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**Ethiopian University Students', Lecturers' and Administrators'  
Perceptions of Interculturally Competent Persons**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** This study's aim was to investigate Ethiopian university students', lecturers', and administrators' perceptions of the dispositions (savoir-être) of interculturally competent persons.

**Methodology:** Building on seminal models of intercultural competence, a survey instrument was created to inquire into the three stakeholder groups' perceptions. The survey was completed by 638 participants.

**Findings:** The paper highlights similarities and differences between students, lecturers, and administrators. The findings also show that African and western characteristics associated with interculturally competent persons reflect the respondents' personal and professional roles.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** This study is the first to study Ethiopian students', lecturers' and administrators' perceptions of interculturally competent persons. The study's findings provide a baseline on which curricula and policies can build in order to promote intercultural competence in Ethiopian universities.

**Keywords:** *Interculturally Competent Person, Ethiopia, University Students, University Lecturers, University Administrators*

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## INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia, which is the hub of Africa and the seat of the African Union, is a typical multilingual and multi-ethnic country. In addition to foreign languages like English, French, Arabic, or Chinese, 83 languages are actively spoken in the country with more than 200 dialectical variations discernable. Furthermore, the country is characterized by multi-ethnic groups in which more than 80 ethnocultural groups with more than a total population of 115 million inhabitants living together (Semela, 2012; Semela, 2014; Wagaw, 1981; United Nations, 2020). Hence, diversity is a fact of life in Ethiopian society. This fact is also reflected in Ethiopian university populations. Currently, the country has more than 900,000 academics (i.e., students, academic staff members, and administrative staff members) (MoE, 2017; Addisalem, 2020).

In recent educational policy documents (Ministry of Education, 2017), the Ethiopian government has proposed a new roadmap for educating young Ethiopians as intercultural citizens who can take up responsibilities in a country that is united, yet also recognizes its manifold cultural groups and languages. Following the release of these documents, most Ethiopian universities have adopted multiculturalism as a pedagogical and institutional arrangement model. As a result, universities admit students from various nations, ethnic groups, and cultures, hire staff from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and aim to modify their policies and legislation to address equity, diversity, and cultural pluralism. (Ministry of Education, 2017).

The study is significant for several reasons. At a time when universities are releasing policy plans to meet the changing intercultural contact situation on their campuses, this research for the first time aimed to study which dispositions, in the sense of Byram's 1997 *savoir-être* or soft skills as opposed to visible skills and behaviors, Ethiopian students associate with interculturally competent persons and how their views differ or are similar to those of university lecturers and university policymakers. Mapping students', lecturers', and administrators' perceptions of what is needed in terms of internal personal intercultural competencies will help determine which of these dispositions need to be developed in students for them to be able to cooperate in educational and professional multicultural collaborations. To study these dispositions, a research instrument was developed based on a number of seminal models of intercultural competence. Thirdly, the research takes place in Ethiopia and contributes to the study of interculturality on the African continent where there is a dearth of studies looking into the development of intercultural *savoir-être* in tertiary education students.

### Intercultural Dispositions

The importance of collaborating with others, whatever their cultural background may be, is one of the sustainable development goals supported by UNESCO. To achieve common goals, it is important that collaborators dispose of intercultural *savoir-être* as part of intercultural competence. Indeed, in his seminal model, Byram (1997, 2020) distinguishes between five *savoirs* which together make up intercultural competence. *Savoir-être* refers to underlying orientations and traits of character that are conducive to successfully engaging with others.

In her bottom-up hierarchical Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (see Figure 1 below), Deardorff too refers to intercultural dispositions (desired internal outcome, level 3) as important prerequisites for intercultural competence. In this model, the lower levels are viewed as supporting the higher levels. The pyramid model suggests that requisite attitudes, knowledge and comprehension elements, and skills will lead to changes in one's disposition towards

otherness and foreignness (desired internal outcomes) and to desired externally visible intercultural behaviors and effective communication (desired external outcomes, level 4). Behaving and communicating effectively in intercultural contact situations (level 4) presupposes intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes, that follow from internal dispositions (level 3).

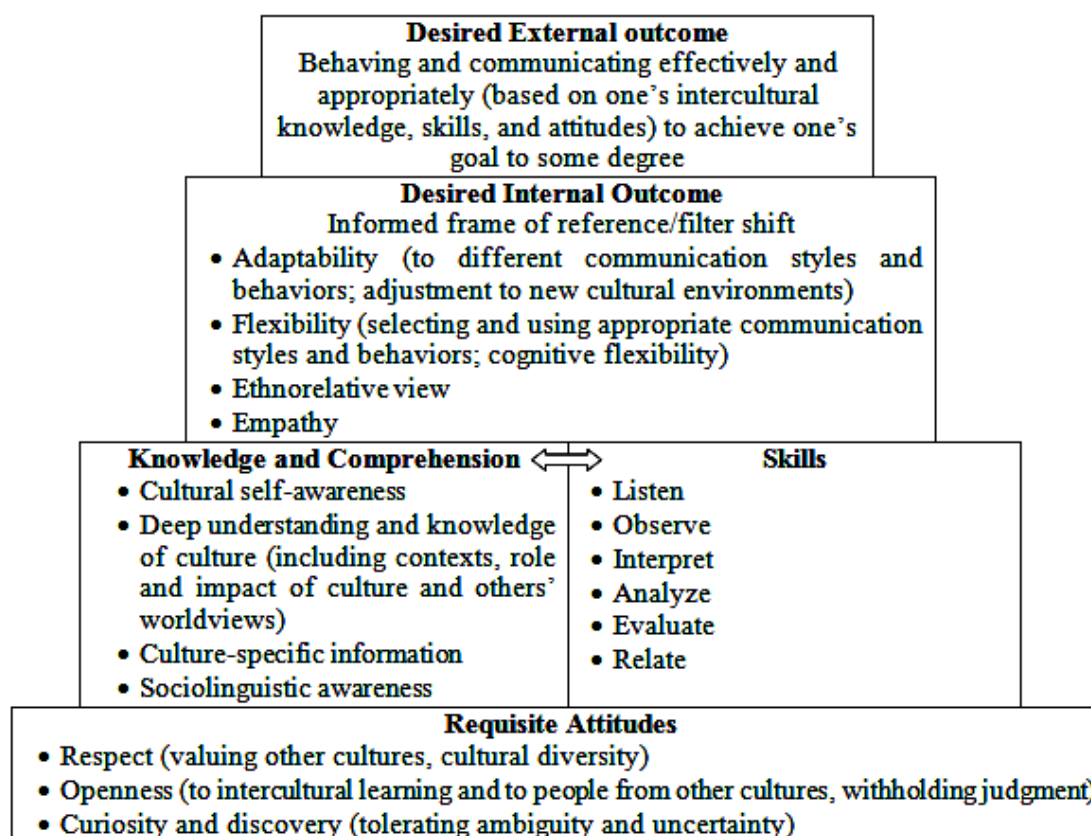


Figure 1: Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006, 2009)

Indeed, the premise underlying the above conceptualization of the intercultural competent person is that certain internal outcomes are requisites for the development of appropriate goal-oriented intercultural (communicative) behavior. Without the right internal characteristics, interlocutors may react to differences by judging others based on their own cultural perspectives, failing to empathize with the interlocutor's point of view. They may also lack the necessary flexibility to select and use appropriate communication styles, or the adaptability to adjust to new cultural environments.

Like Deardorff (2006), Kim (2009) focuses on intercultural competence as a private matter, not a group matter. Additionally, intercultural competence, including particular dispositions, is conceived as a "culture-general and context-general concept that is applicable to all encounters between individuals of differing cultural (or ethnic) backgrounds" (p. 54), regardless of the particularities of the intercultural contact situation.

Schwarzental et al. (2019) speak of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural responsibility as important dispositions. Intercultural communication requires adaptability and communicative competence. Intercultural sensitivity focuses on the attentive and caring awareness of potential

differences between cultures. Intercultural responsibility demands engagement and commitment to turn the intercultural interaction or collaboration into a success.

### **Intercultural Dispositions in an Ethiopian Context**

Following Kim (2009), an interculturally competent person can be defined as someone who is capable of engaging in “behaviors and activities that foster cooperative relationships in all types of social and cultural contexts in which culturally and ethnically dissimilar others interface” (Kim, 2009,). Mutuality and cooperation are characteristics that Africans might also typically associate with intercultural competence (Nwosu, 2009), even if Africans’ conceptualization of intercultural competence may not fully match that of westerners.

One important difference indeed concerns the role of communalism over individualism. “Communalism, as a way of life, has been elevated to the status of a communal religion in most of traditional Africa (Taylor & Nwosu, 2001), in the same manner that individualism, as a concept, has been elevated to the status of a national religion in the West” (Nwosu, 2009, p. 167). “Whereas individualism represents commitments to independence, privacy, self, and all-important I, communalism represents commitment to interdependence, community affiliation, others, and the idea of we” (Nwosu, Taylor & Blake, 1998, p. 237). In the African worldview, one cannot separate the self from the social context. Linked to this fundamental value of communalism, other African attitudes include respect for elders, acceptance of the supremacy of hierarchical structures, loyalty to the organization, the longevity of service, and less desire for job mobility.

Yet, African culture is far from homogeneous and Peltzer (2006) suggests that the complex effects of colonialism and other historical forces in Africa offer varied perspectives to understand the African cultural environment and communication forms. He identifies three African groups that have emerged from or in spite of the historical and more recent colonial forces, and that are relevant to personal attitudes towards intercultural competence: (1) traditional persons, who are little affected by modernization and who are functioning within the established and seemingly timeless framework of their culture; (2) transitional persons, often living in and shuttling between the two cultures in the course of their daily round of activities (e.g., between work and home or between the temporary urban dwelling and the ancestral village, where their extended family continues to reside); and (3) modern individuals, participating fully in the activities of the contemporary industrial and postindustrial world. (Peltzer, 1995) Intercultural dispositions may reflect any of these three large categories or combinations thereof. They may represent a more traditional, individual or transitional one.

### **Research Question**

The central research question is as follows:

In the views of Ethiopian university students, lecturers, and administrators, what dispositions typify interculturally competent persons?

To date, not many studies are available that focus specifically on *savoir-être* as a component of intercultural competence. Much of the work in the field of intercultural competence development in higher education has been concerned with the teaching of appropriate and effective communicative behavior, for example in business contexts. Increasingly, such work is becoming available with respect to intercultural relations between African and Chinese citizens (see, for example, Mayer Lynette Louw & Boness (2019). Yet, this work is not concerned with studying the underlying personal characteristics that are prerequisites for

effective intercultural behavior and communication. The assumption thus seems to have been that anyone, no matter their disposition, will be able to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural contact situations. Yet, in practice, it can be seen that a lack of an intercultural disposition may lead to disengagement or disinterest in intercultural contact situations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The study reported here is part of a larger (doctoral) project that aims to document Ethiopian students', lecturers', and administrators' dispositions and convictions regarding intercultural competence education with a view to developing intercultural training programs that take account of these dispositions and views. The study uses quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

The sub-study reported here made use of a questionnaire that contained questions mapping a number of demographic variables, as well as a number of closed and one open question mapping the dispositions that students, lecturers, and policymakers associate with an interculturally competent person. The closed questions offered the different stakeholder groups a number of potential characteristics of interculturally competent persons. These traits were derived from surveying different models of intercultural competence and interculturally competent persons (e.g., Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001; Arasaratnam, 2006). The respondents had to indicate their level of agreement with each characteristic. The open question invited them to suggest additional characteristics they associated with interculturally competent persons.

As a means of collecting data and describing people's dispositions, self-report instruments have been widely used and supported. Due to the scope of the study which envisioned collecting data among several hundreds of participants, it was decided to use a closed question format in combination with an open question, offering the possibility to add information not queried in the closed questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative (survey) data was cleaned, coded, and imported into SPSS and processed (described and analyzed) by means of SPSS software. The study uses a table-based (visual) data presentation method for the quantitative data. Analyses included comparisons of percentages, means, and standard deviations. The qualitative (open questionnaire question) data were processed and analyzed by hand.

### **Procedure and Sample**

The data for the study was collected from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 through the end of August 2021. The paper survey questionnaire was distributed among 674 potential participants. 638 (94%) (54 administrators, 104 lecturers, and 480 students) returned the questionnaire. All paper data were entered into an excel sheet to allow further electronic data processing.

All student and lecturer participants were selected randomly. All administrator participants were selected purposefully. Student participants were deemed eligible when they were enrolled at Jimma University, a large public university located in the city of Jimma, or at Hawassa University, a public university attracting students from more rural areas. Lecturer participants were deemed eligible when they had at least a 50% appointment at Jimma or Hawassa

University. Administrators were deemed eligible when they were (co)responsible for university policy, or when they had policymaking power with respect to educational matters, and in particular, as regards multilingual and multicultural education at Jimma or Hawassa University.

From Table 1 it can be seen that more male than female students participated in the study, which is a reflection of the university population mainly consisting of males. As regards the respondents' place of birth, Table 1 shows that 28,5% of the participants are originally from rural areas, whereas the other participants either navigate between rural and city cultures (41%) or live in an urban area (30,5%). Finally, it appears that Jimma University is slightly overrepresented in the sample as Hawassa attracts slightly more students than Jimma University.

**Table 1: An Overview of a Frequency Distribution of Study Participants by Gender, Place of Birth and Name of University**

Dependent Variables		Groups	
		N	%
Gender	Male	407	63.8
	Female	231	36.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>100</b>
Place of Birth	Culturally diverse urban areas	195	30.5
	Culturally homogenous rural areas	182	28.5
	Mixture of the two	261	41.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>100</b>
Name of University	Jimma University	351	55
	Hawassa University	287	45
	<b>Total</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>100</b>

A second Table provides additional information on the respondents' multilingual and multicultural backgrounds.

**Table 2: An Overview of Descriptive Statistics (Mean Score and Standard Deviation) of Study Participants by Language Mastered, and Frequency of Face-to-Face Interactions with Culturally Diverse Populations at the University**

Variables	Groups					
	Administrators		Lecturers		Students	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Language Mastered	2.89	0.32	2.79	0.41	2.40	0.49
Frequency of face-to-face interactions with culturally diverse populations at university	1.43	0.63	1.46	0.65	1.76	0.98

**Note:** M= Mean Score, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2 above summarizes the distribution of study participants by number of languages mastered, and frequency of face-to-face interactions with culturally diverse populations at the university. In terms of the variable languages mastered both orally and in writing, the

administrators' overall mean score equals 2.89 and the overall standard deviation is 0.32, which means that some administrators masters more than 3 other languages apart from their mother tongue. As regards lecturers, in terms of the number of languages mastered both orally and in writing, the overall mean score is similar to that of administrators (Mean = 2.79, S.D. = 0.41). However, as regards the number of languages mastered both orally and in writing by students, Table 2 shows that with  $M = 2.40$  and  $S.D. = 0.49$ , overall students master slightly fewer languages than lecturers or administrators.

In terms of the frequency of face-to-face interactions with culturally diverse populations, the administrators' overall scores are  $M = 1.43$  and  $S.D = 0.63$ , which means that most administrators indicate they have such contacts at least once a month and sometimes more frequently (at least once a week). Similarly, Table 2 shows that lecturers' scores ( $M = 1.46$ ;  $S.D. = 0.65$ ) are in line with those of the administrators. However, as regards students, Table 2 shows that their overall mean score is highest (Mean = 1.76, S.D. = 0.98), which indicates that a larger deal of students has at least weekly and some daily contact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

## RESULTS

### Closed Questionnaire Question

Table 3 summarizes administrators', lecturers', and students' answers to the closed questions, investigating to what extent these different groups actually associate the different characteristics that could potentially typify interculturally competent persons with such people. Possible answering categories included: 1 = I do specifically associate, 2 = I do not associate, 3 = I am not Sure



**Table 3: An Overview of a Frequency Distribution of Personal Characteristics Typically Associated with an Interculturally-Competent Person**

Variables	Groups												
	Administrators				Lecturers				Students				
		1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total
Disciplined	N	44	5	5	54	89	5	10	104	367	75	38	480
	%	81.5	9.3	9.3	100	85.6	4.8	9.6	100	76.5	15.6	7.9	100
Flexible	N	52	2	-	54	96	3	5	104	344	94	42	480
	%	96.3	3.7	-	100	92.3	2.9	4.8	100	71.7	19.6	8.8	100
Independent	N	29	13	12	54	72	16	16	104	304	100	76	480
	%	53.7	24.1	22.2	100	69.2	15.4	15.4	100	63.3	20.8	15.8	100
Respectful	N	54	-	-	54	100	-	4	104	382	58	40	480
	%	100	-	-	100	96.2	-	3.8	100	79.6	12.1	8.3	100
Model	N	45	3	6	54	78	11	15	104	292	115	73	480
	%	83.3	5.6	11.1	100	75	10.6	14.4	100	60.8	24	15.2	100
Tolerant	N	53	1	-	54	98	5	1	104	368	82	30	480
	%	98.1	1.9	-	100	94.2	4.8	1	100	76.7	17.1	6.3	100
Loyal	N	34	7	13	54	78	11	15	104	320	99	61	480
	%	63	13	24	100	75	10.6	14.4	100	66.7	20.6	12.7	100
Adaptable	N	50	3	1	54	98	3	3	104	305	106	69	480
	%	92.6	5.6	1.9	100	94.2	2.9	2.9	100	63.5	22.1	14.4	100
Progressive	N	46	2	6	54	90	7	7	104	253	133	94	480
	%	85	3.7	11.1	100	86.5	6.7	6.7	100	52.7	27.7	19.6	100
Including	N	52	-	2	54	97	1	6	104	292	155	73	480
	%	96.3	-	3.7	100	93.3	1	5.8	100	60.8	24	15.2	100
Caring	N	50	1	3	54	96	6	2	104	267	110	103	480
	%	92.6	1.9	5.6	100	92.3	5.8	1.9	100	55.6	22.9	21.5	100
Engaged	N	49	2	3	54	91	9	4	104	284	98	98	480
	%	90.7	3.7	5.6	100	87.5	8.7	3.8	100	59.2	20.4	20.4	100
Collaborative	N	52	1	1	54	98	3	3	104	294	108	78	480
	%	96.3	1.9	1.9	100	94.2	2.9	2.9	100	61.3	22.5	16.3	100
Communicative	N	54	-	-	54	90	9	5	104	384	81	51	480
	%	100	-	-	100	86.5	8.7	4.8	100	72.5	16.9	10.6	100
Honest	N	28	10	16	54	75	14	15	104	352	67	61	480
	%	51.9	18.5	29.6	100	72	13.5	14.4	100	73.3	14	12.7	100
Competitive	N	33	15	6	54	63	23	18	104	280	114	86	480
	%	61.1	27.8	11.1	100	60.6	22.1	17.3	100	58.3	23.8	17.9	100
Emotional	N	4	36	14	54	10	59	35	104	200	172	108	480
	%	7.4	66.7	25.9	100	9.6	56.7	33.7	100	41.7	35.8	22.5	100
Rational	N	51	2	1	54	88	5	11	104	297	105	78	480
	%	94.4	3.7	1.9	100	84.6	4.8	10.6	100	61.9	21.9	16.3	100
Optimistic	N	45	6	3	54	79	6	19	104	275	107	98	480
	%	83.3	11.1	5.6	100	76	5.8	18.3	100	57.3	22.3	20.4	100
Observant	N	45	6	3	54	85	9	10	104	280	112	88	480
	%	83.3	11.1	5.6	100	81.7	8.7	9.6	100	58.3	23.3	18.3	100

Table 3 provides the percentages to which lecturers, students, and administrators associate, do not associate, or are uncertain as to whether to associate each characteristic with an interculturally competent person.

When setting the agreement level at over 90%, Table 3 shows that administrators typify an interculturally competent person by means of ‘flexible’, ‘respectful’, ‘tolerant’, ‘adaptable’, ‘including’, ‘caring’, ‘engaged’, ‘collaborative’, ‘communicative’, and ‘rational’. Likewise, Table 3 reveals that when setting the agreement level at over 90%, lecturers typify an interculturally competent person by means of ‘flexible’, ‘respectful’, ‘tolerant’, ‘adaptable’, ‘including’, ‘caring’, and ‘collaborative’ consecutively. In other words, the characteristics lecturers associate most strongly with an interculturally competent person largely match those of administrators. They also largely coincide with those put forward by Deardorff in her Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (2006).

However, when setting the agreement level at over 90% for students, it appears that this group does not select any of the characteristics put forward by lecturers and administrators as personal qualities typically associated with an interculturally competent person. In other words, when setting the agreement level at over 90%, clear differences between lecturers and administrators on the one hand and students on the other appear. In particular, a larger group of students seem undecided as to whether particular characteristics can be attributed to an intercultural person. For example, with respect to 'caring', 21,5% of the students indicate they are not sure whether this characteristic typifies intercultural people as opposed to 5,6% of administrators and a sheer 1,9% of lecturers. A similar line of reasoning applies to 'engaged', with respect to which 21,4% of students are unsure as opposed to 5,6% and 3,8% of administrators and lecturers, or 'collaborative', regarding which 16,3% of students are unsure as opposed to 1,9% and 2,9% of administrators and lecturers.

A clear 'no, I do not associate this characteristic with an interculturally competent person' is given by students for the characteristics 'engaged', 'caring' and 'collaborative' (20,4%, 22,9%, and 20,4% of students). By contrast, this social dimension is clearly included in the administrators' and lecturers' perceptions regarding an interculturally competent person with only 3,7%, 1,9% and 1,9% of administrators and 8,7%, 5,8% and 2,9% % of lecturers indicating they do not associate these characteristics (engaged, caring and collaborative) with an interculturally competent person.

It is only when setting the agreement level at between 70% and 80% that students appear to select the characteristics 'disciplined', 'flexible', 'respectful', 'tolerant', 'communicative', and 'honest' as typifying an interculturally competent person. For the characteristics 'tolerant' and 'respectful' typically associated in the literature with an interculturally competent person, Table 3 reveals that 17,1% and 12% of students do not associate these characteristics with interculturally competent people.

### Open Questionnaire Question

As regards the respondents' answers to the open question, it appears that the list of alternative characteristics associated with interculturally competent persons suggested by administrators and lecturers was substantially more elaborate than that of students (N = 68 for administrators, N = 83 for lecturers, N = 22 for students). Students mainly refer to facets of being (e.g., sociable, friendly, patriot), and far less to characteristics referring to active commitment (e.g., active participation) or collaboration (e.g., cooperative). Lecturers refer to both personal characteristics (e.g., empathetic, non-judgmental, compassionate) and behavioral components, with the latter being related to interpersonal relationships (e.g., negotiator, listener, problem solver, concerned about others' feelings, altruistic, doing good things, empathetic). Administrators, like lecturers, suggest characteristics relating to *savoir-être* (personal characteristics; Byram, 1997) and *savoir-faire* (behavioral features), but interestingly, also characteristics relating to 'leadership', 'organizational skill', 'professional commitment', and 'farsightedness'. These findings suggest that the characteristics that the three groups associate with an interculturally competent person reflect the way in which the three groups determine their social identity, being either a student, a lecturer, or an administrator. Administrators, for example, name characteristics, such as 'assertive', 'leader', 'farsighted', 'transformer' which may reflect administrators' professional duties to organize university life well and provide answers to challenges related to societal changes. Lecturers refer to 'approachable', 'supportive', 'non-judgmental', 'appreciating', 'encouraging', 'helping', which may reflect

their overall attitude as lecturers supporting their students, and also African communalist attitudes. Students, finally, name characteristics, such as ‘passionate’, ‘friendly’, ‘sociable’, ‘curiosity’, which primarily appear to refer to personal characteristics of what could be considered a sociable hospitable student, with hospitality being an important characteristic of African society. This student is not yet seeing it as his/her duty to support or encourage others (cf. Lecturers) nor is the student ready to take on a leadership role in society (cf. administrators).

Surprisingly, at least from a Western point of view, is that one of the students says to typify an intercultural person as a ‘patriot’. Yet, within the Ethiopian context, where the federal government is promoting unity in the country through using Amharic as the national language and teaching that language at school, this student has linked patriotism to being a good citizen, and thus as someone who is able to cohabitate with people originating from different cultures. Likewise, adjectives such as ‘sharing’ or ‘good relation’ are mentioned by students, making reference to the communalist nature of Ethiopian culture. Similarly, when administrators suggest that one needs to be ‘a good listener’ to be an interculturally competent person, this trait may refer to the African cultural context where being a good listener is important since messages tend to remain covert and implicit and cultural symbols carry a great deal of meaning. The mentioning of ‘professional commitment’, ‘rectitude’ ‘trustworthiness’ by administrators may testify to the role they have in Ethiopian society: they are elders and higher up in the societal hierarchy, so they need to behave as ‘models’ so that they can be respected by others.

### **Discussion**

The above results have provided an answer to the question ‘What mental schema do students, lecturers and administrators use to typify an interculturally competent person?’. From this typification, several things have become obvious which we will highlight below.

First, the data have shown that the traits of character mentioned as prerequisites for the development of intercultural competence mentioned in Deardorff’s (2006) Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence have also been named by students, lecturers, and administrators albeit with diverging degrees of agreement. These traits include ‘openness’, ‘tolerance’, ‘respect’ and ‘curiosity’. Other features that reached the highest levels of agreement among lecturers, administrators, and students include ‘flexible’, ‘adaptable’, ‘engaged’, ‘including’, and ‘collaborative’.

Fewer students than lecturers or administrators tend to agree with the characteristics mentioned above. In other words, more students than lecturers or administrators appear unsure as to how to typify an interculturally competent person. This may be due to the fact that students have been given fewer opportunities to systematically reflect on this matter and have not developed a mature opinion on it. Yet, it may also be the case that students who have more frequent contact with people with other cultural backgrounds than administrators and lecturers, may want to refrain from essentializing intercultural persons through a number of characteristics, having had the experience that people from other cultural backgrounds are as friendly, sociable and human as they are themselves. Additionally, for students, who have yet to find a professional position in Ethiopian society, it may be easier to react freely to the question, expressing more uncertainty, than it is for administrators and lecturers. This latter group may have to react from within their societal role, demonstrating professional commitment and loyalty to their organization and its policy also while completing the questionnaire. Finally, it may be the case that students, more so than lecturers and administrators, are of the ‘modern

individualistic' type of person (see Pfelzer, 1995), and do not feel close to traditional or transitional persons. Whereas transitional persons may commute between individualistic and communalist perspectives of intercultural competence, students may feel closer to individualistic perspectives, coming into contact with popular Western cultures via social media that may implicitly or explicitly distribute Western values.

Even if an agreement with the internal outcomes put forward in Deardorff's model has become visible from our data, it is also the case that the respondents have reacted as Ethiopians, i.e. African people, reflecting a more communalist perspective of an intercultural person. Whereas the task of reflecting on one's own intercultural competence would appear to be a very personal and individualistic task in the West, in Ethiopia the majority of respondents relate to communalist perspectives, referring to social and collaborative aspects of intercultural competence, more so than might be expected among a Western group of respondents.

Finally, we want to reflect on the research methodology employed in this study. The data collection method chosen allowed us to collect data among a large number of respondents, yet it prevented us from delving deeper into students', lecturers', and administrators' views of the intercultural person. The fact that interview data collected within the framework of the larger doctoral study in which the study presented here is embedded does not make the limitation of the current study smaller. Yet, it appears the study has been able to provide a benchmark as far as current-day Ethiopian academics' views concerning interculturally competent persons are concerned. In the future, the study might be repeated and complemented with interview data, exploring also developments in students', lecturers', and administrators' perceptions over time. This will be interesting, especially in view of the fact that the Ministry of Education (2017) has only recently released its roadmap for educational reforms in Ethiopia. In future studies, other characteristics than the ones currently included in the study could be selected to reflect better the respondents' African background.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the limitations of the study, we have provided a benchmark for Ethiopian university students', lecturers', and administrators' views regarding the internal characteristics an interculturally competent person (should) possess(es). The study has shown that African and western characteristics associated with interculturally competent persons reflect the respondents' cultural backgrounds and their personal and professional roles. On the basis of the study, it becomes possible to develop curricula that meet students where they are in terms of the development of the dispositions needed to act and communicate appropriately and effectively in intercultural contact situations.

In this article, we have merely scratched the surface, and further work is needed to understand the three parties' perspectives better. Exploring the terrain for intercultural competence education in Africa, and in particular in Ethiopia is needed. It is time for the field of intercultural communication to study Africa in all its intercultural diversity.

### **Disclosure Statement**

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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