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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN ADOLESCENCE AND EMERGING ADULTHOOD

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Abstract. This theoretical and integrative review examines the relationship between intercultural competence and emotional intelligence during late adolescence and emerging adulthood. A structured thematic synthesis of psychological, educational, and intercultural frameworks was conducted, with attention to Uzbek pedagogical and psychological scholarship. The analysis identifies shared mechanisms of emotion recognition, perspective-taking, self-regulation, tolerance of ambiguity, and reflective communication. It proposes an educational model linking emotional literacy, intercultural encounters, guided reflection, and behavioral feedback. Because no primary participant data were collected, the results are conceptual rather than statistical. The paper offers an operational framework for curriculum design and outlines a feasible empirical validation strategy in higher education.

Keywords: intercultural competence; emotional intelligence; adolescence; emerging adulthood; empathy; self-regulation; higher education; intercultural communication; Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary educational settings bring young people into sustained contact with linguistic, cultural, and social differences. Digital exchange, academic mobility, and multilingual classrooms expand opportunities for collaboration, but they also create situations in which misunderstandings, stereotypes, and emotionally charged interactions can undermine learning. Intercultural competence (IC) refers not simply to knowledge of another culture but to the capacity to communicate and act effectively and appropriately across cultural contexts [1, 2]. Emotional intelligence (EI) concerns the perception, understanding, use, and regulation of emotions in oneself and others [3, 4]. Their intersection is particularly relevant during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, when identity, peer relationships, autonomy, and social expectations are actively negotiated [5].

In Uzbekistan, the pedagogical emphasis on moral education, social responsibility, and respectful interpersonal conduct provides a locally meaningful context for investigating these constructs.

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Avloniy's educational writings foreground ethical character and cultivation of conduct [6], while Uzbek psychology textbooks discuss personality development, interpersonal relations, and the role of affect in behavior [7, 8]. These works should not be treated as direct tests of modern EI or IC scales; rather, they help situate contemporary constructs within local educational discourse. The present study therefore connects international theory with pedagogical concerns relevant to Uzbek higher education.

The research question is: through which psychological and educational mechanisms might EI support the development and enactment of IC among young people? The objectives are to (a) clarify the constructs and their overlap, (b) identify developmental moderators and educational conditions, (c) construct an instructional framework, and (d) specify indicators suitable for subsequent empirical testing. The proposed contribution is a cautious, testable synthesis rather than an unsupported claim of causal effectiveness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design. A narrative-integrative review with structured thematic comparison was adopted. The unit of analysis was a theoretical claim or pedagogical implication concerning emotional abilities, intercultural interaction, or adolescent development. The source corpus consisted of 12 works: foundational intercultural and EI literature, developmental psychology, educational guidance, and Uzbek-language pedagogical or psychological works [1–12]. This is not a systematic review or meta-analysis; no exhaustive database search, pooled effect size, or risk-of-bias estimate is claimed.

Analytical procedure. First, definitions were mapped to their core components: attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal outcomes, and behavior for IC [1, 2]; emotion perception, understanding, and regulation for EI [3, 4]. Second, claims were grouped under five cross-cutting themes: emotion recognition, empathy and perspective-taking, regulation during uncertainty, reflective dialogue, and contextual opportunity. Third, developmental considerations were compared with evidence on emerging adulthood and identity formation [5]. Finally, a classroom implementation matrix was designed to translate these themes into observable learning tasks and assessment evidence.

Quality and interpretive safeguards. Conceptual overlap was distinguished from empirical association, and correlation from causation. Trait self-reports were not equated with performance-based emotional ability. Cultural differences were treated as context-sensitive rather than as fixed national personality characteristics. The proposed classroom outcomes are hypotheses to be evaluated, not observed improvements. No human participants, personal data, experimental intervention, or institutional approval were involved in the present desk-based analysis.

RESULTS

3.1. Conceptual convergence. The synthesis indicates that IC and EI intersect most clearly in emotionally complex encounters. Emotion perception can help a student recognize discomfort or uncertainty in a partner without immediately assigning hostile intent. Emotion understanding can support the interpretation of differing communicative norms, while regulation can prevent defensive responses from escalating into conflict [2–4]. Nevertheless, the constructs remain distinct: a person

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may regulate emotions skillfully yet lack cultural knowledge or ethical openness, and may possess cultural knowledge yet respond poorly under emotional pressure.

3.2. Developmental sensitivity. Late adolescence and emerging adulthood involve changes in identity exploration, self-direction, peer affiliation, and social roles [5]. In educational settings, these processes may make intercultural contact especially formative, provided encounters are structured, psychologically safe, and accompanied by feedback. An unstructured encounter alone does not guarantee intercultural learning. Teacher facilitation is important for recognizing power imbalances, language anxiety, exclusion, and the possibility of stereotyping.

3.3. Instructional mechanism. The proposed sequence contains four connected stages: (1) emotional awareness before interaction; (2) cooperative intercultural tasks with explicit norms of respect; (3) guided reflection on emotion, assumptions, and alternative interpretations; and (4) feedback and transfer to new situations. Deardorff's process orientation suggests that attitudes and internal changes should be linked to observable interaction rather than reduced to factual quizzes [1]. The table operationalizes this sequence for a semester-based module.

Table 1. Proposed integration of emotional intelligence and intercultural competence in educational practice

Learning component	Suggested learning activity	Observable indicator	Assessment evidence
Emotion perception	Analyze short intercultural dialogue scenarios	Identifies own and others' emotional cues	Scenario annotation and rubric
Perspective-taking	Role-play conflicting interpretations of a classroom event	Offers more than one plausible interpretation	Peer/teacher observation notes
Self-regulation	Practice pause–reframe–respond during disagreement	Uses non-escalatory language and repair attempts	Structured simulation rubric
Reflective communication	Write guided reflection after collaborative group work	Recognizes assumptions and contextual factors	Reflection journal with criteria
Transfer and feedback	Complete a new cross-cultural problem-solving task	Adapts communication while maintaining respect	Portfolio and follow-up task

Interpretation of Table 1. The matrix is a proposed instructional design, not an evaluation dataset. Its indicators emphasize behavior and documented reasoning instead of relying solely on self-rated tolerance or emotional competence. Multiple forms of evidence help reduce the risk that socially desirable responses will be mistaken for actual intercultural skill. For reliable implementation,

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educators should pilot rubrics, establish inter-rater agreement, and adapt scenarios to the linguistic and cultural composition of each cohort.

3.4. Assessment architecture. A credible evaluation should separate baseline dispositions, learning processes, and outcomes. Baseline measures may include prior intercultural exposure, language confidence, and emotional ability; process indicators may include participation, quality of reflection, and use of feedback; outcomes should include performance in unfamiliar scenarios. EI measures must be selected according to whether the study targets perceived traits or ability-based performance [3, 4]. IC assessment should address appropriateness and effectiveness without rewarding cultural conformity or stereotyping [1, 2].

3.5. Contextual conditions. The synthesis identifies four necessary enabling conditions: instructors trained in facilitation; tasks requiring genuine cooperation rather than superficial cultural celebration; explicit protection against ridicule and exclusion; and assessment aligned with behavioral objectives. Uzbek educational traditions emphasizing moral responsibility and interpersonal respect [6–8] may support the framing of these activities, while contemporary intercultural models supply clearer operational definitions. This connection is pedagogical and conceptual, not evidence that any one tradition automatically produces stronger competence.

DISCUSSION

The main theoretical implication is that EI can be conceptualized as a supporting resource for IC, not as its substitute. When learners encounter ambiguous behavior, emotional awareness may interrupt automatic attribution and create space for inquiry. Yet competence also depends on cultural humility, communication knowledge, motivation, institutional climate, and opportunities to practice. The model therefore places emotion regulation inside a broader cycle of contact, reflection, and ethical engagement [1, 2, 9].

A second implication concerns educational design. Brief lectures about cultural customs may increase declarative knowledge without changing interpersonal behavior. Experiential activities with guided reflection are more likely to make assumptions visible and allow feedback on actual communication. However, experiential learning is not automatically beneficial: poorly facilitated simulations may reinforce stereotypes, marginalize minority students, or convert cultural differences into simplistic labels. The instructor should emphasize individual variation, situational interpretation, and consent in personal disclosure [9, 10].

The developmental argument also requires nuance. The term “youth” encompasses heterogeneous ages and educational experiences; emerging adulthood is a useful framework but not a universal stage experienced identically across societies [5]. Family expectations, employment, rural–urban differences, multilingual repertoires, and access to international contact may alter the relevance of particular tasks. For Uzbekistan, local validation of translated measures and examples is essential before comparing scores across institutions or countries. General psychological and pedagogical perspectives developed in Uzbek scholarship can inform this adaptation without replacing psychometric validation [7, 8, 11].

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Methodological limitations. This article synthesizes a deliberately bounded corpus and does not estimate the strength of the EI–IC relationship. Some cited texts are theoretical or instructional rather than primary experimental studies. The proposed indicators have not been tested for reliability, validity, or sensitivity to change. Furthermore, self-report EI scales and ability measures may capture different constructs, so future work should pre-register the operational definition and avoid combining scores without justification [3, 4]. These constraints limit any causal or population-level conclusion.

Future research could use a quasi-experimental, pretest–posttest design across comparable student groups, with clearly specified inclusion criteria and ethical approval. A mixed-methods protocol would combine validated EI and IC measures, blind-rated scenario performance, reflective journals, and interviews. Researchers should report sample-size justification, attrition, baseline comparability, effect sizes with confidence intervals, and the limitations of nonrandom assignment. Follow-up measurement would help determine whether observed changes persist beyond a single course. Such a design could test whether reflective dialogue mediates the association between emotional skills and intercultural performance, while controlling for language proficiency and prior intercultural experience [2, 12].

CONCLUSION

Intercultural competence and emotional intelligence share several educationally relevant processes, particularly recognition of emotion, perspective-taking, regulation of reactions, and reflective dialogue. Their conceptual relationship is promising for work with adolescents and emerging adults, but it should not be presented as established causal evidence in the absence of participant-level data. A four-stage instructional framework—awareness, cooperative interaction, guided reflection, and feedback—offers a practical basis for designing and evaluating university learning activities.

For Uzbek educational institutions, the proposed approach can connect internationally recognized intercultural frameworks with established pedagogical attention to ethics and interpersonal development. The next step is rigorous local adaptation and empirical validation of tasks and measures. Stronger claims about effectiveness must await transparent comparative research with behavioral outcomes, not only student self-reports.

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