

Title: Fostering Alumni Commitment with Intercultural Competence and Social Responsibility

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Abstract

In contributing to advance higher education's service mission and its internationalization agenda, this pilot study explores the relationship between intercultural competence (IC) and social responsibility (SR) in college graduates. It further studies whether IC and SR can positively influence alumni's organizational commitment (OC) to the university since their commitment can support higher education as a public good and its positive impact on societies worldwide. 150 graduates of a Dutch university were surveyed. Two groups of alumni were selected: a) they either had studied in the Netherlands as international students or b) they were Dutch graduates working abroad at the time. The results show that IC has a statistically significant effect on SR, which in turn has a mediating role between IC and alumni's commitment to the university. Given the importance of IC and SR in developing responsible global citizens, the results of this study support the benefits of teaching these competences in building common efforts to co-create solutions for the global challenges and thus, help higher education's support for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Hypotheses

Increasing student mobility and its value for global labor market have been major objectives of higher education. (Ilieva et al., 2017; Teichler, 2009, 2017; Wächter, 2010). Many studies have delved on the impact, outcomes, value of student mobility (Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Ilieva et al., 2017; Sutton & Rubin, 2004). Other studies show that mobile students feel their study abroad has helped them improve their foreign language skills, their knowledge of host country's culture and society, their understanding of other cultures and getting along with people from different backgrounds (Janson et al., 2009; Landon et al., 2017; Teichler, 2017). In reviewing the literature more extensively, no studies were found that investigate the study abroad and alumni commitment to their alma mater nor the relationships the relationship among all the three constructs (IC, SR, and OC). There is extensive literature on the relationship between SR and OC showing a significant positive relationship (Carroll, 1991; Farooq et al., 2013; Turker, 2009).

To examine these relationships more in depth, the three hypotheses that were formulated for this study are included below.

H1: Developing intercultural competence has a positive effect on the social responsibility of alumni.

H2: Alumni's social responsibility has a positive effect on their commitment to their alma mater.

H3: Intercultural competence has a positive effect on alumni's commitment to their alma mater.

Definition of Constructs

Global Citizen: The capacity to examine local, global, and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate, and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development (OECD, PISA, 2018 p.5).

Intercultural Competence: The complex abilities that are required to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Deardorff 2006, pp 247-248). An individual’s effectiveness in drawing upon a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes to work successfully with people from different national cultural backgrounds at home or abroad (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 530).

Social Responsibility: A socially responsible person has a deep concern over broader moral and ethical problems and a strong sense of justice; tends to help people even when there is nothing to be gained from others and is typically unalienated from society (Berkowitz and Lutterman p.169-171, 1968). Hett (1993) expands the definition of social responsibility by including global-mindedness: “Socially responsible individuals feel connected to the world and are aware of their responsibility for all people living on it” (p 143).

Organizational Commitment: A person can be committed to maintaining a previously established relationship with an organization for three distinct reasons: affective, continuance and normative (Meyer and Allen, p.2, 1991). OC is characterized by three factors: “a strong belief in the goals and values of the organization, a desire to stay a member of the organization, and a willingness to put in effort on behalf of the organization” (Mowday et al., 1979 p 226).

Research Methodology

Participants and Procedure

Conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, this pilot study explores the relationship among three constructs: Intercultural Competence (IC), Social Responsibility (SR), and Organizational Commitment (OC). This study does NOT redefine the constructs. To collect numerical measurable data, we sent a survey via e-mail to alumni of Tilburg University. TilburgU, a research-intensive university in the Netherlands, specializes in social science and humanities. In 2000, TilburgU begun offering study programs in English, and by 2009, it started engaging its international alumni who were defined as: former international students and Dutch nationals living abroad (Rincón, 2013). We selected international alumni who graduated from 2005-2015 from either a bachelor’s or master’s program and had spent at least a semester living and studying in the Netherlands. International alumni were divided into two groups: a) alumni with nationalities other than Dutch, and b) Alumni with a Dutch nationality living abroad at the time of the study. Under these two categories, 2511 alumni were

identified but not all had contactable information since once emails were sent many bounced back. After a period of 26 days, 923 (37%) alumni had opened the email of the 2511 sent emails. Of those who opened the emails and after cleaning up the data, we obtained 150 (16%) clean respondents who completed the survey. None of the participants received monetary incentive for filling out the survey.

Assessing Constructs

We conducted an online survey consisting of 22 statements and 19 descriptive questions, which included items selected from validated scales. Although IC and SR can also be assessed using Global Citizenship Scale (Morais and Ogen, 2010), Global Citizen Scale (Reysen and Katzarska-Miller, 2012), Global Identity Scale (Türken and Rudmin, 2013) or Global-Mindedness Scale (Hett, 1993), they do not include OC in their measurement. Alternatively, we included items from well-known and validated scales in business management research. Based on the definition of each construct, we selected items that exemplified important aspects for each construct with the advice of experts in the fields. Since we tested three different constructs in one survey, we limited the number of items from each scale to reduce its length. Longer surveys lead to lower quality of data and responses (Galesic and Bosnjak, 2009). Table 1 presents the three constructs and items used to build the survey. Each subscale is described further below under its corresponding construct. All subscales were tested using Cronbach's Alpha for reliability and factor analysis for internal consistency. A seven-point Likert-type scale was chosen for all items (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree).

IC Subscale

We used Deardorff's (2006) definition of IC: "the complex abilities that are required to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (pp 247-248). Many instruments have been developed to assess IC such as the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992), Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer et al., 2003) or Assessment of Intercultural Competence (Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006) to mention a few. Most instruments share three key IC dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and affective (Matveev and Merz, 2014). Consequently, we surveyed the underlying components in Fantini and Tirmizi (2006): knowledge, skills, and attitude, corresponding to the three dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and affective. To measure knowledge and skills, we used three items from the Assessment of Intercultural Competence scale (AIC; Fantini and Tirmizi 2006). To measure attitude of global-mindedness, we used four items from Global-Mindedness Scale (GMS; Hett, 1993). Although AIC includes a subscale to assess attitudes, we chose GMS because some of the statements provide reverse scoring. This clarifies if a respondent tends to always answer either positively or negatively to any attitude being assessed.

To check the reliability of this 7-item subscale, we used Cronbach test resulting in an alpha .529 lower than .70 threshold (Kline, 2000). We then performed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Barlett's tests to determine if the data was suitable for a factor analysis to assess whether the subscale is unidimensional. The factor analysis showed that the statements 1-5 formed one factor component and 6-7 another one. We then used the

unidimensional items 1-5 to assure internal consistency. We measured reliability again for this 5-item subscale and it resulted in an alpha .65 now closer to the .70 threshold. The 5-item IC subscale has a Mean = 5.84, SD = 0.71, alpha = .65.

SR Subscale

We incorporated Berkowitz and Lutterman's (1968) definition of a socially responsible person as someone who shows a deep concern over broader ethical and moral problems and who in turn are greatly influenced by interacting with others. Their Social Responsibility Scale (SRS) includes a dimension of altruism: socially responsible person "will tend to help people even when there is nothing to be gained from others" (p. 170). Although SRS is commonly used to measure SR, it lacks a global perspective; we consequently added items from the original GMS Responsibility subscale. Hence, we adapted 5 items from SRS to measure exclusively SR attitudes and 5 items from GMS to measure world fairness resulting in a 10-item subscale for SR. As with IC, we performed both a Cronbach test resulting in high reliability alpha .78 (>.70 threshold) and a factor analysis confirming a strong internal consistency. The 10-item subscale for SR has a Mean = 5.34, SD = 0.83, alpha = .78.

OC Subscale

For this study, OC means loyalty and willingness to help the university be successful. OC is characterized by three factors: "a strong belief in the goals and values of the organization, a desire to stay a member of the organization, and a willingness to put in effort on behalf of the organization" (Mowday et al., 1979 p 226). The Organizational Commitment Survey (OCQ; Mowday et al., 1979) is still commonly used to measure OC in business management. We included 5 items of the original OCQ, where 'this organization' was substituted for 'Tilburg University' (See Table 1). Just as with IC and SR, we performed both a Cronbach test resulting in a high alpha .87 and a factor analysis confirming a strong internal consistency. As a result, the 5-item subscale for OC has a Mean = 5.18, SD = 1.12, alpha = .87.

Table 1: Overview of Constructs, Measurements and Survey Items

Constructs	Scales	Survey items
IC	AIC Fantini& Tirmizi 2006 (1-3) and GMS Hett's 1993 (4-7)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I could cite a definition of culture and describe its components and complexities. 2. I could contrast important aspects of a foreign language and culture with my own. 3. I could cite important historical and social-political factors that shape my own culture. 4. I think I am an intercultural person because I know how to work and do business with foreigners. 5. I enjoy trying to understand people's behavior in the context of their culture. 6. My compatriots' values are probably the best. 7. I sometimes feel irritated with people from other countries because they don't understand how we do things here.
SR	SRS Berkowitz& Lutterman's 1968 (1-5) and GMS Hett's 1993 (6-10)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is no use worrying about current events or public affair; I can't do anything about them anyway. 2. Every person should give some of his time for the good of his town or country. 3. Our country would be a lot better off if we didn't have so many elections and people didn't have to vote so often. 4. At school, I usually volunteer for special projects. 5. I feel very bad when I have failed to finish a job I promised I would do. 6. I often think about the kind of world we are creating for future generations. 7. When I see the conditions some people in the world live under, I feel a responsibility to do something about it. 8. It is very important to me to choose a career in which I can have a positive effect on the quality of life for future generations. 9. I feel a strong kinship with the worldwide human family. 10. My compatriots have a moral obligation to share their wealth with the less fortunate people of the world.
OC	OCQ Mowday's et al. 1979 (1-5)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that is normally expected in order to help Tilburg University be successful. 2. I feel very little loyalty to Tilburg University. 3. I am proud to tell others that I am part of Tilburg University. 4. I am extremely glad that I chose Tilburg University over other universities I was considering at the time I joined. 5. I really care about the fate of Tilburg University.

In addition to testing these three constructs, the survey included several descriptive questions on international experience (study abroad and travel abroad for work), and general information about the respondents (gender, age, nationality, marital status, and level of education). Data collected from these questions was used to consider other factors (gender, age, nationality, etc.) that may have influenced the relationships between the constructs.

Results and Discussion

Survey

Of the 150 respondents, 56% are female and 44% are male; 71% are under 33 years of age while 25% are between the ages 32 and 44; the remaining 4% are older than 44. Regarding study programs, 89% completed a master's degree while 11% a bachelors. The respondents represent 48 nationalities, and all of them have lived abroad for at least a year. 59% claimed a European nationality of which 10% are Dutch, and 36% represent other nationalities while 4% did not state their nationality. 71% have travelled abroad for work, and 49% studied abroad during their

academic program. 23% still reside in the Netherlands and 77% live abroad. 66% are single, and 34% are married of which 31% married someone with another nationality than their own.

Testing Hypotheses

To test the three hypotheses, we used univariate and multivariate linear regression models and Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation model. To complement the analysis on mediation, we used Preacher and Hayes' (2008) bootstrapping method. Starting with hypothesis 1, we first tested the relationship between the independent variable (IC) and the dependent variable (SR) using univariate linear regression analysis (Osborne and Waters, 2002). We found a positive and statistically significant relationship between IC and SR ($B = 0.273$, $S.E. = 0.09$, $p < .01$). To assure that this positive relationship is not driven by individual characteristics, we controlled for other factors such as gender, level of study and educational background. Although 90% of the respondents had been former international students, we still included variables to measure if alumni had participated in a study abroad program while studying at TilburgU, or worked in international teams during their academic program, or travelled abroad for work. The results of these multivariate regressions continued to show a robust positive relationship between IC and SR with a similar significance level of 5% ($B = 0.255$, $S.E. = 0.10$, $p = .013$).

We can conclude that alumni who perceive themselves as having developed IC also show traits of SR. In the process of developing IC, an individual's frame of reference expands from local/national to global, thus bringing distant places psychologically closer. When students and graduates live or work abroad, friends and people they have met overseas become part of their community; consequently, they may feel more connected and responsible for others' well-being. This supports Hett's (1993) definition of socially responsible individuals as those who feel connected to the world and are aware of their responsibility for others. We recognize that those who study abroad could already be more socially responsible people, but it was difficult to control this factor for this pilot study.

Since the results provided above support hypothesis 1, we then used a linear regression analysis to test the direct relationship between SR as the independent variable and OC as the dependent variable. The results of this univariate regression showed that SR has a significant positive relationship with OC ($B = 0.384$, $S.E. = 0.11$, $p < .01$). The relationship is even stronger when controlling for individuals' characteristics ($B = 0.421$, $S.E. = 0.10$, $p < .01$). These results support hypothesis 2 and other previous studies that reported a positive correlation between SR and OC (Ali et al., 2010; Farooq et al., 2013).

Carroll's (1991) earlier work found that an employee's perception of a firm's Corporate SR policies has an impact on the individual's social responsibility. We can thus assert that socially responsible alumni are willing and committed to participate in social change initiatives organized by their alma mater if they believe in the university's values and feel part of it. Therefore, student and alumni engagement programs should clearly espouse the university's values in their communication, curriculum, extra-curricular activities, research, and social outreach.

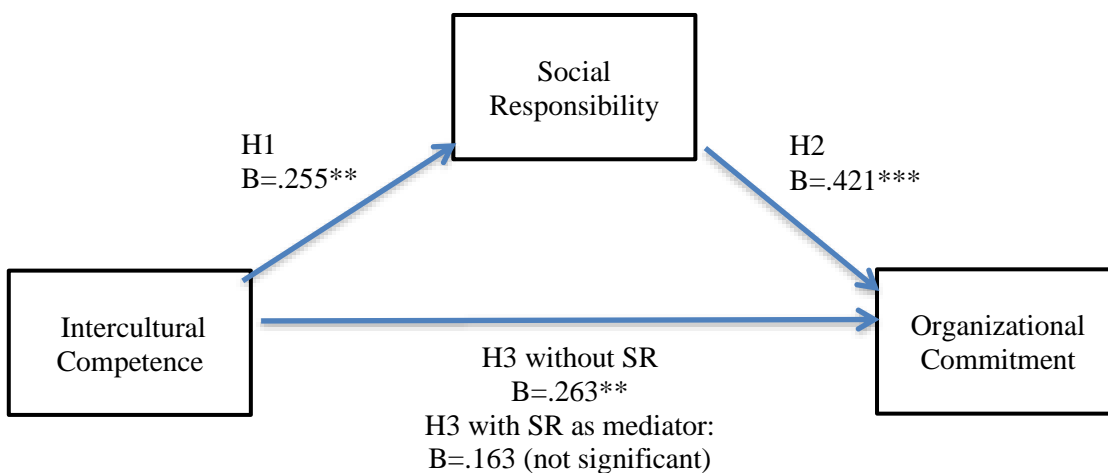
Finally, the univariate linear regression analysis used to test hypothesis 3 showed that IC has significant effect on OC ($B = 0.131$, $S.E. = 0.13$, $p = .308$). Since omitting relevant explanatory variables may create a bias

in the results, we controlled for other individuals' characteristics in multivariate linear regressions. For example, studying abroad or participating in international projects may explain alumni's commitment to the university. Once we control for individuals' characteristics, we found a positive and statistically significant relationship between IC and OC at a significance level of 5% ($B = 0.263$, $S.E. = 0.13$, $p = .048$). These results support hypothesis 3, thus it shows the importance of teaching IC to foster OC.

Given the positive relationship between IC and SR; IC and OC; SR and OC, we further explored whether SR functions as a mediator between IC and OC. Could IC have an indirect effect on alumni's commitment through SR? To answer this question, we followed Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation model and conducted two linear regressions with and without control variables. In both cases, we found that once SR is included in the regression, IC is not significant anymore (with control variables, the results are: $B = 0.163$, $S.E. = 0.13$, $p = .210$). "Perfect mediation holds if the independent variable has no effect when the mediator is controlled" (Baron and Kenny 1986 p 1177). However, SR remains positive and statistically significant in relation to OC ($B = 0.393$, $S.E. = 0.11$, $p < .01$). These results confirms SR as the mediating variable.

To complement these linear regressions analysis, a mediation analysis was tested further using the bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence estimates (Preacher and Hayes 2008). A 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect was obtained with 5000 bootstrap resamples. The results provide the confidence interval of .035 to .219, suggesting that IC may have an indirect effect on alumni's commitment to the university through SR. These results show that IC can strengthen SR in the process of developing global citizens, and further support Hett's (1993) definition of a socially responsible individual: "Socially responsible individuals feel connected to the world and are aware of their responsibility for all people living on it" (p 143).

Figure 1: Correlation between IC, SR, and OC



Note: ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Limitations and Future Directions

This pilot study explores whether a positive correlation exists between constructs rather than determining causality. Future research needs to include more rigorous assessments to overcome some of the limitation found here. Given that all respondents donated time in completing the survey may be interpreted as they already showing commitment to the university. Thus, further analysis of those who did not respond would be useful. Another selection bias is that only alumni who studied or worked abroad were surveyed. A follow-up survey should include alumni who did not study or worked abroad. Although survey participants indicated the amount of time they participated abroad, we did not explore whether a short stay would also show a positive correlation between constructs. Research does suggest that longer stays are associated with greater gains in IC (Kehl and Morris, 2007). Short-term programs have also been shown to have a positive impact on IC development under special conditions (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Another sample selection bias here may be that those who study abroad are already more socially responsible.

Future research needs to examine if hypothesis 1 holds true regardless of whether alumni have participated in study abroad, or in internationalization at home, or in non-international programs. Other universities and countries should also be included. It would further be important to examine if the COVID-19 pandemic has limited IC and SR development in those graduating in 2020 and 2021 and consequently restricting their commitment to their alma mater.

Conclusion

This study explores the relationship between Intercultural Competence (IC) and Social Responsibility (SR) in university graduates. We also studied the relationship between IC and SR and alumni's commitment to their alma mater where commitment can indicate individuals' willingness and intention for societal impact.

An internet survey was distributed among Tilburg University international alumni. 150 alumni representing 48 nationalities completed the survey. All respondents lived or worked abroad for at least a year before COVID-19 pandemic restricted traveling and attending on campus activities in person. A combination of the Assessment of Intercultural Competence Scale (Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006), Global-Mindedness Scale (Hett, 1993), Social Responsibility Scale (Berkowitz and Lutterman, 1968) and Organizational Commitment Survey (Mowday et al., 1979) were used to measure the constructs. Descriptive questions regarding international experience and demographic information were also added to the survey. Once all the data was collected, a multiple regression analysis was used to clarify the results.

IC was found to have a statistically significant effect on SR, which in turn has a significant positive effect on alumni's commitment to the university. Although a significant direct relationship was found between IC and alumni's commitment, the findings also showed SR with a highly significant mediating role in the relationship between IC and commitment to the university.

Some important implications of these findings are that investing in learning SR and IC can help develop more socially responsible graduates and increase alumni's commitment to the university. Developing IC is a worthwhile investment for universities from humanistic and economic perspectives. In a time of increasing anti-immigration, religious and political turmoil, universities should consider reengaging alumni's commitment from a humanistic perspective to enhance tolerance and freedom, and awareness of worldwide interdependence and ecological imperative.

Therefore, providing programs that teach and develop IC and SR in students, staff and alumni allows universities to reengage with their humanistic ideals and to inspire a sense of purpose to new generations. Alumni commitment can also provide knowledge and funding in support of intercultural learning, achieving Sustainable Development Goals and projects with social impact. Alumni are gateways and connectors to local and global societies and when they share their alma mater's espoused values, they can be ethical ambassadors for a higher purpose.

Our findings support the benefits of teaching IC and SR in building mutual understanding, collaboration, and commitment to advance university's values and mission. In addition to study abroad programs, universities and business schools could benefit from continuing their investing in internationalization at home, life-long learning and supporting SDGs. These programs allow students and alumni to keep learning IC and SR throughout their careers, and help universities and business schools nurture their relationship with them while building loyalty and commitment. "The ability to learn about, adapt to, and build relationships across different cultural contexts along with a sincere commitment to peace, social justice, and environmental sustainability are the ingredients necessary to inspire responsible global citizens" (Paracka and Pynn, 2017 p 48).

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