to other cultures and their limited and framed opportunities in understanding others as well as their actual role -if any- in (inter)cultural events and context (cf. Colvin et al., 2015, p. 430).

Taking Poland as an example of a homogenous culture, Górak-Sosnowska & Markowska-Manista (2022a) proved that regardless of the quantity and intensity of the intercultural learning content, the absence of a real experience and direct contact with the other cultures is a major obstacle for polish school students (Górak-Sosnowska & Markowska-Manista, 2022a, p. 7). Globalisation affected and limited intercultural education by a group of people[2], who are not directly in the field or not taking individual cases into consideration and only wants to force and provide intercultural education in a certain form, regardless of the suitability and possibility to include intercultural education content and activities in correspondence with national and regional values of a specific country: "The problematic nature of the term, the unclear scope and the relationship with its constituent or related terms form a challenging climate in which we can undertake measured, systematised and comprehensive activities." (Górak-Sosnowska & Markowska-Manista, 2022a, p. 9).

The evaluation of this intercultural educational content can differ based on how to view it, and according to Górak-Sosnowska & Markowska-Manista, when the community sees this intercultural content a chance to develop and cooperate internationally and catch the globalization, locally this intercultural content considered as a method to change on a social and individual basis (Górak-Sosnowska & Markowska-Manista, 2022a, p. 10). And this shows the gap between the target behind imposing intercultural education and the actual need of the learning group; having intercultural educational content among monocultural learning group only as an input will not bring much to the individual, especially when they cannot use or practice it.

Emphasizing intercultural education at schools in Poland was one of the results that Poland joined the EU in 2004 and started to employee EU standard to their policies, and despite the importance of including international education Górak-Sosnowska & Markowska-Manista

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[1] Bourdieu's social field theory: Bourdieu's social field theory provides an analytic framework that understands social phenomena in terms of three interconnected concepts: field, habitus and capital. Bourdieu conceptualizes social activity as practice that occurs between actors in social spaces called fields. According to Bourdieu, fields are autonomous spaces that have rules and roles that inform social behaviour and distinguish them from other fields: in Bourdieu's words, they have their own 'logic' (Bourdieu 1992). In order to succeed within a field, an agent needs to understand the rules that govern social behaviour within it (cf. Colvin et al., 2015, p.416).

[2] Politicians, NGOs activities, practitioners and educators. (Górak-Sosnowska & Markowska-Manista, 2022a, p. 9)

(2022b) still argue that intercultural topics or teaching content is mostly a theoretical material and not related to dirct intercultural contact in Poland, specially that the school teachers themselves barely have the chance to share an personal intercultural experience with their students and mostly they are considered as narrators and prepared cultural content mediator (Górak-Sosnowska & Markowska-Manista, 2022b, p. 139). Compared to many countries in the EU, one of the factors found to influence the situation in Poland's monocultural schools, along with the fact that national minorities are very few in Poland, Poland does not host as many refugees or immigrants as other EU countries, which does not allow the intercultural content taught to monocultural leaning group to be used in everyday situation (Górak-Sosnowska & Markowska-Manista, 2022b, p. 144); which by default decreases the chances of gaining or improving intercultural competence.

The case of Poland can be generally applied to another country, like Jordan, where most lectures and classrooms have monocultural and monolingual learning groups. But when taking the German Jordanian University as an example, there is a chance to meet Germans, European or international German language lecturers, which opens a window to have a direct contact with someone from a different culture, but does learning a foreign language by a foreign teacher help improving intercultural competence?

Intercultural Competence in a Foreign Language Lecture

Vogt (2016) discusses the challenges to promote intercultural competence and argues, that intercultural competence is often neglected in foreign language teaching because it is seen as more difficult and less tangible to measure than other language skills (cf. Vogt, 2016, p. 77). Vogt points out that when assessing performance, the more easily measurable language skills are often given priority, while intercultural aspects are relegated to the background. As a result, intercultural competence is not adequately addressed in the classroom as teachers tend to focus on the content of the exam, which usually does not include intercultural elements (ibid.).

Despite having intercultural competence as an output, the absence of guidelines and clear assessment methods for testing intercultural competence makes practical implementation in the classroom difficult as well as intercultural competence as an outcome is hard to determine (cf. Vogt, 2016, p. 78).

Teacher's Background

Since learning and teaching a foreign language does not depend on the textbook, the language teacher has a major role in delivering (inter)cultural content. However, the awareness of the cultural topic, the way chosen to deliver it, and the background of the teacher are all essential to how students will perceive and deal with intercultural education. Morrier et al. (2007) highlight that when delivering a multicultural content, there is a need to pay attention to the cultural background and attitude of the teacher, because whether the teacher notices it or not, students are able to determine if a teacher is capable of delivering a cultural discussion or prefers to avoid what does not go along with his or her own culture (cf. Morrier et al., 2007, p. 33).

This view is supported by Yan (2021) who confirms that facilitating students' intercultural awareness is achieved by the ability of the language teachers to allow and steer cultural conversations and interaction between both the students' culture and the foreign one (cf. Yan,

2021, p. 394). Yan also mentioned that some teachers reflected their intercultural knowledge and pointed out that they struggle with some (inter)cultural topics, which restrict them from delivering intercultural content, and by time instead of finding a way to mention it, they found a way to avoid "complex intercultural phenomena" (ibid.).

Starting from the belief that language teachers should not be "Self-centred", aside from showing empathy while teaching, Yan emphasizes the necessity for teachers to integrate intercultural knowledge and skills into their teaching practices to effectively prepare students for engaging with diverse cultures (cf. Yan, 2021, p. 395).

To bring the last two points together, a recent study by Oberste-Berghaus (2024) enhances and highlights the importance of professional development for language teachers to help to improve intercultural competence in a foreign language lecture, taking German as a foreign language as an example. The study of Oberste-Berghaus suggests educators teaching German as a Foreign Language (GFL) to help to develop intercultural competence:

Among these suggestions is that educators should prioritize the development of intercultural competence as a core objective in their teaching. In addition to that, teachers should incorporate effective teaching strategies that help with better intercultural understanding. Reflecting and addressing challenges while teaching (inter)cultural content as well as collaborating with other educators to share and learn their followed strategies to improve intercultural competence while teaching the culture of the foreign language, mainly in a GFL-lectures (cf. Oberste-Berghaus, 2024, p. 3–12), means educators should adopt a comprehensive approach to language teaching that integrates cultural awareness and sensitivity, preparing students to engage in a globalized world.

Intercultural Competence in Higher Education

Intercultural communication competence plays a key role in shaping the international student experience, influencing their social integration, academic success, cultural adjustment, career readiness and personal development; this being discussed by Xiaoyan et al. (2024) how international students in higher education need to develop their intercultural competence; because students tend to experience intercultural situations mostly after they have enrolled in higher education and become involved in its international programs or joining exchange opportunities (cf. Janeiro et al., 2014, p.15). The detailed systematic literature review of intercultural competence by Xiaoyan et al. (2024) - with a main focus on communication - showed that intercultural communication competence (ICC) influences the experiences of international students in higher education by fostering cultural understanding and promoting personal growth as well as confidence. Students with well-established ICC can navigate diverse social interactions, engage effectively in academic settings, appreciate cultural differences, and develop essential skills for future careers, all of which contribute to a more positive and enriching educational experience (cf. Xiaoyan et al., 2024).

Method

To reach the objective of the research and answer its main question, an online questionnaire was designed, including a scale, multiple-choice, and open questions. This questionnaire was shared during the spring semester for the academic year 2023/2024 with 26 exchange students who stayed one semester or one year in Germany. These students were divided into two groups: the **first group** are students mainly from Jordan and Palestine, who are/were

enrolled at the German Jordanian University (GJU) and spent one year in Germany at different German universities to complete their study requirements; This group is considered a homogenous group, on the other hand, the heterogeneous group are students from different Asian, EU and non-EU countries, representing the **second group**, who chose to spend their exchange semester/year in Germany at the Applied University of Potsdam (FHP).

By answering 13 questions, students provided information about:
- Country of origin and Place of learning GFL
- Own experience with intercultural competence
- Mind-set and cultural perspectives before and after living in Germany
- Being introduced to a new culture through learning a foreign language
- Last GFL-Learning group and teacher's background as well as his/her attitude while teaching cultural content
- Recent cultural-conflict situations (Optional)

The data collected from the students are analysed to summarize the limitations and opportunities to gain, practice and improve intercultural competence. This based on students who learned in a monocultural group (Group 1), and to compare it with the experience of students of the second group (Group 2), which is a multicultural learning group. This determines if both groups have similar or different experiences regarding improving their intercultural competence.

Results

Students who took part in the questionnaire come from the following countries: Jordan, Palestine, China, France, South Korea, Taiwan, Ukraine, the USA and Vietnam; all of them studied GFL at the university, except one, who learned the language in a language centre.

A simple definition of intercultural competence was given to the participant, and they were asked if they believe they generally have this competence or have even improved it; The following pie chart (Figure 4) shows that all participants believe they are interculturally competent, but the only difference was how being in Germany affected their competence. While more than half of the students believe being in Germany makes them more (inter)culturally competent, the second-highest percentage shows that being interculturally competent depends on how sensitive the situation is, which might prevent them from practicing this competence, despite claiming to have it.

- Yes, I had it before traveling to Germany and improved it during my stay
- No, I didn't have it and still struggling to improve it.
- Depends on the sensitivity of the situation/topic. Sometimes I cannot pr…
- I had it before traveling to Germany and it didn't change during my stay
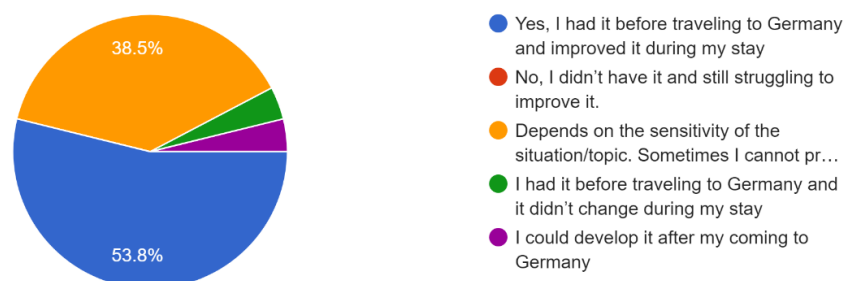- I could develop it after my coming to Germany

Figure 4: Having Intercultural Competence.

The exchange students shared factors, which helped them to gain and improve their intercultural competence, also shared the possibilities why someone might lack having this competence. Reasons are listed as follows:

Factors Behind Gaining and Improving IC Among Exchange Students

- Family and friends: being open to other cultures and allowing cultural conversations.
- The early and constant exposure to intercultural content through education, documentaries, and other possible media sharing cultural content.
- Travelling: either for tourism or educational purposes.
- more contact with locals: locals can explain and help understand how and why things are the way they are.

Factors Behind Lacking IC Among Exchange Students

- Language: not being able to fully speak or understand the language.
- Contacting mainly with people from one's own or similar culture.
- Practising different religion and following different society norms.
- When the new culture does not meet one's own values and cultural background makes it hard to tolerate cultural differences.

Exchange students were asked to rate some statements addressing some aspects that might be affected by their stay abroad. The Following Table shows students ratings of these statements, where **1** means that the statement does not apply to the student and **5** highly matches the student's situation:

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I believed I am open to the new culture, despite the differences.	1	0	5	10	10
I was sure I can manage and handle all/most of cultural differences without problems.	0	3	5	12	6
I was afraid from the cultural and/or religious differences I might face.	2	15	3	4	2
Being in a monocultural studying group, did not help me improve my intercultural skills – because at that time we did not get the chance to be exposed to real different cultural situations.	4	4	7	7	4
I had neither worries nor negative expectations about living in Germany.	4	1	11	4	2

Table 1: Before Studying Abroad.

The second Table shows students ratings of similar statements, but addressing aspects after studying abroad:

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I notice how much I am connected to my own culture and kept criticizing the culture and common social habits in Germany.	2	4	9	7	4
I started to practice and showing my own culture/religion more than I did in my country.	0	8	5	6	7
I became sure, that I am not able to deal with cultural differences.	2	15	3	4	2
I did not face any cultural situations that made me uncomfortable.	4	4	7	7	4
I changed my perspectives and my way to deal with things and became more open to others.	10	10	2	4	0
Being in a heterogeneous culture enhanced/improved my intercultural skills and I can accept that people are not meant to be the same.	5	4	11	3	3

Table 2: After Studying Abroad.

Despite teacher's background, language teachers' role is essential when sharing cultural content. For some students it might be much comforting when they discuss this cultural content based on their cultural or religious background without having to explain a lot or have a fear of being misunderstood. The following pie chart (Figure 5) shows what background similarities exchange students shared with their language teacher. Yet, more than 50% had at least one thing in common with their teacher.

46.2%
15.4%
19.2%
19.2%

- my country/culture and have same religion.
- my country/culture and have different religion.
- a different country but have similar culture/religion.
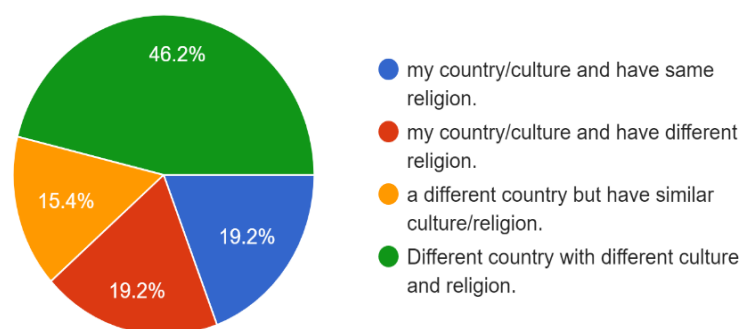- Different country with different culture and religion.

Figure 5: Language Teacher Background.

Being in a multicultural and heterogenous learning group enhances the chance to gain and improve intercultural competence, therefore, exchange students were asked if their colleagues in the last learning group have similar backgrounds. Figure 6 shows that more than half of the students were coming from the same country or culture.
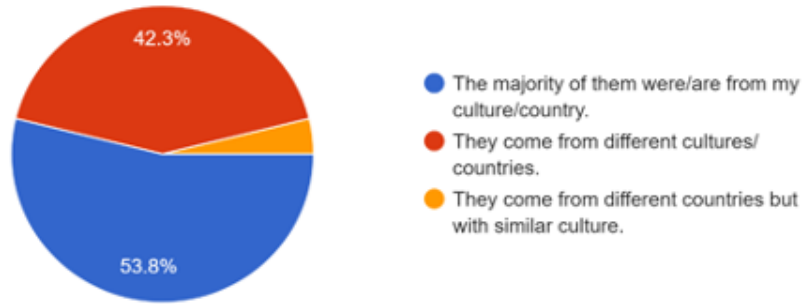
Figure 6: Learning Group Background.

Except for one participant, students reported that their language teacher either showed understanding of their concerns regarding cultural differences or was culturally prepared to introduce the other (foreign) culture without underestimating their own culture.
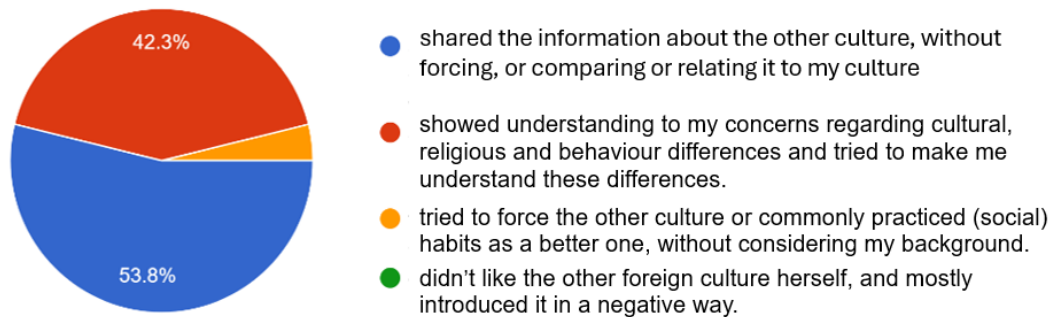

Figure 7: Cultural Awareness and Attitude of the Language Teacher.

Exchange students chose what describes their feeling about the culture or commonly practiced (social) habits in Germany when they knew about it in German language lecture:
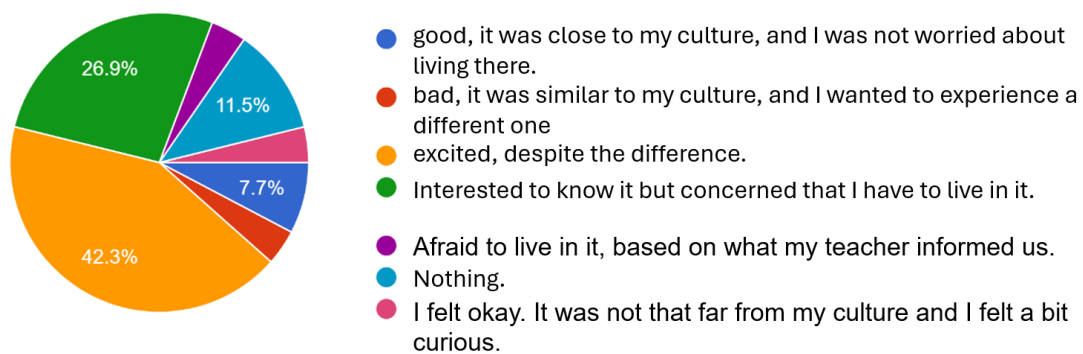

Figure 8: Thoughts on Being in a Different Culture.

Based on that, exchange students were asked to share the social habits and cultural differences that they experienced during their stay in Germany and could not deal with or understand. Despite the fact that they knew about some of these habits in the language course. Their responses are summarized as follows:

Habits and Differences Related to Social Life

- Socializing barriers and making friends are conditional: it was not easy to socialize with people, unless within a context, like work or a university project, to be able to make a new contact or friend.
- Direct to what you want: Asking "How are you" is not as easy as it sounds before making a request or explaining your need to the other person.
- Not knowing is not an excuse: people in Germany usually do not consider that foreigners (here exchange students) are not aware of the German context and might get offended if someone said or reacted in an unaccepted way.
- Rules come first, and showing warmth is rare: Compared to exchange students' countries, people in Germany act mostly in a practical way with fewer emotions.

Habits and Differences Related to Language and Communication

- Language barriers: learning GFL at the university was not sufficient to have a conversation with people speaking German.
- Communication barriers: due to language and socializing barriers, communication with others speaking German is difficult and leads to misunderstandings.
- Being direct: unlike the situation of most exchange students, in Germany people tend to communicate in a clear and straightforward way.
- Deeper conversations are not offered to international students, but only among foreigners themselves: people in the German culture usually avoid a full conversation and prefer to keep things on "a surface level".
- People being selective: in some cases, exchange students faced people who treat foreigners differently based on their nationality or cultural background.

Habits and Differences Related to Norms and Culture

- Life in Germany offers different social norms and behaviours, other than what an exchange student is used to, in their home country.
- Teamwork is a Must: to work individually at school/university is not the first option.
- "Taboos" are not taboos: compared to exchange students' background, what they consider taboo might turn to be a normal practice.
- Other's opinions are not a decision maker: it is noticeable that people in Germany do not give much attention to what others might say or think about them, and act only according to their needs and desires (mentioned as a positive statement).
- Food/Drink culture: carbonated water and alcoholic drinks are culture.

Habits and Differences Related to Society, Policies, and Individuals

- Communicating with strangers: In Germany one is more exposed to deal or talk with strangers, like in a restaurant or on a train, unlike some countries, where strangers initiating a conversation not usual and probably a sign of danger.
- Shops rest days and closing time: in Germany shops, malls, and café close early in the evening or even do not open in the weekend or mid of the week.
- Available Food and social activities as barriers: Going to pub with friends can be a common social activity and buying food without asking about the ingredients (except for allergies and vegans). Yet, if a student did not grow in a community where pubs are like

other places, and need to cover food restrictions, being in a different society takes time to find who and what is suitable for you.

- Appointment-Culture: in many cultures to show up by a doctor or go to any governmental department does not require having an appointment, unlike in Germany, having an appointment is a must, but finding a near date is quite hard.
- Smoking (incl. Weed): In some cultures, smoking in front of others considered impolite and a bad habit, also smoking weed is prohibited and a sign to avoid the person smoking it, for some international students it is noticeable that smokers are careless in general and ignore others health.
- People identifying themselves differently: in Germany it is a real matter to address people the way they like, yet it is hard for some exchange students, because they do not have this among their societies.

Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was to determine if being exposed to a new culture in form of cultural content in a foreign language lecture under monocultural learning group will increase the opportunity of being interculturally competent or not. Taking into account teacher's background and the nature of the learning group. The study results were based on exchange students' experience, who stayed for one semester or one year abroad to fulfil their study requirements. The following are significant findings to emerge from this study:

- Communicating about, reflecting to and understanding the background are the key to be interculturally competent.
- One semester or year in a multicultural environment is not enough compared to 20+ years in one's own culture.
- Accepting that there is a cultural difference, is different from accepting the other culture.
- Teachers are not the only mediators for cultural content, but teachers who have cultural awareness ease (inter)cultural discussions.
- In some situations, claiming to be interculturally competent does not exceed a temporary conversation.
- For some, to tolerate a cultural difference, it should provide an added value and not make the situation harder for the person, when they should go with it.
- It is not a surprise that learning in a monocultural group does not bring much to improve intercultural competence, yet, learning in a monocultural group that can discuss cultural differences might provide skill improvements and a chance to understand one's own culture.

In the method it was mentioned that exchange students were divided into two groups to compare the similarities and differences due to different origins and the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the learning group, yet it is concluded that all exchange students coming from Jordan and other Asian countries share similar cultural traits and habits, unlike the students coming from France and the USA, who have a closer culture to Germany, which means that living in a country that shares a similar culture to one's own culture is also a limitation not to improve intercultural competence.

Based on exchange students' experience: the media, (not) having locals as friend or reference, language proficiency level and one's own Background are core factors to or not to have and improve intercultural competence. To be raised in a homogenous society and culture, as well as learning in a monocultural group both reduce the chance to improve

intercultural understanding and competence. Not to forget the absence of direct contact with other cultures in any mean or/and unconsciously following one's surrounded culture without understanding it in the first place, all will hinder the process of gaining intercultural competence.

The absence of (inter)cultural awareness by a teacher, among family members or in the surrounding environment, and the contact with other cultures does not exceed theoretical facts, this decreases the chances of having or improving the required intercultural competence. On an **individual** level, instead of being only a cultural input receiver, one should have a direct contact with cultural differences to develop and enhance the skills and attitude to deal with these differences. On the **teaching** level, if the teacher was not able to create or manage a(n) (inter)cultural conversation in a language class, then this class is language-based and will not help achieve intercultural outcomes.

Intercultural competence and awareness might fade when students are in a monocultural learning group, and instead of being able to tolerate or respect cultural differences, students will ignore the importance of dealing with these differences and will not consider it, because these students are already surrounded with people sharing similar background, and this is another reason where students not only do not consider cultural differences but also will not be able to understand and reflect their own culture.

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