Vol.9 Special Issue No.1 (2026)

Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching

ISSN: 2591-801X

Proudly owned and sponsored by Kaplan Business School, Australia

Content Available at: https://jalt.open-publishing.org/index.php/jalt/index

Understanding the relationship between faculty's intercultural competence and inclusion competence

Casey Aldrich [A]

[A] *Dartmouth College, USA*

Keywords

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives;
higher education;
inclusion competence;
intercultural competence;
faculty development.

Correspondence

Casey.J.Aldrich@Dartmouth.edu [A]

Article Info

Received: 28 April 2025
Revised: 19 October 2025
Accepted: 5 December 2025
Published: 1 June 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2026.9.S1.10

Abstract

U.S. higher education continues to face persistent inequities despite increasingly diverse student populations, and faculty diversity has not kept pace, contributing to exclusion and cultural disconnect. This study examined the relationship between faculty intercultural competence and inclusion competence to identify strategies for fostering more inclusive campus environments. Findings reveal a strong positive correlation between these competencies, suggesting that faculty with higher intercultural skills are better positioned to promote inclusion. While correlational, the study highlights opportunities for future research, including exploring causal mechanisms, evaluating interventions to develop these skills, and assessing their impact on student outcomes. The results underscore the urgent need for institutions to move beyond superficial diversity initiatives and implement deliberate, evidence-based strategies that cultivate both intercultural and inclusion competence among faculty, thereby creating equitable and supportive learning environments.

Introduction

Within the past several years, a series of tragedies, social movements, and institutional reckonings have exposed persistent inequities across U.S. society. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020 sparked renewed national attention on the systemic racism plaguing the United States, while the COVID-19 pandemic revealed deep disparities in access, support, and outcomes for those from marginalized communities. In the years that have followed, increasing political polarization and public debates over the legitimacy of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work have intensified challenges for higher education institutions seeking to address structural inequities.

Educational inequities, such as gaps in access, degree completion, campus belonging, student debt burdens, and post-graduation employment, remain significant across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines (NCES, 2023; Taylor et al., 2020). At the same time, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the U.S. face growing scrutiny of their DEI commitments. Many initiatives have been criticized as performative, symbolic, or reactive rather than transformative (Allard, 2021), while others have faced political and legislative pressures that threaten their continuation. Despite these tensions, calls for inclusive, equity-minded leadership have intensified, particularly from students and faculty advocating for environments that affirm and empower all members of their communities (Benson Clayton, 2021; Herron, 2020).

Over the past two decades, the demographic landscape of higher education has shifted markedly. Today's student body is more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse than ever before (Espinosa et al., 2020; IIE, 2024), with over one million international students enrolled in U.S. HEIs in 2023–24 (IIE Open Doors, 2024). Yet faculty composition remains disproportionately White: in fall 2022, 72% of full-time faculty identified as White, compared to 6% Black, 6% Hispanic, and 12% Asian (NCES, 2024). This representation gap can contribute to inequitable learning environments and cultural disconnects (Herron, 2020). To foster inclusive learning communities, faculty must not only reflect greater diversity but also develop intercultural competence to engage across difference effectively and respectfully, a skill increasingly relevant in higher education globally.

Meaningful diversity has substantial benefits, including enhanced critical thinking, cross-cultural understanding, civic engagement, and innovation (Benson Clayton, 2021). Achieving these benefits requires intentional, sustained leadership practices grounded in equity-mindedness and intercultural fluency. Faculty intercultural competence, i.e. the ability to communicate and act effectively and appropriately across cultural differences, may be a key factor in achieving true inclusion, defined as "the respect for and encouragement of the full participation of all individuals and groups" (Bennett, 2013, p. 11).

However, despite the intuitive link between intercultural competence and inclusive practice, empirical research testing this relationship in higher education remains limited. This study addresses that gap by exploring the relationship between faculty members' intercultural competence and their inclusion competence, providing the first empirical evidence of this connection and offering insights for institutions worldwide seeking to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments.

Drawing from data collected using two psychometric assessments, one measuring intercultural competence and the other inclusion competence, this study addresses the following research questions:

> RQ1: What is the relationship, if any, between faculty members' intercultural competence and their inclusion competence?
>
> RQ2: To what extent, if any, do faculty members' demographic characteristics interact with their intercultural competence to predict their level of inclusion competence?

By examining the relationship between educators' level of intercultural competence and their inclusion competence, this study provides a rationale for a more holistic approach to DEI that can be taken by various stakeholders at every level of the institution, including faculty, to foster more inclusive campus environments.

Literature review

Research indicates that inclusion in HEIs represents "a state and an experience that is nurtured with a sense of connection, care, and trust, facilitating a state of open communication and fairness" (Sengupta et al., 2019a, p. 5). Creating inclusive campus environments means establishing settings where community members from all backgrounds feel valued, represented, and experience a sense of belonging (Taylor et al., 2020). These experiences significantly impact learning outcomes, curriculum development, innovation, retention, and stakeholder satisfaction.

Despite growing research on creating inclusive learning environments in U.S. higher education (Sengupta et al., 2019a, 2019b), widespread institutional change remains elusive. Current diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts are often fragmented, varying considerably between institutions (Anderson, 2019). Common approaches include establishing DEI offices, publishing diversity statements, developing training programs, and implementing policies targeting recruitment and retention of diverse populations (Cartwright, 2012; Nunes, 2021). However, student experiences continue to vary significantly along racial and ethnic lines (Taylor et al., 2020), with some scholars suggesting that certain DEI initiatives may even trigger adverse reactions (Valentino, 2019).

While institutional policies and governance practices are necessary to address DEI issues, the limitations of top-down approaches are increasingly recognized. Valentino (2019) notes that mandated changes often make only "superficial difference in the complexion of our classrooms" (p. 19) without addressing deeper biases. Effective strategies require multifaceted approaches (Goosby Smith, 2016; Sengupta et al., 2019) that prioritize "building human and more human relationships" (Cote-Meek, 2018, as cited in Valentino, 2019, p. 18). This necessitates developing what the Kozai Group terms "inclusion competence", "an ability to promote a sense of belonging across cultural groups" (Kozai Group, 2022a, para. 1).

Understanding culture is fundamental to developing inclusion competence. Culture encompasses "the learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors of a community of interacting people" (Bennett, 2013, p. 1). It is neither homogeneous nor static but rather comprises multiple variables affecting all aspects of experience (Kleinman & Benson, 2006). Contemporary scholarship considers many diversity dimensions—including race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, economic status, and religion—as cultural constructs (Kleinman & Benson, 2006; Messer & Gonzalez, 2021; Worrell, 2014).

As campus diversity increases, the ability to interact effectively across difference becomes increasingly important, highlighting the need for intercultural competence. Scholars define intercultural competence as the ability to function effectively across cultures (Whaley & Davis, 2007), "to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways" (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 422), and "to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations" (Deardorff, 2008, p. 33). This competence develops through intercultural learning, a transformational process converting disconnected knowledge and experiences into systematic behavioral outcomes and cognitive competence (Li, 2013).

Research demonstrates that diversity alone does not guarantee effective cross-cultural engagement (Harvey, 2021). Intentional intercultural learning enables individuals to experience cultural differences in more complex ways (Bennett, J.M, 1986; Bennett, M.J., 1986; Paige, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009) and has been shown to increase intercultural awareness while decreasing ethnocentrism (Aslantaş, 2019). However, no previous research has empirically examined the relationship between intercultural competence and inclusion competence in higher education contexts. This study addresses this gap by investigating faculty members' roles in advancing their institutions' DEI efforts.

Conceptual framework

Before examining the specific constructs, it is essential to establish a clear understanding of competence as a foundational concept. While scholars have not reached consensus on a single definition of competence (Shippmann et al., 2000), many common definitions frame it as a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills

associated with high performance. Mirabile (1997) defines competence as "a knowledge, skill, ability, or characteristic associated with high performance on a job" (p. 73), while Spencer et al. (1994) describe it as "a combination of motives, traits, self-concepts, attitudes or values, content knowledge or cognitive behavior skills; any individual characteristic that can be reliably measured or counted and that can be shown to differentiate superior from average performers" (p. 4).

These domains of competence are often referred to as the "head, heart, and hand" concept (Hayles & Russell, 1997) or as a "mindset, heartset, and skillset" (Bennett, 2009), and include:

- • Cognitive (head/mindset): knowledge, data, factual information
- • Affective (heart/heartset): awareness, empathy, values, emotional understanding
- • Behavioral (hand/skillset): interpersonal interaction and communication skills (Hayles, 2013)

Effective and appropriate interaction across difference requires integration of all three components, regardless of whether one is approaching the interaction from an intercultural or inclusion perspective.

Defining the Key Constructs

Intercultural competence is commonly defined as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2008, p. 33). This construct emerged primarily from international education, cross-cultural psychology, and anthropology, emphasizing the navigation of national and ethnic cultural differences.

Inclusion competence, on the other hand, is defined as the "ability to promote a sense of belonging across cultural groups" (Kozai Group, 2022a, para. 1). This construct has emerged more recently from diversity, equity, and inclusion literature, emphasizing the importance of creating environments where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel valued and able to contribute.

While these competences serve different primary purposes, they share fundamental characteristics in how they approach difference, particularly in the affective and behavioral domains. The following sections analyze each domain in depth, examining areas of complementarity and divergence.

The Cognitive Domain: Knowledge Requirements

In the cognitive domain, intercultural and inclusion competence share one critical area of complementarity: cultural self-awareness. This foundational knowledge of oneself, including recognition of cultural patterns that have influenced one's identity, is prerequisite for developing both intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 2013) and inclusion competence (Bird et al., 2022).

Despite this shared foundation, the specific knowledge requirements diverge significantly. Intercultural competence requires knowledge of culture-general frameworks that help understand patterns across cultures, culture-specific knowledge about particular cultural groups, understanding of identity development patterns, knowledge of cultural adaptation processes, and sociolinguistic awareness (Deardorff, 2008; Bennett, 2009). In contrast, inclusion competence requires knowledge of different types of unconscious biases, understanding of macro- and micro-inequities, awareness of power dynamics in organizational structures and individual relationships, and knowledge of power and privilege and their impacts on inclusion and equity (Gundling & Williams, 2021; Kozai Group, 2022b).

This divergence reflects critiques that intercultural education often overlooks issues of power, privilege, and systemic inequities. As Gorski (2016) argues, knowledge of different cultures alone cannot prepare individuals to "recognize and respond justly to the insidious and often implicit and intersectional inequities" (p. 224) experienced by many. The complementarity and divergence in the cognitive domain of intercultural competence and inclusion competence are shown in Figure 1.

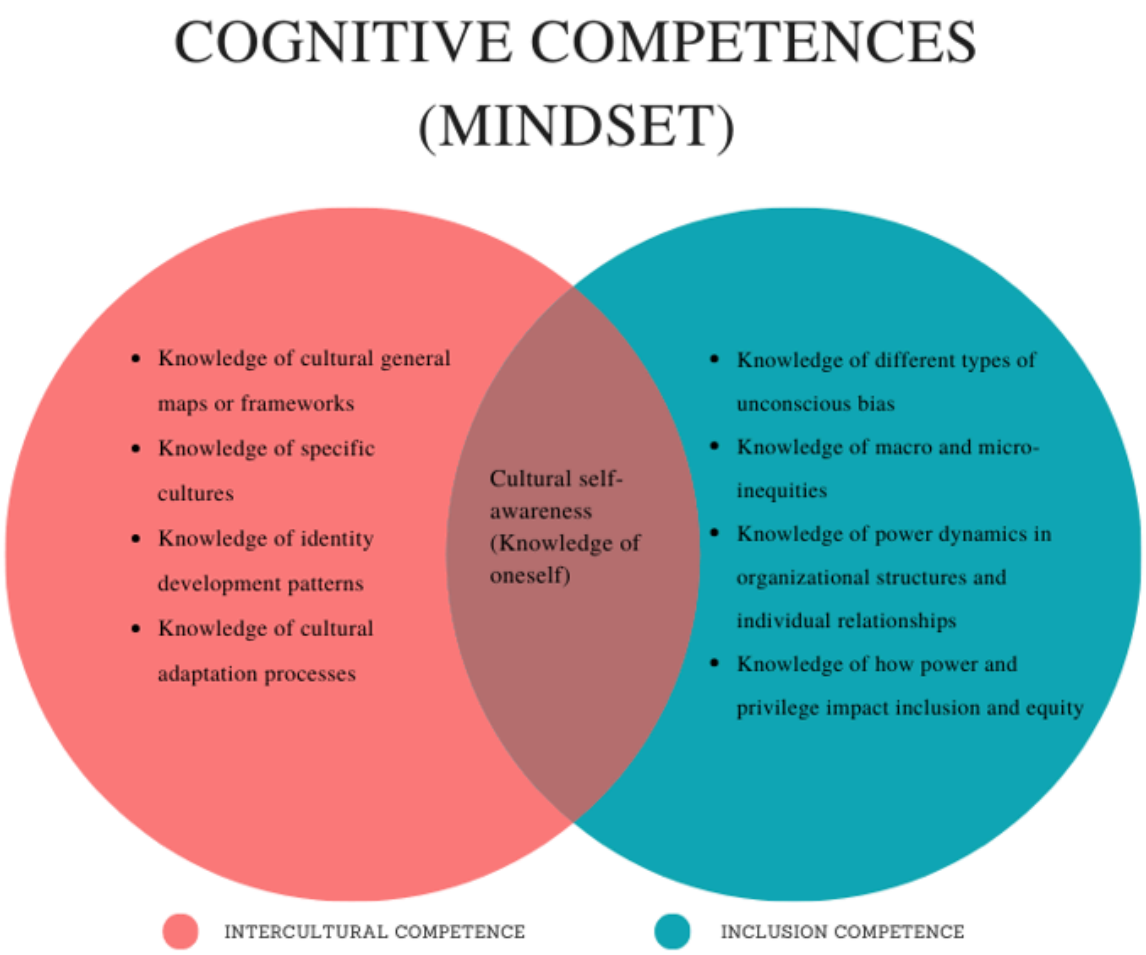

Figure 1. Cognitive domain of intercultural competence and inclusion competence

Affective Domain: Attitudes and Values

As can be seen in Figure 2, the affective domain shows substantial complementarity between the two competences. Both require curiosity about difference and openness to new perspectives, initiative and risk-taking, non-judgmental attitudes, cognitive flexibility, open-mindedness, tolerance of ambiguity, flexibility and resourcefulness, openness to change, and valuing different perspectives (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Gundling & Williams, 2021).

Deardorff (2006) emphasizes that attitudes of "openness, respect (valuing all cultures), and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity)" (p.225) are fundamental to intercultural competence development. Similarly, valuing different perspectives is essential to inclusion competence (Casey & Robinson, 2017; Gundling & Williams, 2021).

The affective domain shows less divergence than the cognitive domain. The primary differences are that intercultural competence emphasizes cultural humility", a distinctive and desirable way of comprehending cultural differences" (Guskin, 1991, p. 162) that involves questioning the primacy of one's own perspective, while

inclusion competence emphasizes emotional sensitivity, or the ability to read people who differ from oneself with respect to thoughts, feelings, and communication patterns (Kozai Group, 2022b).

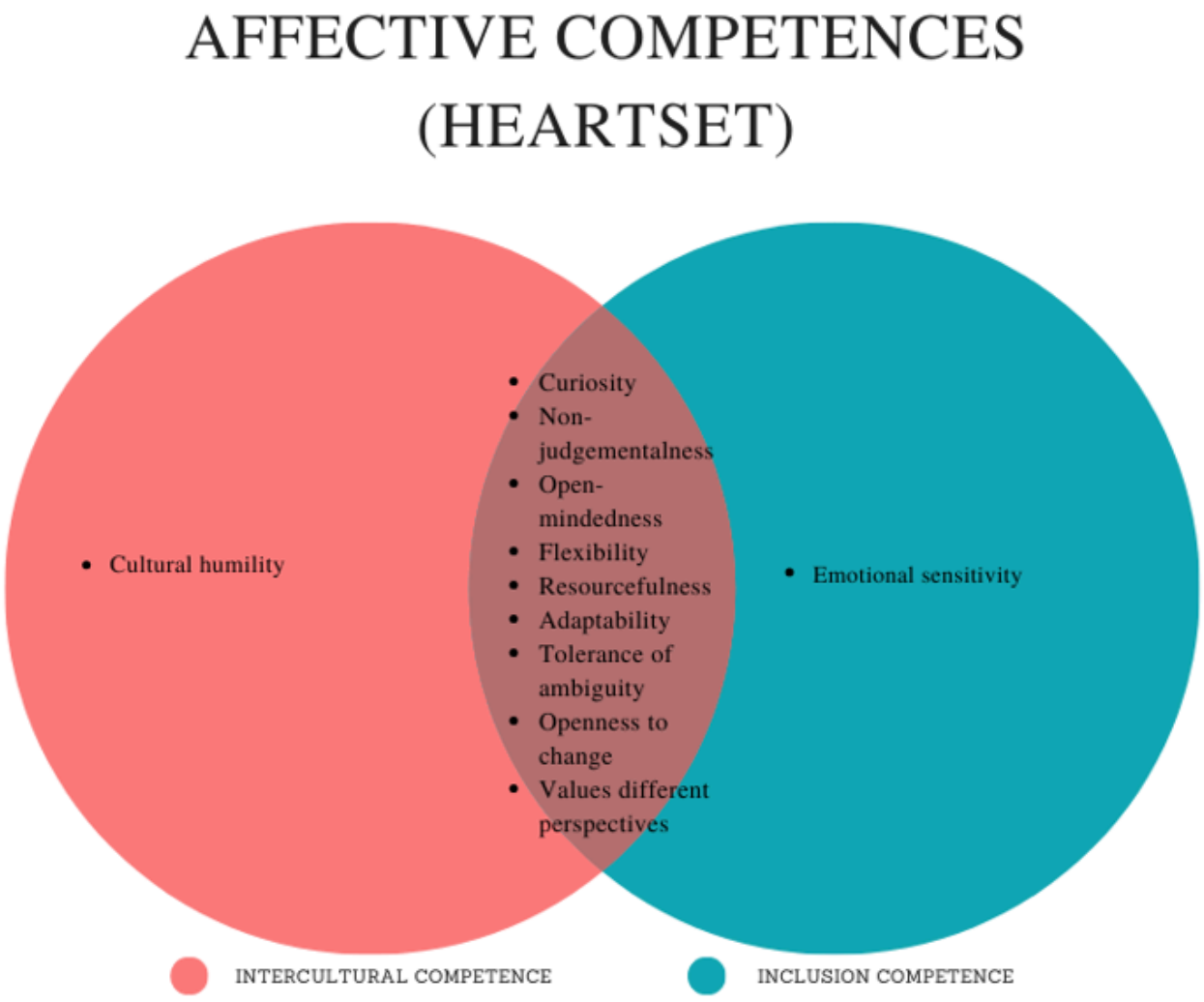

Figure 2. Affective domain of intercultural competence and inclusion competence

Behavioral Domain: Skills and Actions

The behavioral domain demonstrates the greatest complementarity between intercultural and inclusion competence. Both competences require empathy, defined as "the imaginative intellectual and emotional participation in another person's experience" (Bennett, 1998, p. 207). They also share the need for the ability to listen and perceive accurately, adaptability to different contexts and situations, problem-solving skills, information gathering abilities, and management of social interactions and anxiety (M. J. Bennett, 1986; Gundling & Williams, 2021; Kozai Group, 2009).

Pettigrew's (2008) meta-analysis suggests that empathy and perspective-taking are far more important than knowledge acquisition in reducing prejudice, highlighting the critical nature of these behavioral skills for both competences.

While significant complementarity exists in the behavioral domain, inclusion competence requires additional behaviors not typically emphasized in intercultural competence. These include the ability to champion inclusion and leverage inclusive practices for better performance results, skills in identifying and amplifying marginalized voices, creation of environments characterized by trust, respect, and mutual learning, and facilitation of spaces where people feel heard and believe they can contribute meaningfully (Gundling & Williams, 2021). The complementary and diverging competences of both constructs are illustrated in Figure 3.

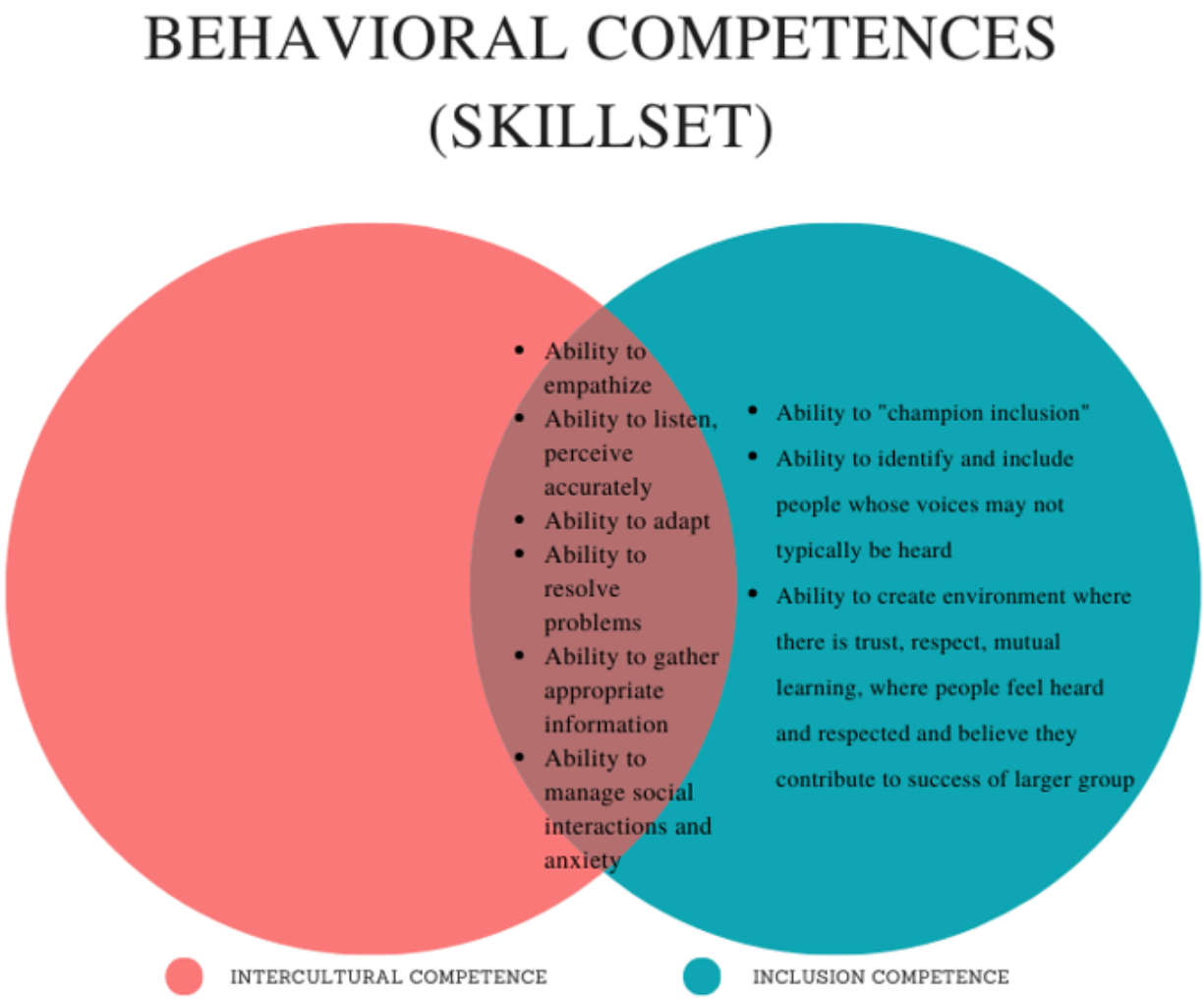

Figure 3. Behavioral domain of intercultural competence and inclusion competence

Implications of the Framework

This conceptual framework suggests both potential complementarity and divergence between intercultural and inclusion competence. The substantial overlap in the affective and behavioral domains indicates a likely positive relationship between these constructs. However, the notable differences in knowledge requirements may influence this relationship.

For higher education institutions, these findings suggest several possible approaches. Developing intercultural competence may enhance inclusion competence and promote more inclusive learning environments. Similarly,

developing inclusion competence may improve intercultural interactions both in and beyond the classroom. Perhaps most promising, a holistic approach integrating both sets of competences may be more effective than addressing them separately.

Those developing intercultural competence programs might consider incorporating content on unconscious bias, power dynamics, and privilege. Similarly, inclusion competence initiatives could benefit from including culture-general frameworks and adaptation processes.

This framework serves as the foundation for empirical investigation into the relationship between faculty members' intercultural and inclusion competence within U.S. higher education institutions, with implications for faculty development and institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Methodology

This quantitative study employed a correlational design to examine the relationship between intercultural competence and inclusion competence among faculty at higher education institutions (HEIs) in the United States.

Sample

Data were collected between June and September 2023 following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and ethics clearance. Using simple random sampling, 50 four-year public and not-for-profit private, bachelor's degree-granting institutions across the US were selected from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). After excluding institutions that did not respond or lacked public faculty directories, the final institutional sample comprised 31 HEIs. Faculty email addresses were collected from institutional directories, and survey invitations were sent directly to faculty members. This approach yielded 353 participants.

Institutional characteristics data (institution type, size, student and faculty demographics) were gathered from IPEDS to control for institutional differences. Faculty demographic information was collected through the survey.

Instruments

Two psychometric inventories were used: the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES), which measured participants' levels of intercultural competence, and the Inclusion Competencies Inventory (ICI), which measured their inclusion competence. The IES (Mendenhall et al., 2012) consists of 60 items measuring three dimensions: Continuous Learning, Interpersonal Engagement, and Hardiness. The instrument has undergone rigorous reliability and validity testing and has been proven a reliable and valid instrument for predicting the effectiveness of participants' experiences in intercultural encounters (Mendenhall et al., 2012). Statistical analysis indicates the instrument's content validity, criterion-related validity, convergent/divergent validity, differential validity, and face validity (Mendenhall et al., 2012). The overall alpha coefficient reliabilities of the three main dimensions are all above .84 in prior instrument reliability work, as is the alpha coefficient for the instrument as a whole.

The ICI (Kozai Group, 2021) comprises 50 items measuring three dimensions: Knowing Yourself, Knowing Others, and Bridging Differences. Both instruments use Likert-scale response formats and have demonstrated strong reliability in previous validation studies. In a recent validation study, all ICI scales were shown to have alpha coefficient reliabilities values ranging from .77 to .91. The alpha coefficient reliability of the social desirability scale is .83 (Kozai Group, 2022b).

For the purpose of this study, question items from the IES and ICI were combined into a single instrument using a 7-point Likert format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Nine question items overlapped between the IES and ICI and were removed from the merged instrument since it is difficult to argue that two constructs are distinct when the same indicator is used to measure them (Cheung et al., 2023). To further ensure the instruments measure two different underlying constructs, a divergent validity analyses was conducted by comparing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model that assumed a single factor with the two instruments combined (i.e., a one-factor model) with a model assuming separate IES and the ICI constructs, which left the two

instruments disaggregated (i.e., a two-factor model). The two-factor model had an AIC[1] of 86726.896 and BIC[2] of 87647.115, which fit the data significantly better than the one-factor model, with an AIC of 87444.465 and BIC of 88360.818. Both AIC and BIC were lower for the two-factor solution, offering evidence that the IES and ICI measure empirically distinct constructs (χ^2 (1)=719.57, p<0.001) (Whatley et al., 2023).

Variables

The outcome variable was inclusion competence (Overall ICI score), with intercultural competence (Overall IES score) as the primary predictor variable. Control variables included participant demographics (race/ethnicity, citizenship, age, gender, sexual orientation, job position, and job level) and institutional characteristics (type, size, student and faculty demographic composition, and region), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Predictor and Control Variables used in Analyses

Intercultural Competence (IES) (Predictor)	**Demographic Characteristics (DEMS) (Control)**	**Institutional Characteristics (INST) (Control)**
Overall IES Score	Race/ethnicity	Type of HEI
	Country of Citizenship	Size of HEI
	Age	Pct International
	Gender	Students
		Pct Minoritized Students
	Sexual Orientation	Pct International
	Job Position	Faculty/Staff
	Job Level	Pct Minority Faculty/Staff
		Region

Data Analysis

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to analyze the relationship between intercultural competence and inclusion competence. The base model included the Overall IES score, participant demographics, and institutional characteristics as predictors of the Overall ICI score. This regression model in equation form is as follows:

$$ICI_i = a + b_1 IES_i + DEMS_i\, b_2 + INST_i\, b_3 + e. \quad (1)$$

[1] Akaike information criterion (AIC) is a fined technique based on in-sample fit to estimate the likelihood of a model to predict/estimate the future values.

[2] Bayesian information criterion (BIC) is another criterion for model selection that measures the trade-off between model fit and complexity of the model. A lower AIC or BIC value indicates a better fit (*Akaike Information Criterion - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics, n.d.*)

To address the second research question, an additional model incorporated interaction terms between the Overall IES score and participant demographic characteristics to examine whether the relationship between intercultural competence and inclusion competence varied by demographic group. The regression model with this interaction term in equation form is as follows:

$$ICI_i = a + b_1 IES_i + DEMS_i b_2 + INST_i b_3 + IES_i * DEMS_i\, b_4 + e. \quad (2)$$

Results

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics that summarize the institutional characteristics of all sample institutions (n=31) included in the dataset are presented in Tables 2 and 3. These data were obtained from the Education Department's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), as reported in the fall of 2021, the most recently available data at the time of writing. Institutional characteristics include institution type, control, and size as defined by the Carnegie (n.d.) size and setting classifications utilized by IPEDS, as well as the percentage of faculty and students who identify as minoritized or international[3]. Sample institutions were located across the country and included institutions of various sizes and types (see Table 2). Regarding region, 23% of the institutions in the sample were located in the Southeast, while 19% were located in the Far West. Other regions represented include New England (16%), the Mid East (16%), Great Lakes (16%) and the Plains (10%). Regions not represented in this random selection of institutions include the Southwest, the Rocky Mountains, US Service Schools, and Outlying Areas. In terms of control, 61% of the institutions in the sample were private and 39% were public. As for size, 42% of the institutions in the sample were classified as medium-sized, with between 3,000 to 9,999 degree-seeking students, 26% were classified as small, with between 1,000–2,999 degree-seeking students, and the remaining institutions were classified as very small, with fewer than 1,000 degree-seeking students, or large, with at least 10,000 degree-seeking students (16% each). The majority (55%) of all institutions were classified as highly residential, while the remaining 45% were considered primarily residential.

Table 3 displays the percentage of minoritized and international students and faculty at institutions included in the dataset. Institutions reported that an average of 41.4% of their student body identifies as minoritized, and 5.6% as international students (of any race). Regarding faculty, an average of 31.8% of faculty at the institutions identify as minoritized and 2.6% as international.

Participant demographic characteristics

Five hundred thirty-three faculty of all levels (Instructors, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, and Professors) from the 31 sample institutions participated in this study by responding to the survey (response rate = 3.9% [533/13,543]). One hundred eighty-one of the responses were incomplete and were not included in the dataset, leaving 353 valid survey responses.

[3] According to IPEDS, "minority" refers to people who are nonwhite and whose race is known. This includes those who are two or more races; it does not include "nonresident aliens," as their ethnicity or race is unknown. "International," in this study, refers to the IPEDS category "Nonresident / foreign" – those of all racial and ethnic groups who are in the United States on a visa or temporary basis and do not have the right to remain indefinitely (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024) For more detailed information on how IPEDS defines race and ethnicity, see Appendix B.

[4] Other countries represented in the participant sample included Canada (n=2), France (n=1), Germany (n=2), Ghana (n=1), India (n=2), Iran (n=1), Netherlands (n=1), South Africa (n=1), Tonga (n=1), UK (n=1), US and Argentina (n=1), US and Brazil (n=1), US and Canada (n=2), US and China (n=1), US and Croatia (n=1), US and Egypt (n=1), US and Germany (n=2), US and Ghana (n=1), US and Italy (n=2), US and Mexico (n=1), US, France and UK (n=1), US, Uruguay and Italy (n=1).

Table 2. Sample institution characteristics

Variable	N	Percentage
Region		
New England	5	16%
Mid East	5	16%
Great Lakes	5	16%
Plains	3	10%
Southeast	7	23%
Far West	6	19%
Classification		
Doctoral	8	26%
Master's	11	35%
Baccalaureate	8	26%
Baccalaureate/Associate's	4	13%
Associate's	0	0%
Control		
Public	12	39%
Private	19	61%
Size and Setting		
Very Small (fewer than 1,000)	5	16%
Primarily nonresidential	0	0%
Primarily residential	1	3%
Highly residential	4	13%
Small (1,000–2,999)	8	26%
Primarily nonresidential	0	0%
Primarily residential	4	13%
Highly residential	4	13%
Medium (3,000–9,999)	13	42%
Primarily nonresidential	0	0%
Primarily residential	4	13%
Highly residential	9	29%
Large (at least 10,000)	5	16%
Primarily nonresidential	0	0%
Primarily residential	5	16%
Highly residential	0	0%

Table 3. Average percentage of minoritized and international students and faculty at sample institutions

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Percent Minoritized Students	41.1	0.1	0	52.8
Percent International Students	5.6	0.26	4.3	98.7
Percent Minoritized Faculty	31.8	0.03	0	13
Percent International Faculty	2.6	0.26	4.2	100

Table 4 presents a full summary of the characteristics of the faculty who participated in the study. Participants indicated a number of countries of citizenship, with the majority (91.5%) reporting the United States as their only country of citizenship[4]. The majority of participants were white (81%) females (56.7%) who held a doctoral degree (71%). Regarding level of education, other participants included those who had completed a bachelor's degree (n=7), some graduate coursework (n=2), one or more master's degrees (n=64), or a post-doctoral degree (n=26), as well as some current doctoral candidates (n=4). Participants were mostly straight (79.3%) and ranged in age from under 39 years old (24.4%) to over 70 (6.5%), with nearly equal representation in the 39 and under age group (24.4%), 40-49 age group (24.6%) 50-59 age group (22.9%), and 60-69 group (21.5%). In comparison to the faculty make-up at institutions nationally, the percentage of faculty members in the participant sample who identify as white was slightly higher than the national average where, in the fall of 2021, 73 percent identified as white. The percentage of participants in the sample who identified as female, however, is close to the national average where women account for 54 percent of full-time faculty members (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

Participants' intercultural competence and inclusion competence

The mean Overall IES score of the participant sample is 5.26 (standard deviation [sd] = 0.554), and the mean Overall ICI score is 5.14 (sd=0.511). The skewness of the Overall IES scores was found to be -0.12, indicating a fairly symmetrical distribution, and the kurtosis was 2.56, indicating that there were fewer and less extreme outliers than the normal distribution. Regarding the distribution of the Overall ICI scores, the skewness was found to be 0.10 and the kurtosis was 2.74, again suggesting a normal and fairly flat distribution. Table 5 presents the mean Overall IES and ICI scores as well as mean scores for the sub-dimensions of each construct.

Table 4. Participant demographic characteristics

Characteristic	N	Percent
Education		
Completed doctoral/terminal degree (e.g., PhD, JD, MD)	250	70.8%
Other	103	29.2%
Job Level	N	Percent
Professional employee or self- employed	233	66.0%
Other	120	34.0%
Age	N	Percent
39 and under	86	24.0%
40 to 49	87	24.6%
50 to 59	81	22.9%
60 to 69	76	21.5%
70 and above	23	6.5%
Gender Identity	N	Percent
Female	200	56.7%
Male	142	40.2%
Other	11	3.1%
Sexual Orientation	N	Percent
Straight	280	79.3%
Not Straight	73	20.7%
Ethnicity	N	Percent
White / Caucasian	286	81.0%
Other	67	19.0%
Country of Citizenship	N	Percent
USA	323	91.5%
Other	30	8.5%

Table 5. Mean IES and ICI scores grouped by each construct's main dimensions and sub-dimensions (n=353)

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
IES				
Continuous Learning	5.774	0.545	3.833	7.000
Self-Awareness	5.429	0.697	3.111	7.000
Exploration	6.119	0.603	3.667	7.000
Interpersonal Engagement	5.217	0.954	2.643	7.000
World Orientation	4.722	1.355	1.000	7.000
Relationship Interest	5.711	0.834	3.143	7.000
Hardiness	4.804	0.748	2.984	7.000
Positive Regard	4.986	0.880	2.778	7.000
Emotional Resilience	4.621	1.045	2.000	7.000
Overall IES	5.265	0.554	3.683	6.524
ICI				
Knowing Yourself	4.906	0.725	3.133	7.000
Openness to Change	6.080	0.652	3.667	7.000
Adaptability	3.732	1.181	1.000	7.000
Knowing Others	5.234	0.725	3.417	7.000
Connecting with Others	6.042	0.665	3.667	7.000
Reading Others	4.426	1.095	1.167	7.000
Bridging Difference	5.280	0.608	2.667	6.619
Valuing Different Perspectives	5.733	0.682	3.333	7.000
Power Sensitivity	4.826	0.941	2.000	6.857
Overall ICI	5.140	0.511	3.856	6.692

Regression results

Given the relatively small sample size (N=353) and few degrees of freedom available for this study, initial statistical tests were conducted to determine which participant demographic characteristics and institutional characteristics appeared significantly related to the predictor variable of interest (Overall IES score) or the outcome variable (Overall ICI score) to limit the number of control variables in the regression analyses. In terms of participant demographics, *t*-tests comparing the mean Overall IES and Overall ICI scores of participants who identified themselves as white to those who self-identified as another race or ethnicity revealed significant differences in both their Overall IES scores (t= 2.06, df = 351, $p < 0.05$) and their Overall ICI scores (t=1.96, df = 351, $p < 0.05$). One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) also revealed a significant relationship between participants' age and their Overall IES scores [F(4, 348) =3.31, $p < 0.05$]. Both race/ethnicity and age, therefore, w-

-ere included in the multiple linear regression models as control variables. Tests revealed no significant relationship between their other demographic characteristics, nor any of the institutional characteristics, and Overall IES or Overall ICI scores. Nonetheless, the percentage of international and minority faculty and staff were included in the regression as control variables since, according to the literature, they are the institutional characteristics most likely to impact the results, even if at statistically insignificant levels (Kohli Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020).

Table 6 summarizes OLS regression results that provide an answer to this study's first research question ("What is the relationship, if any, between faculty members' level of intercultural competence and their inclusion competence?). As can be seen, the results show a positive and significant relationship between Overall IES and Overall ICI scores (b = 0.573, p < .001), indicating that participants with higher levels of intercultural competence are expected to have higher levels of inclusion competence, even after controlling for the other variables in the model. Specifically, a one-point increase in Overall IES score is related to an increase of over a half-point (0.573) in Overall ICI score. While the previously mentioned statistical tests indicated that some participant demographic characteristics correlated with participants' Overall IES or Overall ICI scores, their age, gender, and race/ethnicity did not contribute to the multiple regression model at a standard level of significance. The regression produced an R^2 = 0.377, F(10, 337) = 20.35, p < .001).

Table 6. OLS estimates of the relationship between intercultural competence and inclusion competence (outcome=overall ICI)

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Overall IES	0.573 ***	(0.041)
Ethnicity (Non-white)	0.060	(0.057)
Age (39 and under)	-0.115	(0.063)
Age (50-59)	-0.087	(0.064)
Age (60-69)	0.002	(0.065)
Age (70 and over)	0.011	(0.102)
Pct International Faculty	-0.418	(0.552)
Pct International Students	-0.468	(0.240)
Pct Minority Faculty	0.079	(0.256)
Pct Minority Students	-0.120	(0.180)
Constant	2.286	(0.285)

*Note. ***p<.001. Reference groups include: Female (for gender identity), White (for racial/ethnic identity), and 40-49 (for age group).*

Table 7 summarizes OLS regression results that provide an answer to this study's second research question ("To what extent, if any, do faculty members' demographic characteristics interact with their intercultural competence to predict their level of inclusion competence?"). Results indicate that participants' intercultural competence does not predict their level of inclusion competence differently by age, ethnicity, or country of citizenship in any significant way. The regression produced an $R^2 = 0.392$, $F(15, 332) = 14.28$, $p < .001$.

Table 7. OLS estimates of the relationship between intercultural competence and inclusion competence with interaction terms included (outcome=overall ICI)

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Overall IES	0.733*	(0.341)
Ethnicity (Nonwhite)	0.948	(0.549)
Ethnicity interaction	-0.173	(0.106)
Age (30-39)	0.738	(0.604)
Age interaction (30-39)	-0.176	(0.115)
Age (50-59)	-0.677	(0.643)
Age interaction (50-59)	0.113	(0.122)
Age (60-69)	-0.131	(0.637)
Age interaction (60-69)	0.023	(0.118)
Age (70 and above)	0.026	(1.01)
Age interaction (70 and above)	0.003	(0.185)
Pct International Faculty	-0.469	(0.550)
Pct International Students	-0.394	(0.241)
Pct Minority Faculty	0.081	(0.258)
Pct Minority Students	-0.172	(0.182)
Constant	-1.49	(1.82)

*Note. *p<.05. Reference groups include: Female (for gender identity), White (for racial/ethnic identity), and 40-49 (for age group)*

Discussion

This study explored the relationship between intercultural competence and inclusion competence among faculty in US higher education institutions (HEIs), providing the first empirical evidence linking these two constructs. Our analysis revealed that while the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES) and Inclusion Competence Inventory (ICI) measure distinct constructs, confirmed through divergent validity testing, faculty's levels of intercultural competence and inclusion competence demonstrate a significant positive relationship. This finding suggests that as faculty develop higher levels of intercultural competence, their inclusion competence is likely to increase as well, and vice versa.

The positive relationship between these competences likely stems from their complementarity, particularly in the affective and behavioral domains. Both constructs require similar dispositional attributes such as curiosity, open-mindedness, tolerance of ambiguity, and empathy, along with behavioral skills related to relationship-building and effective communication across differences. Although the cognitive domains of each construct show less overlap, both require cultural self-awareness as a foundational element. Faculty who demonstrate high competence in these areas appear better equipped to navigate cultural differences while simultaneously fostering environments where all students experience a sense of belonging.

Among the demographic and institutional characteristics examined, only age and race/ethnicity demonstrated significant relationships with intercultural competence. Older faculty exhibited higher levels of intercultural competence, possibly reflecting increased exposure to diverse cultural contexts over time. Interestingly, White faculty showed slightly higher scores on both intercultural and inclusion competence measures compared to faculty of color. One possible explanation for the slightly higher mean IES and ICI scores among White participants is that differences in exposure to professional development, mentorship, and institutional opportunities, as well as variations in socialization and self-assessment norms, may influence the development and reporting of intercultural and inclusion competence.

Notably, the analysis revealed no significant interaction effects between demographic characteristics (age, race/ethnicity, citizenship) and intercultural competence in predicting inclusion competence. This suggests that regardless of demographic background, faculty with higher intercultural competence demonstrated comparable levels of inclusion competence. This finding may reflect the impact of increased campus diversity across US higher education, where cross-cultural interactions have become commonplace, potentially facilitating more uniform development of these competences across demographic categories.

It is important to note that the results do not establish a causal relationship between intercultural competence and inclusion competence. The direction of this relationship remains unclear. However, understanding the positive association between these competences provides valuable insight for institutions considering which types of faculty training and professional development opportunities might contribute to creating more inclusive learning environments.

Implications for practice

This study's findings have important implications for various stakeholders in higher education. For institutional leaders, the results suggest the value of allocating resources toward programs that enhance both intercultural and inclusion competence among faculty. Regular assessment of these competences can help measure progress toward institutional goals related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, leaders should consider undergoing training themselves to demonstrate institutional commitment to inclusivity.

For DEI practitioners, the findings highlight the importance of collaborating across institutional divisions to implement holistic practices that integrate intercultural awareness with inclusive practices. The artificial bifurcation between intercultural training and DEI training should be addressed through collaborative relationships between DEI practitioners and international educators. Such collaboration would help address common critiques of current DEI initiatives, including their siloed approach, lack of authenticity, and US-centric focus.

International educators should consider expanding their work beyond study abroad programs to promote intercultural understanding across campus, particularly through faculty-facing intercultural learning opportunities. Our findings justify more widespread, intentional intercultural learning as a pathway to enhancing inclusion competence.

For faculty, prioritizing professional development targeting intercultural competence improvement may enhance their ability to create inclusive learning environments. By integrating diverse perspectives into courses and sharing lessons learned from professional development, faculty can help address the siloed approach to DEI initiatives while enriching students' learning experiences.

Finally, while this study focused on U.S. higher education, its findings could have broader implications globally. As higher education becomes increasingly internationalized, the role of faculty intercultural competence in fostering inclusive learning environments grows more critical. Understanding this relationship can help institutions worldwide support diverse student populations, contributing to international efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

Limitations and future research

This study's correlational design cannot establish causality between intercultural and inclusion competence. Future experimental or longitudinal research could help determine directionality and causal relationships between these constructs. Additionally, our study did not examine the impact of existing institutional DEI interventions or faculty's previous intercultural experiences. Future research should explore how professional development programs affect faculty's competences and investigate additional demographic factors or contextual variables that might influence the relationship between these constructs.

Conclusion

U.S. higher education continues to face persistent inequities despite increasingly diverse student populations, and faculty diversity has not kept pace, contributing to feelings of exclusion and cultural disconnect (Llamas et al., 2019; Feasel et al., 2024. This study examined the relationship between intercultural competence and inclusion competence among faculty, aiming to identify strategies to create more inclusive campus environments. The findings demonstrate a robust positive relationship between these competencies, indicating that faculty with stronger intercultural skills are better equipped to foster inclusion. While correlational, this study highlights critical avenues for future research, including exploring causal links between intercultural and inclusion competence, testing interventions to develop these skills, and assessing their impact on student outcomes across diverse institutional contexts. Given these persistent inequities, institutions must move beyond surface-level DEI initiatives and take deliberate, evidence-based action to cultivate faculty capacity for inclusion and intercultural engagement—ensuring that all students can thrive in genuinely equitable and multicultural learning environments.

References

Anderson, J. (2019, October 30). *Harvard EdCast: Colleges as courageous spaces*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/19/10/harvard-edcast-colleges-courageous-spaces

Aslantaş, S. (2019). The effect of intercultural education on the ethnocentrism levels of prospective teachers. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 11*(4), 319–326. https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2019450790

Bennett, J. M. (1986). Modes of cross-cultural training: Conceptualizing cross-cultural training as education. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10*(2), 117–134. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90002-7

Bennett, J. M. (2009). Transformative training: Designing programs for culture learning. In M. A. Moodian (Ed.), *Contemporary leadership and intercultural competence: Exploring the cross-cultural dynamics within organizations* (pp. 95–110). SAGE Publications.

Bennett, J. M. (2013). Intercultural competence: Vital perspectives for diversity and inclusion. In B. M. Ferdman & B. R. Deane (Eds.), *Diversity at work: The practice of inclusion* (pp. 155–176). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118764282.ch5

Bennett, J. M. (Ed.). (2015). *The SAGE encyclopedia of intercultural competence*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483346267

Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10*(2), 179–195.

Benson Clayton, T. (2021, January 13). *Refocusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion during the pandemic and beyond: Lessons from a community of practice*. Higher Education Today. https://www.higheredtoday.org/2021/01/13/refocusing-diversity-equity-inclusion-pandemic-beyond-lessons-community-practice/

Bird, A., Cartwright, C., & Osland, J. (2022, October 11). *Ways to link, develop, and measure global learning and inclusion* [PowerPoint slides]. AAC&U Transforming Global Learning Practice: Time for Action Conference.

Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. (n.d.). *Size and setting classification*. Retrieved March 17, 2023, from https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/classification_descriptions/size_setting.php

Cartwright, C. (2012). Assessing the relationship between intercultural competence and leadership styles: An empirical study of international Fulbright students in the U.S. (Doctoral dissertation). https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.759

Casey, M. E., & Robinson, S. M. (2017). Neuroscience of inclusion: New skills for new times. Outskirts Press.

Cheung, G. W., Cooper-Thomas, H. D., Lau, R. S., & Wang, L. C. (2023). Reporting reliability, convergent and discriminant validity with structural equation modeling: A review and best-practice recommendations. Asia Pacific Journal of Management. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-023-09871-y

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 10*(3), 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002

Deardorff, D. K. (2008). Intercultural competence: A definition, model, and implications for education abroad. In V. Savicki (Ed.), *Developing intercultural competence and transformation* (pp. 32–52). Stylus Publishing.

Feasel, J., Dover, T. L., Small, P., & Major, B. (2024). Discrimination and perceived cultural mismatch increase status-based identity uncertainty. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672231163736

Gorski, P. (2016). Rethinking the role of "culture" in educational equity: From cultural competence to equity literacy. *Multicultural Perspectives, 18*(4), 221–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2016.1228344

Gundling, E., & Williams, C. (2021). *Inclusive leadership, global impact*. Aperian Global.

Guskin, A. (1991). Cultural humility: A way of being in the world. *Antioch Notes*, *59*(1), 1-11.

Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*(4), 421–443. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(03)00032-4

Hayles, R. (2013). Communicating about diversity and inclusion. In M. Bernardo Ferdman & R.D. Barbara (Eds.), *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion*. Jossey-Bass.

Hayles, V. R., & Russell, A. M. (1997). *The diversity directive: Why some initiatives fail and what to do about it*. American Society for Training and Development.

Kleinman, A., & Benson, P. (2006). Anthropology in the clinic: The problem of cultural competency and how to fix it. *PLOS Medicine, 3*(10), e294. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0030294

Kozai Group. (2009). *The Intercultural Effectiveness Scale: Example statements from the IES*. http://www.kozaigroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/IESSampleStatements.pdf

Kozai Group. (2021). *The inclusion competencies inventory sample assessment*.

Kozai Group. (2022a). *Inclusion competencies*.

Kozai Group. (2022b). *The inclusion competencies inventory assessments*.

Li, Y. (2013). Cultivating Student Global Competence: A Pilot Experimental Study: Cultivating Student Global Competence. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education*, *11*(1), 125–143. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4609.2012.00371.x

Llamas, J. D., Nguyen, K., & Tran, A. G. T. T. (2019). The case for greater faculty diversity: Examining the educational impacts of student–faculty racial/ethnic match. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 24*(3), 375–391. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1679759

Mendenhall, M. E., Stevens, M. J., Bird, A., Oddou, G., & Osland, J. (2012). Specification of the Content Domain of the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale. *The Kozai Monograph Series*, *1*(3), 26.

Mirabile, R. J. (1997). Everything you wanted to know about competency modeling. *Training and Development 51*(8), 73–77.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Race/ethnicity of college faculty* (Fast Facts No. 61). U.S. Department of Education.

Paige, R. M. (2004). Handbook of Intercultural Training. In D. Landis, J.M. Bennett, & M.J. Bennett (Eds.), *Handbook of Intercultural Training* (3rd ed., pp. 85–128). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452231129

Pettigrew, T. F. (2008). Future directions for intergroup contact theory and research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 32*(3), 187–199. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2007.12.002

Sengupta, E., Blessinger, P., Hoffman, J., & Makhanya, M. (2019a). Introduction to Strategies for Fostering Inclusive Campuses in Higher Education. In J. Hoffman, P. Blessinger, & M. Makhanya (Eds.), *Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning* (Vol. 17, pp. 3–14). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2055-364120190000017001

Sengupta, E., Blessinger, P., Hoffman, J., & Makhanya, M. (2019b). Introduction to Strategies for Fostering Inclusive Classrooms in Higher Education. In P. Blessinger (Ed.), *Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning* (Vol. 16, pp. 3–20). Emerald Publishing.

Shippmann, J. S., Ash, R. A., Batjtsta, M., Carr, L., Eyde, L. D., Hesketh, B., Kehoe, J., Pearlman, K., Prien, E. P., & Sanchez, J. I. (2000). The Practice of Competency Modeling. *Personnel Psychology*, *53*(3), 703–740. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2000.tb00220.x

Valentino, C. (2019). Removing the Rose Colored Glasses of Exclusivity. In J. Hoffman, P. Blessinger, & M. Makhanya (Eds.), *Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning* (pp. 17–30). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2055-364120190000017002

Vande Berg, M., Connor-Linton, J., & Paige, R. M. (2009). The Georgetown Consortium Project: Interventions for Student Learning Abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *18*(1), 1–75. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v18i1.251

Whaley, A. L., & Davis, K. E. (2007). Cultural competence and evidence-based practice in mental health services. *American Psychologist, 62*(6), 563–574. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.6.563

Worrell, F. C. (2014). Culture as Race/Ethnicity. In K. C. McLean & M. Syed (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development* (pp. 249–268). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199936564.013.029