

EFL Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence, Intercultural Contact, and Personality Traits: A Structural Equation Modeling

Behrouz Sarbakhshian¹, Mahnaz Saeidi^{2*}, Touran Ahour³

¹ Ph.D. Candidate, English Department, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

² Associate Professor, English Department, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

³ Assistant Professor, English Department, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Language learners continuously use Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) skills in EFL and ESL contexts but they have various personality traits and intercultural contacts (IC). This study attempted to investigate the relationships among learners' personality traits, IC, and ICC. To this end, the researchers administered three questionnaires of self-reported Big Five Inventory (BFI), IC, and ICC among 200 male and female Iranian EFL learners from various language schools in Tabriz, Iran. Structural equation modeling (SEM) measured the relationship among variables through SmartPLS3 software. The results demonstrated positive relationships among extraversion, openness, and agreeableness with direct and indirect IC. Their relationships with ICC were also significant and positive. Furthermore, the relationships between direct IC and indirect IC with ICC were significantly positive. However, the relationships between neuroticism and direct IC, indirect IC, and ICC were significantly negative. Moreover, although the relationships between conscientiousness and direct IC and indirect IC were significantly positive, its relation with ICC was insignificant. This study also clarifies the implication of the extracted pathways for ELT and presents some suggestions for future studies.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence; Intercultural contact; Personality traits

INTRODUCTION

The increase in social media use and also technological advances have had a predominant impact on people's interaction and communication in the contemporary world. Fritz, Mollenberg, and Chen (2002) argued that globalization and internationalization had increased the significance of competency to communicate with people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, according to the Committee for Economic Development (2006), language knowledge is not enough for successful communication in an international professional environment. And at least some

elementary awareness of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is necessary.

A review of various related disciplines demonstrates that numerous definitions have been proposed for ICC. But many researchers have a consensus that it is a set of abilities for effective and appropriate interaction across cultures in various contexts (Arasaratnam, 2015, 2016; Deardorff, 2009, 2015; Fantini, 2006; Liu, 2012). Additionally, in the past 50 years, from the variable-analytic foundation of research on ICC and through the perspectives of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, some researchers attempted to develop the traditional mainstream paradigmatic approach by discussing ICC

* Corresponding Author's Email:
m_saeidi@iaut.ac.ir

components and variables (Bennett, 2013; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Hammer, 2015). Some others tried to identify ICC components and stated that attitudes, skills, and awareness were among the most prominent ICC components (Deardorff 2006; Spitzberg & Changnon 2009). Wu, Fan, and Peng (2013) studied college students' ICC in the Chinese context and demonstrated that ICC could be measured using the following six factors: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, intercultural communication skills, attitudes, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness.

Allport (1954) proposed the Intercultural contact (IC) theory. It states that IC is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members under convenient situations. Allport (1954) attempted to find suitable solutions for decreasing inter-group prejudice, and this model has its socio-psychological attributes applicable in language learning contexts. Later on, other studies like Dörnyei and Csizér (2005) attempted to investigate the effects of intergroup contact and travel experience on attitude and learning motivation toward language.

A study by Kormos and Csizér (2007) classified IC into two forms direct contact and indirect contact. They demonstrated that there is a relationship between IC and ICC. They also showed the positive impacts of IC on students' ICC, motivation in learning a foreign language, and reducing students' anxiety toward language. Furthermore, in 2014, Kormos, Csizér, and Iwaniec considered contact theory from the socio-psychological perspective and claimed that contact with members of different cultures could change individuals and groups' attitudes and behaviors toward others.

Another dimension associated with ICC is personality traits. McCrae and Costa (2008) defined personality as enduring emotional, interpersonal, experiential, attitudinal, and motivational styles, and it explains individuals' behavior in disparate contexts. To describe individuals' personalities, this model has five different characteristics as follows: extroversion, openness to experience,

neuroticism, compatibility, and responsibility (Ewen, 2013).

Among various models to examine personality traits, many researchers use the Big Five Personality Model to measure personality traits because it has several advantages over other trait theories. One advantage is that this model presents participants' personality traits on a spectrum. As an example, a person's extroversion is not classified as extroverted or introverted. It is presented in a spectrum between two extreme ends of extroverted and introverted to demonstrate their extroversion level. The other advantage is that it contains broad features of personality. Gray (2017) argued that this model nearly covers all features of personality. For instance, extroversion encompasses characteristics like Sociability, Assertiveness, and Emotional expression. Moreover, Lim (2020) argued that the scores in Big Five Model have higher stability in people's lives, and there are small changes as a person gets older.

Some studies attempted to investigate the relationship between personality traits and ICC, and they used diverse components of personality traits in their studies. Mount, Barrick, Scullen, and Rounds (2005) pointed to individuals' personality traits in determining emotional, behavioral, and cognitive forms. Moreover, Ramalu, Rose, Uli, and Kumar (2010) investigated the relationship between personality traits and ICC. They found that three components of extroversion, openness and compatibility create more intercultural communication. Therefore, personality traits involve in IC and ICC, the relationship of which deserves more investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework for the Relationship among IC and Personality Traits

Studying prejudiced personality theory and contact theory and juxtaposing them present a theoretical framework for the relationship between IC and personality traits. According to Prejudiced Personality Theory, a harsh environment creates an authoritarian personality, characterized by intolerance of ambiguity, a reluctance to integrate new

information, etc.; these individuals view the world in terms of simple, definite, and dichotomous categories (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950).

According to Allport (1954), the relationship between IC and prejudice is not a direct negative one, as suggested by the simple contact hypothesis, but involves other complicating factors. Allport further states that according to the contact theory, changes in prejudice are related to the circumstances and type of IC experienced by the individual. Therefore, different personality types might show different results undergoing diverse IC, and also, they might choose disparate resources, in case of giving freedom of choice, for having ICs.

Theoretical Framework for the Relationship among ICC and Personality Traits

Some researchers provided a theoretical framework for personality and ICC relationships. For example, Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) provided a theoretical framework for the relationship between personality traits and intercultural success. It links the intercultural personality approach to the ABC model of culture shock. This model assumes that ICC involves affective, behavioral, and cognitive aspects, and those adjustments and changes as a result of culture shock concern all of these three aspects. Moreover, Bennett (1998) claimed that individuals' personality traits crucially contribute to their intercultural communication.

According to Ramalu et al. (2010), those with personality traits of extroversion, openness, and compatibility created more intercultural communication, which can have a positive impact on individuals' ICC. It is worth bearing in mind that personality traits often interact with myriad factors inherent in the social context. In other words, even if personality traits do not directly determine the degree of an individual's intercultural competency, they indubitably shape the way people respond to their situational variables in a way that may affect people's attitudes and behaviors (Weiss & Adler, 1984).

Theoretical Framework for the Relationship among IC and ICC

Additionally, the existing literature provides extensive evidence that intercultural contact plays a critical role in ICC development. Some researchers have argued that direct contact with native speakers can increase international students' intercultural attitudes and skills (e.g., Campbell, 2012; Vezzali, Crisp, Stathi, & Giovannini, 2015; Yashima, 2010). Others have discussed that direct contact with exchange students and blogging with native speakers can foster ICC development in foreign language and study abroad contexts (Campbell, 2012; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Jackson, 2006; Zhang, Cheung, & Lee, 2012).

According to Zhang et al. (2012), exchange students' ICC increases through the use of blogs and interviews with native speakers, and they understand cultural differences and show openness and appreciation toward the target culture. Campbell (2012) also pointed out the positive impact of blog interaction on ICC development. Furthermore, according to Elola and Oskoz (2008), blog interaction enhances both study-abroad learners' and foreign language learners' ICC.

Empirical Studies

Several studies demonstrate the role of personality traits on intercultural communication. Yashima (1995) investigated the relationship between English proficiency, personality, and intercultural adjustment among Japanese students in the USA. The results demonstrated that personality traits were the stronger predictors in interactional dimensions. Moreover, extroversion was among the main predictors of intercultural adjustment.

The association between some personality traits and ICC has yielded mixed results (Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004). Ang, Van Dyne, and Koh (2006) associated agreeableness and extraversion with the cultural intelligence model. Findings reveal that individuals high in agreeableness are not only accommodating and receptive to foreign experiences, but they are also skilled at minimizing the manifestation of conflict escalation in social contexts. Some

research has suggested that extroverts are more likely than introverts to initiate social interactions with people from diverse backgrounds (Mooradian & Swan, 2006; Liu & Huang, 2015).

However, many other studies elaborated on the positive role of considering personality traits in intercultural communication. Wilson, Ward, and Fischer (2013) studied the relationship between personality and cultural competence. Their findings demonstrated that personal and situational factors are related to cultural competence, and future studies should have greater attention to personality variables. Additionally, Peiser and Jones (2013) studied the influence of teachers' interests, personality traits, and life experiences in intercultural language teaching. The research revealed the profound effects of individuals' interests, personalities, and life experiences on their intercultural understanding. Furthermore, Zee, and Oudenhoven (2013) investigated personality traits as a determinant of intercultural competence using the ABC model of culture shock, and they obtained different effects for different personality traits.

Yeke and Semercioz (2016) investigated the relationships among personality traits, cultural intelligence, and intercultural communication competence. The results demonstrated the positive influence of personality traits on cultural intelligence and ICC. Additionally, Chan and Sy (2016) studied the relationships between personality, intercultural communication, and cultural self-efficacy in nursing students. They realized that intercultural communication correlated positively with agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. Moreover, Peng and Wu (2016) measured intercultural contact and its effects on intercultural competence. Path analyses revealed that intercultural contact pathways improved Chinese college students' intercultural competence.

Peifer et al. (2017) explored that cultural identity, personality, and social exposure correlate to college women's intercultural competence. The results show that conscientiousness is a significant predictor of cognitive knowledge. Moreover, extraversion

and neuroticism can significantly predict intrapersonal identity and self-awareness. Also, agreeableness and racial/ethnic diversity significantly predict intrapersonal effect, cultural-emotional intelligence, and attunement. Furthermore, Ruan and Medwell (2020) studied the role of social networking technology in ICC development. They demonstrated that students had uneven social media use, and these tools made learners global citizens and intercultural speakers.

Other studies attempted to study different conceptualizations of ICC in nonwestern contexts (Dalib, Harun, & Yusof, 2017; Nadeem, Mohammed, & Dalib, 2017; Nadeem, Mohammed, & Dalib, 2018; Nadeem, Mohammed, & Dalib, 2019; Nadeem, Mohammed, & Dalib, 2020a; Nadeem, Mohammed, & Dalib, 2020b). Among these studies, Nadeem et al. (2017) proposed a culture general model in the Malaysian context. The study demonstrated the extent of international religious students' intercultural communicative competence. Nadeem et al. (2020a) retested the Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (IMICC) in the Malaysian context. The results demonstrated a direct impact of sensation seeking and attitude toward other cultures (STOC) on ICC. This study validated IMICC in the Asian context. Moreover, Nadeem et al. (2020b) retested the relationship between sensation seeking, attitude towards other cultures (ATOC), and ICC. It demonstrated the direct impact of both on ICC and highlighted the mediating role of ATOC on the relationship between sensation seeking and ICC.

In a recent study, Heggernes, (2021) studied the role of text in improving ICC in the English Language Classroom. The study demonstrated awareness of the potential of various texts helps teachers to mediate EL students' ICC. Another recent study by Huang (2021) investigated the effect of explicit instruction on ICC among EFL learners in the Taiwanese context. The findings demonstrated the positive impact of explicit instruction on enhancing students' ICC. Moreover, students' better ICC acquisition affects their English proficiency and overseas experience.

Additionally, in the Iranian cultural context, a few studies were done on the relationship between ICC and different concepts such as attitude, motivation, and teachers' beliefs (Pourakbari, Tabrizi, & Chalak, 2018; Shirazi & Shafiee 2017; Mozaffarzadeh & Ajideh 2019). Among them, Pourakbari et al. (2018) concluded that if students have a positive belief about being good communicators, they likely better participate in intercultural encounters. Additionally, Mozaffarzadeh and Ajideh (2019) asserted Iranian ELT textbooks are not sufficient materials to teach cultural skills like intercultural competence.

Purpose of the Study

As far as the researchers observed, most of the research on personality traits and ICC is in other fields and not in the EFL context. And a few studies done in the EFL context are not in the area of personality traits. And if so, they did not consider intercultural contact and personality traits simultaneously to observe their effects. And none of them are about the relationship between personality traits, intercultural contact, and ICC. Therefore, the present research investigated the relationship between intercultural communicative competence, intercultural contact, and personality traits in the EFL contexts.

Another innovation in the present research is that the analyses of the relationships were through SEM. Thus, this study presented a model to study the relationships among personality traits, IC, and ICC, which had never been conducted earlier. Finally, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there have been few studies, if any, in the Iranian EFL context, which was the main motive for this study. Hence, to fill the gap in the research literature, the following research questions were proposed:

Q1. Is there any significant relationship between personality traits and intercultural contact?

Q2. Is there any significant relationship between personality traits and intercultural competence?

Q3. Is there any significant relationship between intercultural contact and intercultural competence?

Q4. Is the proposed research model fit?

METHOD

Participants

The participants include 200 students from language institutes in Tabriz, Iran, based on convenience sampling. Considering the lack of consensus in the literature about the convenient sample size for SEM, the researchers decided to have 200 students as sample participants because many researchers state that 100 to 150 is the minimum sample size for SEM (Ding, Velicer, & Harlow, 1995; Tabachnick & Fidell, & Ullman 2007). Moreover, others propose a larger sample size for SEM, such as $N = 200$ (Boomsma & Hoogland, 2001; Kline, 2005). There were 110 male and 90 female students. They include 65 Bachelor students, 84 graduate students, 34 with Master's degrees, and 17 Postgraduate students. Furthermore, 59 students were 18-23 years old, 105 ones 23-28, 31 ones 28-33, and 5 students were older than 33.

Instruments

The following instruments were used to collect the data in this research: The questionnaire of personality traits (five-factor model), Intercultural Contact (IC), and The Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS). Additionally, SmartPLS 3 software was used for data analysis.

The Personality traits questionnaire (five-factor model) is a self-reported Big Five Inventory (BFI) adopted by John and Srivastava (1999) and used to obtain personality data. It is based on a five-factor personality traits model including Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism with 60 descriptive items. The values of Cronbach alpha (ranging from 0.75 to 0.9) for each factor showed that the BFI questionnaire has high reliability and divergent and convergent validity (John and Srivastava, 1999).

The second instrument which is the Intercultural Contact (IC) Questionnaire

following Sarbakhshian, Saeidi, & Ahour (in press) is based on Kormos et al.'s (2007) theoretical paradigm of IC. To make it more compatible with the Iranian EFL context, actual contact situations of Iranian students were considered in its design. For example, in the Chinese questionnaire, social media like QQ and WeChat were used as Domestic Social Media; however, they were deleted and replaced by Whatsapp, Telegram, and Instagram as predominant social media in Iran. The questionnaire involves five factors Social Media (SM), Domestic Intercultural Communication Activity (DICA), Foreign Intercultural Communication Activity (FICA), Cultural Products (CP), and Multimedia (MM), with 26 descriptive items, and they are scored on a five-point Likert scale. The values of Cronbach alpha (ranging from 0.856 to 0.951) for each factor and the results of Construct Crossvalidated Communalities ($Q^2=0.454$, higher than the threshold level of 0.3) demonstrated that the scale has good reliability and construct validity Sarbakhshian, Saeidi, & Ahour (in press).

The Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS) by Wu et al. (2013) was applied as a measurement scale of ICC. This questionnaire includes six factors including knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communication skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness, and 28 descriptive items, and they are scored based on a five-point Likert scale (Wu et al., 2013). The results of exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis of the questionnaire demonstrated that the test has internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha was 0.913) and construct validity (Wu et al., 2013).

The reliability of the questionnaires was assessed through factor loading, Cronbach Alpha, and composite reliability. The coefficients of factor load (greater than 0.4), Cronbach Alpha (higher than 0.7), and composite reliability (higher than 0.6) for all the variables indicate that all three questionnaires have high reliability. Moreover, the extracted mean-variance (higher than 0.5) was the measurement for convergent validity.

The results are presented in detail in the results section.

Finally, the statistical software entitled SmartPLS 3 analyzed the extracted information in the confirmatory factor analysis because it is not sensitive to the low number of samples, the low number of indexes within a construct, and the normal distribution of the data is not necessary.

Procedure

The research had the following phases. In the first phase, to obtain data about personality traits, IC and ICC, a self-reported Big Five Inventory (BFI) questionnaire adopted from John and Srivastava (1999), the constructed questionnaire of IC, based on Kormos et al.'s (2007) theoretical paradigm of IC, and the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS) questionnaire, adopted from Wu et al. (2013), were completed by Iranian EFL students. It took about 1 hour (20 minutes for each questionnaire) to complete three questionnaires. The participants were 200 EFL students from various institutes in Tabriz, Iran, who were chosen based on convenience sampling. However, for ethical considerations, the students were informed about the aim and scope of the study and assured that their participation in the study was voluntary, and their answers would be kept confidential. The participants studied the questionnaires carefully and fill them out in about an hour.

In the second phase, SEM was used to find the pathways between variables. The structural path analyses were done based on the model and respondents' answers to the three questionnaires. Therefore, the pathways coefficients of personality traits to IC, IC to ICC, and personality traits to ICC were analyzed, and their significances were determined. The proposed model for the relationship among variables is presented in Figure 1.

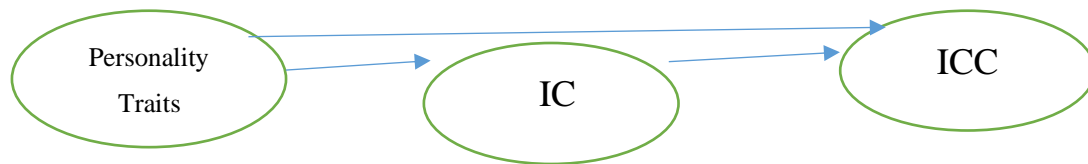


Figure 1
Proposed Model for the Relationship among Personality Traits, IC, and ICC

RESULTS

The aim was to calculate the relationships among personality traits, direct IC, indirect IC, and ICC. SmartPLS3 software calculated the pathways among them.

Statistical Descriptions of the Research Variables

Table 1 presents the statistical descriptions of skewness and kurtosis, the mean and standard deviation for three variables of personality traits, IC, and ICC.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness
Extraversion	39.14	6.51	1.65	-1.08
Openness	40.46	7.67	0.74	-0.77
Agreeableness	38.39	7.22	0.24	-0.31
Conscientiousness	41.76	7.65	1.20	-0.85
Neuroticism	29.63	7.85	1.58	0.91
Direct IC	50.68	7.37	1.61	-0.87
Indirect IC	42.14	6.94	1.22	-0.74
ICC	91.45	13.42	1.82	-0.78

Based on the obtained information, the means are as follows: Extraversion (39.14), Openness to Experience (40.46), Agreeableness (38.39), Conscientiousness (41.76), and Neuroticism (29.63). Moreover, the means for Direct IC, Indirect IC, and ICC are 50.68, 42.14, and 91.45, respectively. Additionally, since the values of skewness and

kurtosis of the data are between -2 and +2. Therefore, the data have a normal distribution at the level of 0.05.

Correlation among Personality Traits, IC, and ICC

Table 2 shows the correlation between personality traits, IC, and ICC.

Table 2
Matrix of Correlation Coefficient between Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Extraversion	1							
Openness	0.39**	1						
Agreeableness	0.31**	0.58**	1					
Conscientiousness	0.36**	0.50**	0.35**	1				
Neuroticism	-0.42**	-0.45**	-0.31**	-0.34**	1			
Direct IC	0.58**	0.69**	0.57**	0.59**	-0.57**	1		
Indirect IC	0.46**	0.58**	0.54**	0.48**	-0.50**	0.85**	1	
ICC	0.49**	0.67**	0.68**	0.40**	-0.55**	0.70**	0.66**	1

The significance level of 0.01** The significance level of 0.05 *



Based on the obtained results, all the calculated correlation coefficients are significant at the alpha level ($p < 0.01$). The correlation between neuroticism and ICC is negative. The relationship between extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and ICC is positive. Moreover, the relationship between direct IC and indirect IC with ICC is positive ($p < 0.01$).

SmartPLS3 software calculated IC mediation in the relationships between personality traits and ICC within the model.

Item Parceling for Personality Traits

The question pack method was applied to evaluate the proposed model. This method is applied when there are more items for each factor. Using question packs instead of individual questions increases the validity of scores, reduces the number of estimated parameters, creates indicators with almost normal distribution, and improves the model fit.

First, the researchers divided each personality trait's questions into four groups. Then they added the question scores in each group and created four-question packs for each personality trait. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3
Factor Load Coefficients of Models

Variables	Indicators	Factor Loads	T value	Significance Level
Extroversion	E1	0.64	8.40	0.01
	E2	0.81	13.66	0.01
	E3	0.73	15.43	0.01
	E4	0.81	13.91	0.01
Openness	O1	0.82	30.31	0.01
	O2	0.85	36.24	0.01
	O3	0.83	31.69	0.01
	O4	0.44	5.068	0.01
Agreeableness	A1	0.78	19.95	0.01
	A2	0.77	21.64	0.01
	A3	0.73	15.95	0.01
	A4	0.74	17.98	0.01
Conscientiousness	C1	0.73	15.51	0.01
	C2	0.91	50.71	0.01
	C3	0.91	49.04	0.01
	C4	0.74	14.07	0.01
Neuroticism	N1	0.75	17.32	0.01
	N2	0.84	17.74	0.01
	N3	0.84	17.87	0.01
	N4	0.60	8.29	0.01
Direct IC	SM	0.87	52.02	0.01
	FICA	0.74	15.06	0.01
Indirect IC	DICA	0.82	26.31	0.01
	MM	0.91	76.18	0.01
ICC	CP	0.88	35.31	0.01
	Knowledge of Self	0.76	26.15	0.01
	Knowledge of Others	0.76	19.83	0.01
	Attitudes	0.74	14.91	0.01
	Communication Skills	0.61	9.55	0.01
	Cognitive Skills	0.82	35.02	0.01
	Awareness	0.69	11.38	0.01

Measurement Model

In SEM methodology, it is necessary to study the structural validity to determine whether the selected components have enough precision to measure the variables. Reliability, convergent validity, and divergent validity determine the measurement models fit.

Reliability was also assessed through three methods of the factor loading, Cronbach Alpha, and composite reliability assessed the model reliability. As seen in Table 4, 0.4 is the criterion for the suitability of factor load coefficients (Hulland, 1999).

Table 4
AVE Values and Reliability Indices

Variables	AVE (>0.5)	Composite Reliability (>0.6)	Cronbach Alpha (>0.7)
Openness	0.58	0.84	0.73
Extraversion	0.57	0.84	0.74
Indirect IC	0.80	0.89	0.75
Direct IC	0.66	0.85	0.75
ICC	0.54	0.87	0.83
Neuroticism	0.59	0.85	0.76
Agreeableness	0.57	0.84	0.75
Conscientiousness	0.68	0.89	0.84

According to the results of Table 4, all coefficients of factor loads are significant ($P < 0.01$) and greater than 0.4, which indicates the appropriateness of the measurement model in this study.

Moreover, the reliability coefficients and standard values of the extracted mean-variance (AVE) show that all model structures have high composite reliability and are higher than 0.6, the index introduced by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Composite reliability indicates the high internal reliability of research data. Cronbach's alpha value is higher than 0.7. It is acceptable reliability because of the small number of items in each variable.

The extracted mean-variance (i.e., the average variance between the structure and its indicators) is one of the appropriate criteria for evaluating the external model. It shows the validity of a measurement tool. The assumption is that the considered hidden variable has more common variance with the designated markers than any other latent variable (Seyed Abbaszadeh, Amani Sari Begloo, Khezri Azar, & Pashvi 2012). In this study, the extracted

mean-variance was the measurement for convergent validity. A value greater than 0.5 indicates acceptable convergent validity. Based on the results, the mean of extracted variance for all latent variables was more than 0.5. It demonstrates the appropriate convergence validity of the model.

It is worth mentioning that the composite consistency index has more validity than Cronbach's Alpha because the composite reliability evaluates each index separately. Therefore, it provides a more stable combination and reliable results. In Cronbach's Alpha, all indicators should be equally consistent. Composite reliability is a preferred choice for measuring reliability due to its power and many applications in structural equations (Shook, Ketchen, Hult, & Kacmar, 2004).

Divergent validity is the third criterion for examining the fit of measurement models. It compares the correlation between the construct indicators with the construct itself versus the correlation between those indices with other constructs (Table 5).

Table 5
Fornell-Larcker Matrix for Divergent Validity

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Openness	0.76							
Extraversion	0.39	0.75						
Indirect IC	0.60	0.47	0.89					
Direct IC	0.69	0.60	0.86	0.81				
ICC	0.68	0.63	0.76	0.83	0.73			
Neuroticism	-0.42	-0.45	-0.51	-0.56	-0.59	0.76		
Agreeableness	0.63	0.36	0.56	0.61	0.71	-0.32	0.76	
Conscientiousness	0.50	0.40	0.49	0.60	0.49	-0.34	0.37	0.82

According to the results of Table 5, the root value of the common values means of the hidden variables in the present study, located in the chief diameter cells of the matrix, is higher than the correlation between those arranged in the lower and right cells of the chief diameter. In other words, each construct in the research model interacts more with its components than other constructs. It indicates the appropriate divergence validity and proper fitness of the measurement model.

The results of reliability, convergent validity, and divergent validity demonstrate that the measurement model of the structural

equation model can desirably measure the hidden variables of the research. Therefore, the fitness of the structural model is determined.

Structural Model

This section examines the relationship between the hidden variables of the research. The first criterion to examine the structural model fit is the coefficient R^2 . It measures the effect of an exogenous variable on another endogenous variable. Three values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 are the criterion values for weak, medium, and strong values, respectively (Davari & Reza Zadeh, 2014) (Table 6).

Table 6
 R^2 and Q^2 Values

Variables	R^2	Q^2
Indirect IC	0.53	0.38
Direct IC	0.71	0.43
ICC	0.88	0.43

Table 4.15 shows that the obtained R^2 values are medium for Indirect IC and Strong for Direct IC and ICC. Therefore, the structural model has a good fit.

Q^2 values are the second criterion for examining the structural model fit. This criterion determines the predictive power of the model. Ringle et al. (2012) introduced each of the three values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for this criterion as a weak, medium, and strong predictive power for the construct. According to Table 6, the values of Q^2 for all endogenous variables are more than 0.35. It demonstrates the strong predictive capability of the model. And it confirms the structural model fit of the research.

Evaluating the Overall Fit of the Model

The goodness of fit criterion (GOF) evaluated the research model. This index considers both measurement and structural models. And it is used as a criterion to measure the overall performance of the model. It is equal to the geometric values mean and the R^2 mean of the endogenous latent variables.

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{communalities} \times R^2}$$

The three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 are weak, medium, and strong values for GOF. The obtained value for the research model was 0.494. Therefore, the appropriate fit of the general research model is confirmed. Figures 2 and 3 present the results.

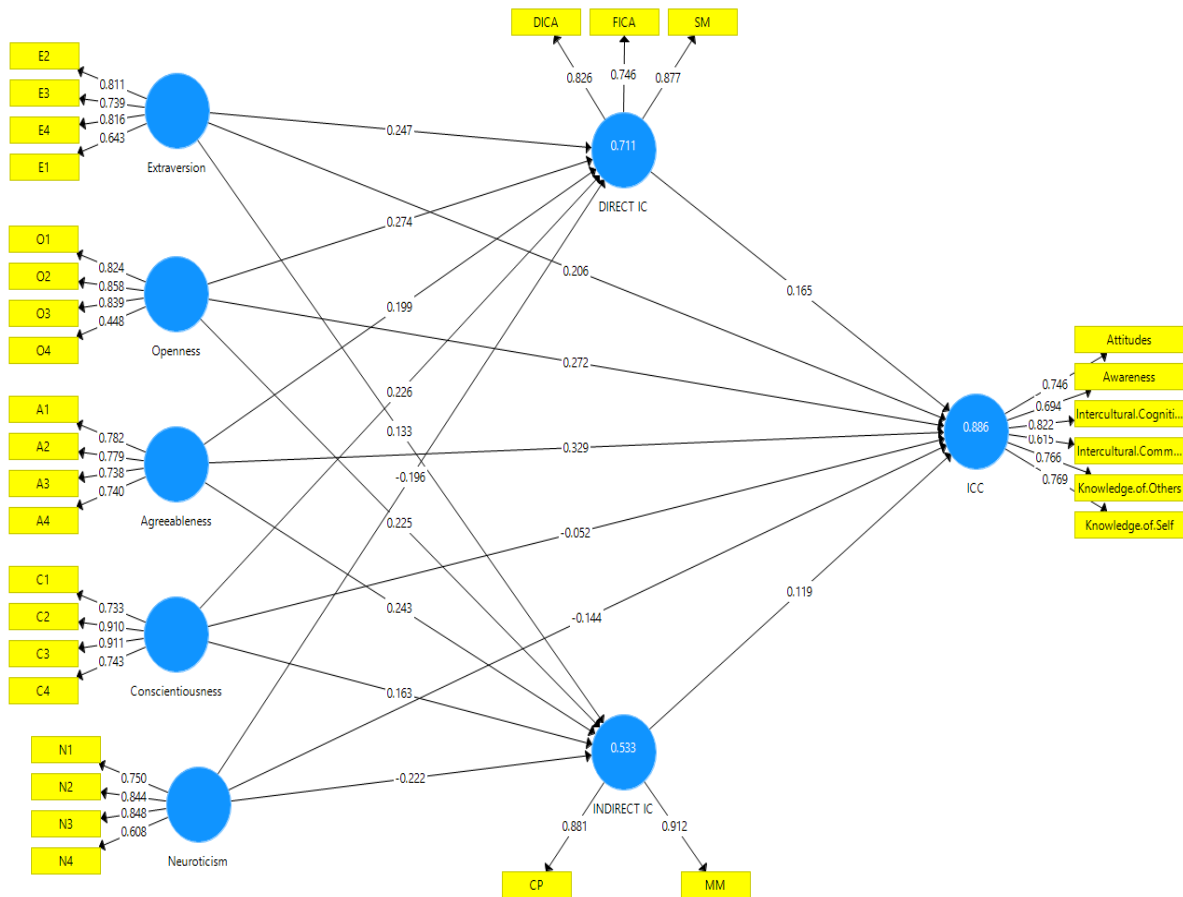


Figure 2
Research Model with Standard Coefficients

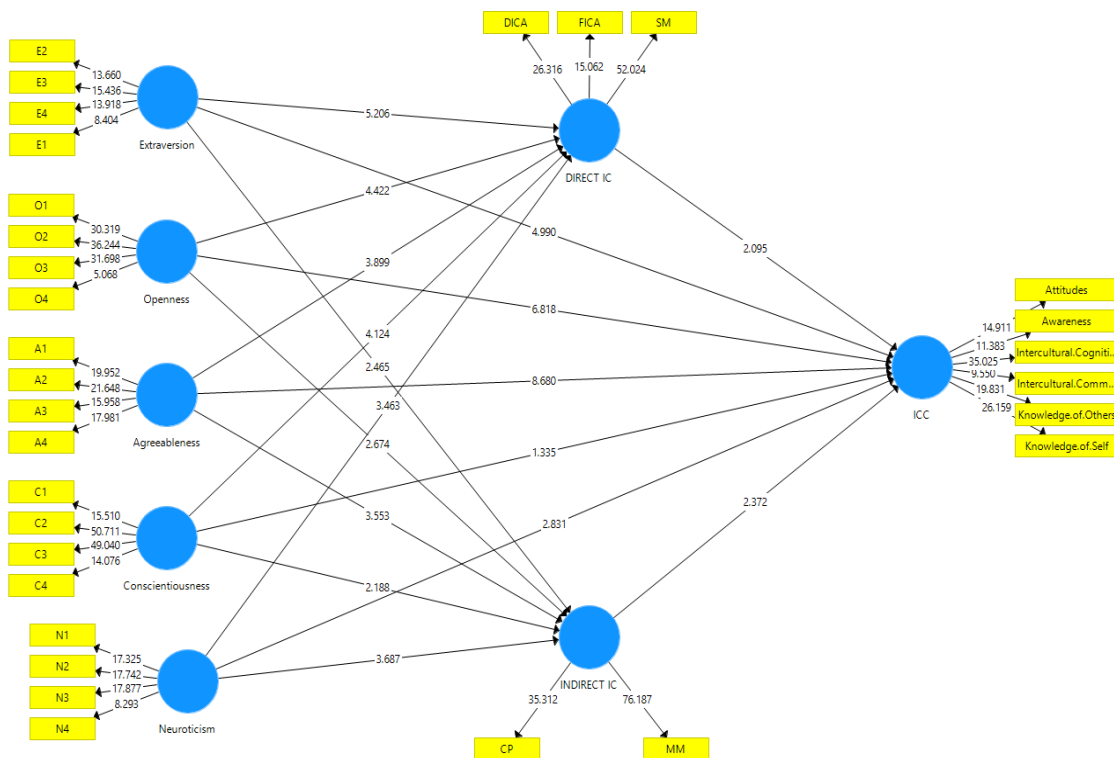


Figure 3
Research Model with t-values

The numbers indicate the t-value for each path. To determine the significance of path coefficients, it is necessary for the value of t in each pathway to be higher than 1.96. In this analysis, the value of the t-statistic for all routes

is higher than 1.96. As a result, it is significant at the 95% confidence level.

Table 7 presents path coefficients between personality traits with direct IC.

Table 7
Path Coefficients between Personality Traits and Direct IC

Paths	Beta	t-values	Significant Level
Extraversion → Direct IC	0.24	5.20	0.01
Openness → Direct IC	0.27	4.44	0.01
Agreeableness → Direct IC	0.19	3.89	0.01
Conscientiousness → Direct IC	0.22	4.12	0.01
Neuroticism → Direct IC	-0.19	3.46	0.01

Based on the results, the path coefficient of the relationship between neuroticism with direct IC is negative. And the path coefficients between Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness with

direct IC are positive and significant at the alpha level ($p < 0.01$).

Table 8 presents path coefficients between personality traits with indirect IC.

Table 8
Path Coefficients between Personality Traits and Indirect IC

Paths	Beta	t-values	Significant Level
Extraversion → Indirect IC	0.13	2.46	0.05
Openness → Indirect IC	0.22	2.67	0.01
Agreeableness → Indirect IC	0.24	3.55	0.01
Conscientiousness → Indirect IC	0.16	2.18	0.05
Neuroticism → Indirect IC	-0.22	3.68	0.01

Based on the results, the path coefficient of the relationship between neuroticism with indirect IC is negative. The relationships between Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness with indirect IC are positive and significant at the alpha level ($p < 0.01$).

Therefore, for the first research question, it can be said that there are positive significant relationships between Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness with IC and a negative significant relationship between neuroticism and IC. Table 9 presents the results of path coefficients between personality traits with ICC.

Table 9
Path Coefficients between Personality Traits and ICC

Paths	Beta	t-values	Significant Level
Extraversion → ICC	0.20	4.99	0.01
Openness → ICC	0.27	6.81	0.01
Agreeableness → ICC	0.32	8.68	0.01
Conscientiousness → ICC	-0.05	1.33	0.18
Neuroticism → ICC	-0.14	2.83	0.01

The results of the research for the second research question indicate that the path coefficient of the relationship between neuroticism and ICC is negative. The relationship between Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and ICC are positive and

significant at the alpha level ($p < 0.01$). The relationship between Conscientiousness ICC was insignificant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 10 presents the results of the path coefficients between IC and ICC.

Table 10
Path Coefficients between IC and ICC

Paths		Beta	t-values	Significant Level	
Direct IC	➔	ICC	0.16	2.09	0.05
Indirect IC	➔	ICC	0.11	2.37	0.05

Based on the obtained results for the third research question, the path coefficients related to the relationship between direct IC and indirect IC with ICC are positive and significant at the alpha level of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$).

Summary of the Results

The main purpose of the present research was to present a model for the relationship between personality traits, IC, and ICC. Therefore, after analyzing the data, the following results were obtained, and the model fit was determined.

For the first question about the relationship between personality traits and IC, the results showed positive relationships among extraversion, openness, and agreeableness with direct and indirect IC, but neuroticism had a significant negative impact on ICC. However, the relationship between neuroticism and direct and indirect IC was significant and negative. Additionally, there was a positive relationship between conscientiousness, and direct and indirect IC.

For the second research question, considering the relationship between personality traits and ICC, the results demonstrated positive relationships among extraversion, openness, and agreeableness with direct and indirect ICC, but neuroticism had a significant negative impact on ICC. Moreover, the relationship between conscientiousness and ICC was insignificant.

For the third research question, the results indicated that the relationships between direct and indirect IC with ICC were positive and significant. Finally, the results confirmed the appropriate fit of the research model.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study regarding the positive significant relationships between direct and indirect IC and ICC are in line with an IC theory by Kormos et al. (2007), which claims that IC has a significant impact on improving students' ICC. Moreover, some studies showed a positive effect of social media such as WhatsApp and Instagram on students' ICC development (Campbell, 2012; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Liaw, 2006; Liaw & Johnson, 2001; Zhang et al., 2012), which is also in line with the results of the present study. It is worth noting that the IC questionnaire used in the present research considered the commonly used social media like Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Skype in Iran and showed their positive impact on students' ICC. Thus, having online communication with foreigners (whether native or non-native speakers) through social media can improve students' ICC, which implies that students should be encouraged to have connections with English speakers through such media. The present study also considered the positive role of Gmail, Email, and LinkedIn text communication as two other IC media in improving students' ICC.

Studies by Zhu (2009) and He (2010) represented that intercultural communication activities create foreign language contact and enhance students' ICC. As Ahn (2015) states, in diverse situations, such as immersion camps, study abroad, and exchange programs, students' ICC and critical awareness can also improve. Similarly, other studies showed intercultural sensitivity improvement of students' international experiences within

exchange programs (Huang, 2012; Jackson, 2006). Along with the results of these studies, the findings of this study indicated that having any sort of IC with foreigners within the country or abroad can enhance ICC. This study classified intercultural communication activities into domestic activities (including an international exhibition on campus, international conference on campus, foreigners' lectures on campus, and free conversation with foreign teachers at international conferences) and foreign activities (like completing an internship abroad, participating in an international academic conference abroad, having training courses abroad, and participating in an international camp abroad) and presented their positive relationships with ICC.

Schuetze (2008) demonstrated the effectiveness of online language and cultural courses in increasing ICC and enhancing students' foreign cultural understandings. A study on learning German in the Turkish context revealed the significant contribution of the cultural value model to students' ICC (Basbagi, 2012). Some cultural products such as electronic forums and online reading through interaction with disparate cultures can increase students' intercultural communication and cultural knowledge (Gómez & Fernando, 2012; Liaw, 2006). Other studies on using foreign films in EFL classes were innovative ways to improve students' motivation, attitudes, knowledge, and awareness of ICC (Chao, 2013; Truong & Tran, 2014). The IC questionnaire used in this study presented two components of IC as cultural products (including reading English books, translated books, English E-books, Translated E-books, journals, and magazines, and E-journals, and E-magazines) and Multimedia (including watching English movies, series, or TV programs, Enjoying English songs, participating in University English courses in the home country, using English learning mobile apps, watching English learning CDs or DVDs, and using English learning computer software). The obtained positive relationships among these components and ICC in the present study have demonstrated similar findings to the above-mentioned

studies. One interpretation for conformity among the results of this study and presented literature is having any contact opportunity, whether online, face to face or through cultural products, exposes students to distinctive cultural features of other nations, which, in turn, brings about ICC for students.

Ward et al. (2001) showed a relationship between personality traits and intercultural success. It also showed the link between the intercultural personality approach and the ABC model of culture shock. Moreover, Ramalu et al. (2010) clarified the positive effects of openness and extroversion on intercultural communication. The results of the present study support the findings of these studies since their findings demonstrated the positive relationships between extroversion, openness, and even agreeableness with ICC.

Yashima (1995) demonstrated that personality traits strongly predict various interactional dimensions, among which extroversion mainly predicts intercultural adjustment. The findings of the study by Peiser and Jones (2013) revealed the significant impacts of people's interests, personalities, and life experiences on intercultural understanding. Moreover, Yeke and Semercioz (2016) showed that personality traits have a positive influence on cultural intelligence and ICC. Chan and Sy (2016) highlighted the positive correlation of intercultural communication with agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. These studies indicate the relationship between personality traits and ICC, which are in line with the results of the present study. Having such conformity among the results demonstrating the relationship between personality traits and ICC means that students' personality traits are of prime importance in enhancing their ICC, and teachers should create this awareness in students to choose the suitable IC compatible with their personality traits.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between personality traits, IC, and ICC. Such findings show that EFL students' personality traits direct them in choosing the suitable IC; therefore, EFL

teachers' awareness of their students' personality traits will help them to expose their students to various resources of IC to create an opportunity for them to obtain the ones compatible with their personalities, which in turn will lead to ICC development. Detailed analyses of the results regarding the positive relationships among extraversion, openness, and agreeableness with direct and indirect IC and ICC indicate that students' awareness of their personality can direct them to make better decisions in choosing the best form of IC, which creates higher ICC. Moreover, knowing about the negative role of neuroticism on ICC rings the bell for neurotic students to be careful about some direct contacts, which might not be beneficial for them to enhance their ICC. Students with less extraversion, openness, or agreeableness can consider the results of this study in their language learning transactions and attempt to choose suitable IC based on their personality traits. Having such knowledge can help teachers to increase their students' awareness and help them assign various interactive tasks for students considering their personality traits.

The findings of the study can have significant implications for all syllabus designers, curriculum developers, and educational authorities in the Iranian EFL context. Having various opportunities for IC within a curriculum can help students with diverse personality traits use the ones they like and enhance their ICC. With the expansion of internet use and students' exposure to online classes, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, access to online webinars held by foreign scholars has increased, which creates an opportunity for students to have online contacts with native speakers of English or other nationalities which, in turn, can contribute to students' ICC. This opportunity is especially beneficial for underprivileged students from various parts of the country to access some of the best-known teachers from all over the world. Therefore, besides learning a new language, they experience a higher level of IC and improve their ICC skills. Furthermore, along with online classes, producing electronic materials and comparing and contrasting them

within various cultures can be a crucial step in encouraging language learners to improve their ICC. Moreover, using IC-oriented language learning programs within an education system can facilitate teaching cultural competence in a foreign language classroom and motivate students to improve their ICC. This, by focusing on the skills needed in cross-cultural communication as Piątkowska (2015) asserts, will lead to new horizons on the role of foreign language teaching. To facilitate this, creating an opportunity for teachers to receive international training courses by English native speakers or experts and scholars from all over the world can have a decisive role. In fact, providing such an opportunity for teachers to participate in online teacher training courses and learn from certified teacher educators and trainers from all over the world not only helps them improve their teaching abilities but also enhances their ICC to transfer the gained knowledge, and attitude and skill to their students.

As the review of previous studies showed, most of them investigated the relationships among personality traits and IC, personality traits and ICC, or IC and ICC. A unique contribution of this study to the research literature is that the presented model in this study is complementary to previous studies because it considers personality traits, IC, and ICC in one single model, which opens a new horizon with regard to their relationship.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that since IC and ICC components change regularly, designing and validating questionnaires for them seems to be necessary for the future to measure students' IC and ICC considering newly emerged media and contact methods. Moreover, further studies may replicate this study using the same variables with different models and questionnaires to confirm the results or even find diverse ones.

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Biodata

Behrouz Sarbakhshian is a Ph.D. candidate at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch, and a lecturer at Payame Noor University, Azarshahr. He has published several books and articles, and his main specialty is teaching TOEFL, IELTS, and GRE courses. His research interests are cooperative learning, writing skills, and intercultural communicative competence.
Email: faithful1359@gmail.com

Dr. Mahnaz Saeidi is an associate professor at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch. She is the editor-in-chief of the Journal of English Language Pedagogy and Practice. She was awarded for being the best researcher from 2007 to 2011 and won the best translator prize in the fourth round of the Scientific, Research, and Technology Ceremony of Islamic Azad University, 2016. She has published many books and articles and presented papers at national and international conferences. Her research interests are intercultural communicative competence, feedback, and Academic writing.
Email: m_saeidi@iaut.ac.ir

Touran Ahour is an assistant professor at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch. She received her Ph.D. from Universiti Putra Malaysia in 2010 and has authored several books and published many articles in scholarly journals and presented papers at national and international conferences. Her research interests include materials evaluation, reading-writing connection, writing assessment, and teaching skills.
Email: torahour2@yahoo.com