

Title: Global Competence to Foster Alumni Commitment for the SDGs

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Abstract

Given the dynamic socio-political tensions around the world, the climate crisis and other global challenges, the United Nations developed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to find solutions for such global challenges as: Ending poverty, protecting the planet, ensuring economic prosperity, social inclusion, and peace to all people. One of higher education's main challenges is to demonstrate its mission's impact locally and globally. Higher education institutions (HEI) play a crucial role in helping to achieve the SDGs by educating global citizens, developing innovative research and fostering international collaborations. The SDGs are powerful engagement tools that can help institutions address barriers on sustainability and the global challenges by engaging all stakeholders at different levels. How can HEI foster awareness, engagement and commitment in students and alumni to support the SDGs? This paper presents the results of study that examines the relationships among different components of global competency and how they relate to the SDGs. The results provide an understanding of how developing global competency during the student-alumni cycle can foster socially engaged students and alumni who can contribute solutions to the local and global challenges.

Introduction

Based on a similar study conducted by S.Rincón in 2015, this study surveyed two groups of alumni from Tilburg University in the Netherlands: (1) alumni who had participated in a non-international program without a study abroad option, and (2) alumni who graduated from a fully international program. This study explores the relationship among intercultural competency (IC), social responsibility (SR) and organizational commitment (OC) and further examines alumni's willingness to give to their alma mater. The aim of this study is NOT to redefine the constructs of IC, SR, and OC, but rather it explores the relationship among them.

The literature review on the constructs of IC, SR, and OC does not provide any studies that investigate the relationship among them. To examine the relationship more in depth, the three research questions were formulated.

1. Is there a positive effect of intercultural competence on social responsibility in alumni who participated in study abroad?
2. Is there a positive effect of intercultural competence on social responsibility in alumni who participated in non-international programs that did not require a study abroad period?
3. What is the role of intercultural competence and social responsibility in fostering organizational commitment?

Theoretical Background

A short definition of each construct is included below to facilitate perusal.

Intercultural Competence (IC)

Deardorff (2004) conducted a Delphi study among intercultural scholars and found "understanding of worldviews of other individuals" essential to IC (2004, p. 248). Most scholars interviewed considered cultural self-awareness, openness, adaptability, and skills to listen and observe as key components of IC. Deardorff defines IC as "effective and appropriate behavior and communication

in intercultural situations” (2004, p. 196). Moreover, IC empowers and enables people “to interact with cultural ‘others’ with a view to bridging difference, diffusing conflicts, and setting the foundations of peaceful coexistence” (Unesco et al., 2013, p. 6). IC is analyzed from an individual-based model consisting of three core components: motivation (affective, emotion), knowledge (cognitive) and skills (behavioral, actional) (Matveev & Yamazaki Merz, 2014; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Sue, 2001). Learning IC is a process of personal improvement moving in a continuum from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism (Bennett, 1986, p. 182).

Social Responsibility (SR)

Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968) define SR in an individual as a deep concern over broader moral and ethical problems that are greatly influenced by the interaction with other individuals. Hett’s (1993) definition of global-mindedness serves to complement the traditional definition of SR which focuses on people’s local and national communities (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968). Hett’s global-mindedness defines a socially responsible individuals as those who feel connected to the world and are aware of their responsibility for all the people living on it.

Organizational Commitment (OC)

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). Carroll (1991) found that people’s social responsibility impacts their willingness and commitment to start and participate in social change initiatives of organizations they belong to. Many studies also show a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and OC. (Ali et al., 2010; Brammer et al., 2007; Farooq et al., 2013; Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010; Turker, 2009).

Although there is no academic literature examining the relationship between IC and OC to a university nor between IC and SR, Hett’s (1993) five dimensions of Global-Mindedness does interweave social responsibility, intercultural competence, and to a certain extent commitment make a difference for the good of the global community.

Research Methodology

This research aims to test the relationship among three constructs: Intercultural Competence (IC), Social Responsibility (SR) and Organizational Commitment (OC) and to further examine alumni’s willingness to give back to their alma mater. Based on Hett’s (1993) five dimensions of global mindedness and Carroll’s (1991) research on SR and OC, this study formulated the following hypothesis:

- 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 positive effect on alumni’s commitment to the university.

This study aims to test the relationship among three constructs: IC, SR and OC and to further examine alumni’s willingness to give back to their alma mater.

Participants and procedure

A survey was sent via e-mail to alumni of Tilburg University in the Netherland. TilburgU is a research-intensive university specialized in social science and humanities. It has been offering

undergraduate programs in English since 2000. In 2022 when the study was conducted, TilburgU offered 34 bachelor and master programs in English, and welcomed more than 4,200 international students. It had more than 82,000 alumni of which 10% are former international students.

For the survey, two groups of alumni were selected from those who graduated between January 2016 and December 2021: a) alumni from the bachelor's program of International Business Administration (IBA) which included a study abroad option, but was not mandatory, and b) alumni from the bachelor's program of Bedrijfseconomie, delivered completely in Dutch without a study abroad option. Of those who graduated with bachelor's in IBA, 996 alumni had contactable email addresses. A total of 1.412 alumni were also identified for Bedrijfseconomie. A total of 2.408 emails were sent out where 1.273 (52%) alumni opened the email containing the link to the survey and 156 begun answering the survey. After a period of 30 days and two email reminders (one every two weeks), 82 clean respondents completed the survey of which 43 studied IBA and 39 studied Bedrijfseconomie. None of the participants received monetary incentive for filling out the survey.

Assessing Constructs

Assessing any construct requires multi-method and multi-perspective approaches such as combinations of tests, inventories, portfolios, interviews, and surveys. Given the limited budget, time, and staff available for this study, an online survey was selected to carry out the research. To test the three constructs (IC, SR, and OC), various scales were used which scholars have previously validated: Global Mindedness Scale (Hett 1993), Assessment of Intercultural Competence (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006), Social Responsibility Scale (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968) and Organizational Commitment Survey Scale (Mowday et al., 1979). Given that longer surveys lead to lower quality of data and responses (Dillman et al., 1993; Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009), not all items of each scale were used to limit the length of the survey.

Each scale is further described under its corresponding construct (see Table 1). All scales were tested for internal reliability with the Cronbach's Alpha. A seven-point Likert-type scale was used (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree).

Assessing Intercultural Competence

The study surveyed the underlying dimensions of IC: *Attitudes, knowledge, and skills* (Fantini 2009; Sue 2001). The Global-Mindedness Scale (GMS) by Hett (1993) is often used to test global mindedness and given its high Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.9; therefore, it was used to test attitudes. The Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) subscale of *knowledge* with Cronbach's Alpha score of .86 (Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006) was used to test knowledge and skills. Thus, four items from the GMS subscale and three questions from the AIC were included for a total of 7 items to test IC (attitudes, knowledge, and skills). Not all the questions provided by the GMS and AIC scales were included so as to limit the length of the survey. Various experts on the field of intercultural competence were consulted to review questions to measure IC and they agreed it included items that test attitudes, knowledge, and skills. ($SD = 0.41$, $\alpha = 0.62$).

Assessing Social Responsibility

To test SR, the traditional SR Scale (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968) was used, but since it does not contain items testing a global perspective, items from Hett's (1993) GMS Efficacy and Responsibility subscales were selected. A total of eight items were selected in the original

statements for SR: three items from SR Scale and five items for World Fairness from GMS (see Appendix 1). (SD = 0.87, alpha = 0.78).

Assessing Organizational Commitment

In the context of this study, organizational commitment means loyalty and willingness to help the university be successful. Organizational Commitment (OC) is generally 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 most widely adopted scale for OC is the Organizational Commitment Survey (OCQ) by Mowday et al., 1979) which is still being used in organizational management studies. Therefore, five original statements in OCQ were included. These five items were slightly adjusted by substituting ‘this organization’ for ‘Tilburg University’ (see Table 1). (SD = 1.20, alpha =0.84).

In addition to testing these three constructs, the survey included several descriptive questions on international experience (study abroad, working with foreigners), willingness to pay, and general information about the respondents (gender, age, nationality, education program). The data collected from the descriptive questions helped assess the relationship between the constructs by considering other factors that may have influenced the relations such as study program, gender, experience abroad.

Table 1: Overview of Constructs, Measurements and Survey Items

Constructs & Scale's Internal reliability	Measurement sources	Survey items
IC Cronbach's Alpha = .61	Fantini & Tirmizi's AIC for knowledge & skills Hett's GMS for attitudes	<i>Knowledge & Skills</i> 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. <i>Attitudes</i> 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 Cronbach's Alpha =.78	Berkowitz and Lutterman's SRS for social responsibility	<i>Social Responsibility</i> 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. At school, I usually volunteer for special projects. <i>World Fairness</i> 4. I often think about the kind of world we are creating for future generations. 5. When I see the conditions some people in the world live under,

	Hett's GMS for world fairness	I feel a responsibility to do something about it. 6. 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. 7. I feel a strong kinship with the worldwide human family. 8. My compatriots have a moral obligation to share their wealth with the less fortunate people of the world.
Organizational Commitment Cronbach's Alpha =.84	Mowday's et al OCQ for organizational commitment	Organizational Commitment 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.

Results and discussion

Demographics

Of the 82 respondents, 39% are females and 60% are male 1% would rather not say; as expected 98% are under 30 years of age while only 2% are between the ages 30 and 39. In terms of study programs, 52% completed a bachelor's degree in International Business Administration while 48% a bachelors in Bedrijfseconomie. The respondents represent 11 nationalities, 99% claimed a European nationality of which 88% are Dutch, and 12% represent other European nationality and 1% is non-European. 84% of the participants live in the Netherlands, 14% in another country in Europe and 2% outside Europe.

Given that the bachelor's in IBA attracts many international students, it was surprising to see a low respond of alumni with other nationality than Dutch. Since most respondents live in the Netherlands and most of the university's alumni engagement activities are geared towards alumni residing in the Netherlands, this result shows that international alumni are not as engaged with the university as Dutch alumni.

Testing Hypotheses

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 positive effect on alumni's commitment to the university.

To test the three hypotheses, univariate and multivariate linear regression models were used. Starting with hypothesis 1, the relationship between the independent variable (IC) and the dependent variable (SR) was tested using univariate linear regression analysis. The results show no statistically significant relationship between IC and SR ($B = 0.225$, $S.E. = 0.17$, $p = .2$). Other factors were also controlled such as study abroad, course on managing culture diversity during and after study, working with foreigners, gender, and age ($B = 0.182$, $S.E. = 0.19$, $p = .350$). Only gender showed a $p < .05$. The relationship between IC and SR was also tested between the two groups (IBA and Bedrijfseconomie), but there was no statistical significance. Given that there is no statistically significant relationship between IC and SR, there was no need to test SR as a mediating variable. Given that only 44% of alumni in this study participated in a study abroad for one semester and that

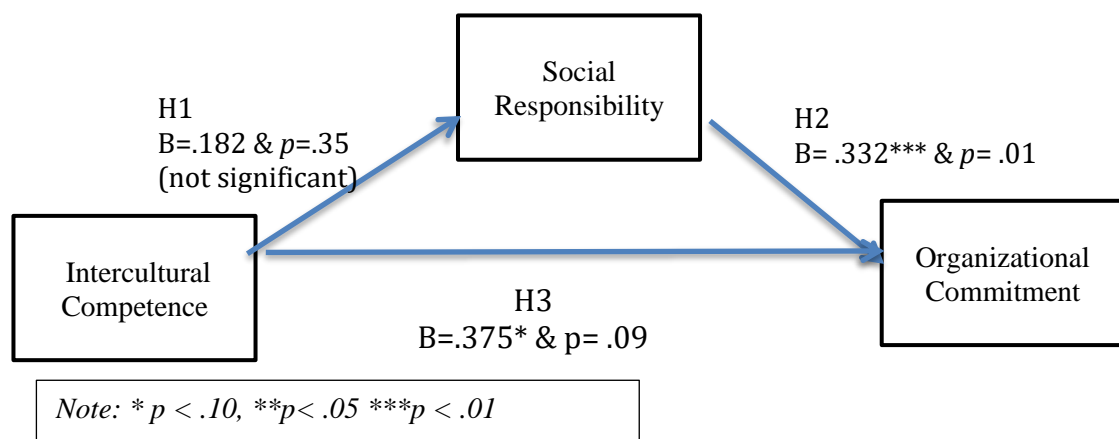
most of the participants are Dutch living in the Netherlands may explain that there is no statically significant relationship between IC and SR.

To test hypothesis 2 a linear regression analysis was used to determine 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 ($B = 0.338$, $S.E. = 0.123$, $p = .008$). The relationship controlling for individuals' characteristics such as study abroad, course on managing culture diversity during and after study, working with foreigners, gender and age continue to show a robust significant positive relationship ($B = 0.332$, $S.E. = 0.133$, $p = .015$). These results support hypothesis 2 as well as other previous studies that have reported a positive correlation between SR and OC (Carroll, 1991 Brammer, 2007; Turker (2008), Ali et al, 2010; Lindgreen & Swaen 2010 and Farooq et al, 2013).

Congruently with Carroll's (1991) findings, the results of testing hypothesis 2 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. Student and alumni engagement programs should clearly incorporate and clarify the university's values not only the curriculum and extra-curricular activities but also in research and social outreach.

Finally, in testing hypothesis 3 other individuals' characteristics were also controlled in multivariate linear regressions similarly as when testing hypotheses 1 and 2. The results indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship between IC and OC ($B = 0.375$ $S.E. = 0.22$, $p = .089$). These results support the hypothesis that intercultural competence has a positive effect on alumni's commitment to the university. Given that through internationalization, higher education is committed to educating global citizens, teaching intercultural competence can play a key role in institutional efforts to have social impact not only at home but also abroad through their alumni's participation. A summary of the results is provided below in Figure 1 (the estimates used include individuals' characteristics as control variables).

Figure 1: Correlation among IC, SR, and OC



Nurturing Intercultural Competence

Of the total respondents, only 44% participated in a study abroad program during their studies: 46% studied in Europe, 22% in North America, 19% in Asia, 8% in South America and 5% in Australia and Oceania. The majority (99%) studied 1 semester abroad and only 1% studied a full year. 61% graduated with a Bachelor of Science in IBA. These results support the many academic findings that show that less than 5% of all college students participate in study abroad programs primarily due to financial constraints. (Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Ilieva et al., 2017; Teichler, 2017). This study results support the need for internationalization at home where an international curriculum includes teaching IC regardless of whether the study program is in English or the host country's official language or includes a study abroad option (Killick & Foster, 2021; Leask, 2015; Olivos Rossini, 2016).

Of all the survey participants, 70% took at least one course on how to manage cultural diversity during their studies and 83% participated in at least one international team project. After graduation, 67% have developed a career that involves dealing or collaborating with foreigners. Of these alumni 75% graduated from the IBA program. 23% of all participants have taken at least one course after graduation on how to manage cultural diversity or international teams.

These results show that most alumni from the IBA program work with internationals after graduation, but they do not necessarily continue learning about managing cultural diversity. Intercultural competence is an ongoing process throughout life and not a consequence of just some experiences (Bennett, 1986; Deardorff, 2004). Therefore, an international curriculum should address the need to include IC in lifelong learning and career development particularly given employers' continually demand for managing cultural diversity in a global economy (OECD, 2018; Turos & Strange, 2018).

Willingness to Pay

When asked alumni from both study programs on their willingness to donate money to TilburgU 38% would donate even when donations are non-tax deductible: 17% of alumni would donate to research and 21% would donate in general to the university. But when asked for more specific projects, of all the respondents 31% would donate to a student scholarship fund, and 44% would donate to research projects that are socially responsible (e.g. climate crisis, sustainability, economic and social development, improve health care, promote democracy). Of those who would donate, the majority would donate between 50 to 200 euros per year and 4% would be willing to donate more than 500 euros per year for research projects that are socially responsible. No statistically significant difference was found between the two groups of alumni (IBA and Bedrijfseconomie).

When analyzing the data closely, the results on Willingness to Pay are encouraging. They show that even though the respondents are young alumni (between ages 20 and 30 years old), 56% of them would donate to the university whether it is in general or for a specific objective. This is very high compared to 19.7% benchmark of undergraduate alumni who engage in philanthropy across higher education institutions in the UK and Ireland (CASE, 2022, p. 12).

When asked on their willingness to donate their free time to TilburgU, 65% of alumni would volunteer to support local alumni activities (e.g., help organize an event, give a lecture, advise for curriculum development, design an internship, mentor a recent graduate). 77% of alumni would volunteer to support student activities (e.g. organize a visit to workplace; mentor a student, guide a student through an internship). A closer analysis of the data shows that 81% of alumni would donate

time supporting either alumni or students. Although there was no statistically significant difference between groups (IBA & BE), in general 88% would donate either money or time to the university.

These results show highly engaged alumni who regardless of their study program feel connected to the university. They would welcome a more meaningful engagement when it involves supporting other students, alumni, or socially responsible research projects. These results are very encouraging since higher education institutions now must show their societal impact and alumni can play a meaningful role in helping their alma maters advance their service mission.

Limitations and future directions

There are various elements that could have caused a bias in the data. First, of the 1273 alumni who opened the email, only 82 out filled in the survey; this could have a potential bias given that the respondents already show a commitment and high engagement by donating their time. It would be useful to know the reason why alumni did not participate in the survey: Is it a lack of time or no desire to have contact with the university? An online survey without combining it with any other method is limiting in assessing these constructs together. Assessment before and after study abroad period would also aid in providing clearer results. Another bias is that the scales used generate self-reporting answers.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the relationship between Intercultural Competence (IC) and Social Responsibility (SR), SR and Organizational Commitment as well as between IC and alumni's commitment to their alma mater where commitment can indicate an individual's willingness to support university's service mission.

An internet survey was developed and distributed among alumni of Tilburg University in the Netherlands. A total of 82 clean respondents completed the survey of which 43 studied International Business Administration and 39 studied Bedrijfseconomie. Although the respondents represent 11 nationalities, 88% are Dutch nationals and live in the Netherlands. Only 44% of all respondents studied abroad for one semester.

A combination of the Assessment of Intercultural Competence Scale by Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) and the Cultural Pluralism and Globalcentrism subscales of the Global-Mindedness Scale by Hett (1993) were used to measure IC. Similarly, subsets of questions from the Social Responsibility Scale by Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968), and the Responsibility subscale of the Global-Mindedness Scale by Hett (1993) were combined to test SR. Commitment to the university was coined as the willingness of alumni to be loyal and supportive to their alma mater and it was measured using the Organizational Commitment Survey by Mowday et al. (1979). Questions to measure alumni's Willingness to Pay were also included. In addition, other descriptive questions regarding international experience and demographic information were also added to the survey. Once all the data was collected, multiple regression analyses were conducted to assess the hypotheses and the results.

Although the results did not confirm a direct relationship between intercultural competence (IC) and social responsibility (SR), both IC and SR were shown to have significant direct relationships with alumni's commitment. Furthermore, the results of alumni's Willingness to Pay showed that even

though the respondents are young alumni (between ages 20 and 30 years old), most of them (56%) would donate to the university whether it is for a general or specific objective purpose. A closer analysis of the data shows that 81% of alumni would donate time supporting either alumni or students. Although there was no statistically significant difference between groups (IBA & BE), 88% of all survey participants would donate either money or time to the university.

An important implication of these findings is that investing in both teaching intercultural competence and nurturing social responsibility can help increase alumni's commitment to the university. Alumni commitment could provide knowledge and funding in support of university's service mission and lifelong learning programs that can help nurture social impact. Given higher education's key role in advancing the 2030 United Nation's Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), nurturing alumni's engagement through lifelong learning and a culture of giving their time, talent and treasure can support many institutional and community projects that help meet the SDGs.

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