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Components of Modern Students' Intercultural Competence: Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

The final results of the research which was held in the Republic of Buryatia, Mongolia and China are represented in the article. Russia is represented by the Republic of Buryatia, one of the multicultural regions of our country, where representatives of more than a hundred native people coexist peacefully with people of other nationalities, mostly from neighboring countries. Globalization also affected this region, which is clearly reflected in the heterogeneity of the student youth of the Republic. The largest groups of foreign students studying at universities in Buryatia are representatives of neighboring regions of China and Mongolia.

For such a multicultural and educational region as the Republic of Buryatia, it is very important to form tolerance and develop the skills of competent intercultural dialogue among young people, along with the preservation of the cultural and ethnic component. This article is an analysis of the results of the research for identifying the level of intercultural competence formation of Russian, Chinese and Mongolian students. Arriving in the Republic for the learning with Russian educational programs, foreign students often face difficulties of intercultural interaction, not to mention the language barrier. In this regard, it is important to clarify at the initial stage the difficulties arising in terms of intercultural dialogue among the main participants of the educational process in the universities of our city.

The article reveals three of the six main parameters on the basis of which this study was conducted, which, in our opinion, represent most clearly the entire procedure of the study and the results obtained.

Keywords: intercultural communication, intercultural competence, components of intercultural competence, intercultural interaction, communication, social interaction, personal management.

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1. Introduction

In the modern world, when international relations in the field of higher education are increasingly intensified, the problem of development of students' intercultural competence becomes particularly relevant.

Integration processes in the education of the Russian Federation put forward the formation of a personality capable of intercultural interaction, respectful attitude to another culture and ready to preserve their own one as one of the most important tasks. For universities in the Eastern regions of Russia, the issues of cooperation with universities and students of China and Mongolia, as important strategic partners of our country, come to the fore (Dagbaeva, 2018).

In this article the components of the formation of intercultural competence (IC) of Russian, Chinese and Mongolian students are analyzed. It is important to highlight that the Russian respondents were represented by students of three universities in Ulan-Ude. Taking into account the cross-border location of the Republic of Buryatia, which has been the "gateway of Russia to Asia" for many centuries and the current geopolitical situation, we consider it extremely relevant to study comparatively the students of neighboring countries in the East of Russia –Mongolian and Chinese ones.

Intercultural competence of a person characterizes the diversity of human relations with society, with himself, with another and his own culture, it is complex in composition, contains diverse components: from knowledge about their own and other people's culture to the manifestation of tolerance. In research studies of IC components, models are proposed that emphasize certain concepts (Byram, 2013; Precht, 2007), context (Kim, 2003) or process (Hajek, Giles, 2003). Some tools evaluate knowledge and skills (Grice, 1975); others supplement them with an affective component (Deadorff, 2004). Models have also been developed that represent intercultural competence as a set of other competencies, for example, professional and general competencies (Paige, 2004).

Having analyzed foreign and Russian methods in the field of assessment of intercultural competence, we can conclude that there is a huge variety of tools. For example, M. Paige identifies 35 different instruments (Paige, 2004), but not all of them are available for Russian teachers.

Traditional self-assessment questionnaires include Pierre Cass's Four Value Orientations Questionnaire (FVOSAI) (1982, 1999), Michael Tucker's Intercultural Readiness to Work abroad Questionnaire (OAI) (1999), Colleen Kelly and Judith Meyers' Cross-cultural Adaptability Questionnaire (CCAI) (1999), Mitchell Hammer's Intercultural Development Questionnaire (IDI), and others.

In Russian science, the issues of measuring the parameters of intercultural communication are also actively discussed; new methods have been developed and adapted: N.P. Fetiskin, V.V. Kozlov, G.M. Manuylov – test "Diagnostics of communicative social competence" (CSC); adaptation of Yu.B. Gippenreiter, A.A. Rukavishnikov of three variants of Russian MBTI (M. Briggs' typology); INTOL technique of L.A. Pochebut, "Scale of intercultural sensitivity" of O.E. Khukhlaeva, M.Yu. Chibisova, etc.

It follows from the above that, on the one hand, most often the measuring material is based on only one or two parameters that evaluate the components of the IC, which do not give an objective assessment of the level of intercultural competence. On the other hand, if the measuring material contains the evaluation of several parameters, it does not take into account the complex nature of the IC. For its objective assessment it is necessary to include tasks based on active methods of teaching (trainings, discussions, games, situation analysis). These methods, according to A.P. Sadokhin, allow immersing in the situation of intercultural communication, thereby form effectively skills to overcome barriers in the situation of intercultural interaction.

2. Materials and methods

To measure the level of intercultural competence, we turned to the questionnaire of the German researcher Deborah Schnabel "Test for measuring intercultural competence" (Vrublevskaya, 2006), which combines both test tasks and analysis of the situation of intercultural communication, which allows making the most accurate description of the level of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is understood as a global orientation of behavior, which has a multidimensional structure. Based on this understanding, she developed the test for measuring

intercultural competence (TMIK), which allows making a differentiated measurement of intercultural competence through self-assessment and situation assessment.

Her model measures nineteen parameters of intercultural competence related to six different areas: *communication* (flexibility, empathy, accuracy, change of perspective), *learning* (willingness to learn, purposeful information gathering, handling criticism, willingness to use a foreign language), *social interaction* (creating trust, integration in groups, creating a professional network, the ability to make and maintain acquaintances), *cultural self-knowledge* (awareness of one’s own cultural identity, reflection of one’s own culture), *creation of synergy* (mediation between different interests, ability to productive cooperation), *personal management* (strategic problem solving, target orientation, stress management).

This type of questionnaire is a unique opportunity to combine different methods of measuring intercultural competence, predict most accurately deviations and correct existing shortcomings in the formation of specific skills.

It is necessary to note that the TMIK Test was tested in different cultures, translated into Portuguese and English, and conducted a sample international survey, including in Brazil. The overall scale of the Brazilian survey shows very high reliability on the Cronbach scale $\alpha = 95$. Individual scales range from 61 to 82. No significant differences were identified between these questionnaires, and we believe it can be applied to other cultures as well.

To adapt Deborah Schnabel’s questionnaire on measuring the components of intercultural competence by philologists of our University, it was translated into Russian, Chinese and Mongolian. Translations into languages were carried out by professional translators (S.N. Darmaeva – into Russian, S.G. Tsybenova – into Chinese, I.G. Aktamov – into Mongolian). Then native speakers, translators checked the correctness of the translation from their native language into Russian, that is, the method of “reverse translation” was used, and was again rechecked by native speakers (Nasledov, 2012).

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov’s normality distribution criterion and the Spearman rank correlation were used for statistical processing of the obtained data. The study involved 150 Russian, 150 Mongolian and 130 Chinese students studying at 1-2 courses of higher education institutions in Ulan-Ude, Ulan Bator, and Manchuria.

On the Figure 1 the arithmetic mean values of the IC measurement of Russian, Mongolian and Chinese students in seventeen blocks and their percentage distribution are presented.

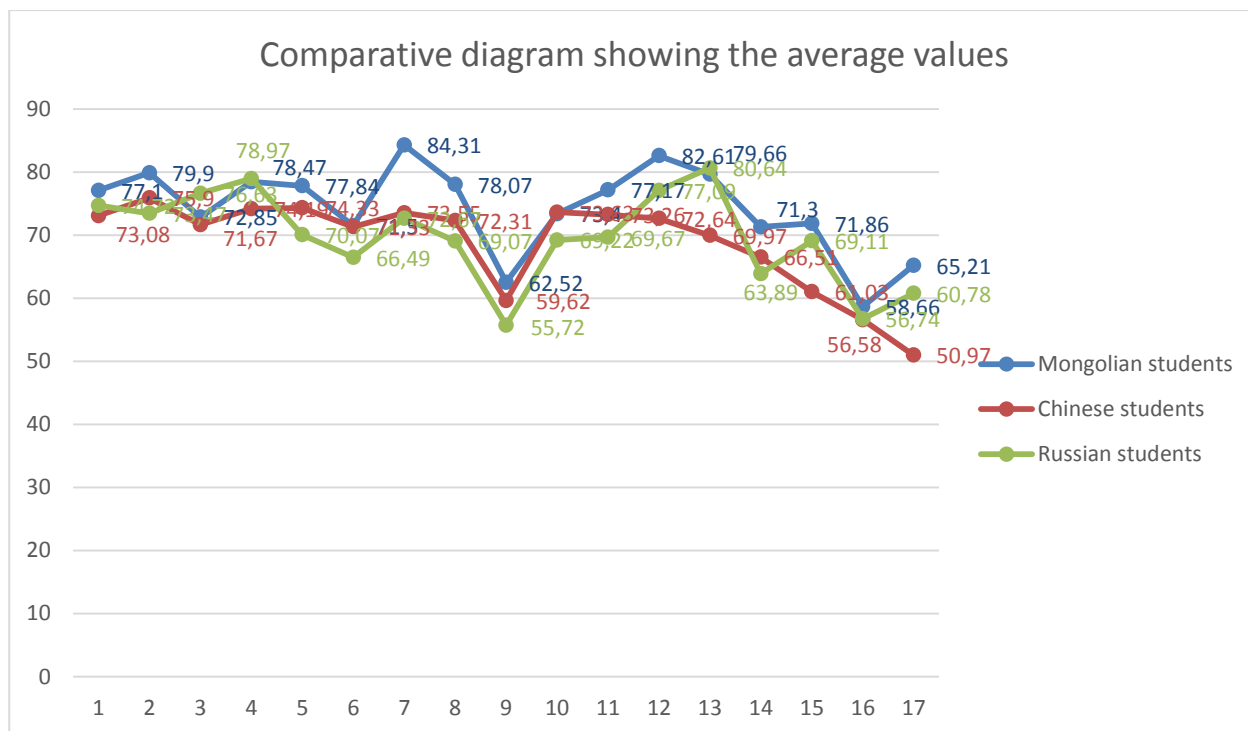


Fig. 1. Comparative chart of average values

Note (in small letters): 1-4 – communication; 5-6 – creating synergy; 7-9 – learning; 10-11 – self-knowledge; 12-13 – personal management; 14-17 – social interaction.

Analysis of this graph shows that respondents do not have a spread of responses in the indicators. IC levels are divided into basic – 0-24 %, average – 25-49 %, advanced – 50-74 %, excellent – 75-100 %).

To identify the relationships of respondents' answers in each tested block, we conducted a correlation analysis, testing hypotheses about the relationships between variables using correlation coefficients (Nasledov, 2012). The conditions for choosing the coefficient were based on two criteria: the *distribution normality* (in our case, the distribution of data is abnormal when p is asymptomatic ≤ 0.05 , in this regard, it was decided to use the Spearman coefficient. The nature of the distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test using the SPSS program) and the *sample size* (in this study, $n = 450$, that is, $n \leq 30$, but the distribution of values is not normal (p asymptomatic ≤ 0.05), so the decision is made to choose the rank correlation coefficient r -Spearman) (Slepko, 2013).

According to Yu.N. Slepko, it makes no sense to look for strict functional, cause-and-effect relationships between variables, as the subject of psychology is almost impossible to be explained unambiguously, it is complicated and not unambiguous. If one dependent variable (for example, mood) is statistically significantly strongly correlated with another independent variable (for example, self-acceptance), then it is mandatory that both the dependent and independent variables will be affected by other independent variables (for example, mood can be affected by temperament type, self-acceptance – by self-esteem). Therefore, there is no unambiguous, direct influence of the level of self-acceptance on mood (Slepko, 2013).

In connection with the above, when interpreting, we will not talk about the influence of variables on each other, but about the degree of relationships between variables, that is, whether there are similarities and differences in the responses of respondents (Russian, Mongolian and Chinese students) in each block.

We analyzed the strength of the relationship, which reaches a maximum under the condition of mutual unambiguous correspondence: when each value of one variable corresponds to only one value of another variable (and vice versa), the empirical relationship coincides with the functional linear relationship (Nasledov, 2012).

In our case, there is a situation of no statistical relationship for independent random variables, as these variables are not interdependent. Students answered in different countries, at different universities, in different languages, that is, the answers of Russian students do not affect the answers of Mongolian and Chinese ones.

The correlation coefficient is interpreted based on the level of the correlation strength:

$r > 0.01 \leq 0.29$ – a weak positive correlation,

$r > 0.30 \leq 0.69$ – a moderate positive correlation,

$r > 0.70 \leq 1.00$ – a strong positive correlation,

$r > -0.01 \leq -0.29$ – a weak negative correlation,

$r > -0.30 \leq -0.69$ – a moderate negative correlation,

$r > -0.70 \leq -1.00$ – a strong negative correlation (Slepko, Ledovskaya, 2013: 92).

When interpreting the results, the following designations are used: R. – Russian students, Ch. – Chinese, M. – Mongolian, as well as taking into account the national psychological and national-cultural characteristics of students (this criterion was taken into account when analyzing the sphere of social interaction). “The knowledge of mental differences that determine emotional reactions, way of thinking and features of the national mentality, allows organizing the learning strategy methodically competent and effective” (Shanturova, 2015).

In this article, we do not aim to analyze the formation of the IC of students of the three countries in all blocks. For this article, we selected the results in three areas, which to some extent are indicative of the assessment of intercultural competence of students, and reflect the behavioral aspect.

3. Results and discussion

If we take the unit, reflecting the skills of *strategic problem solving*, i.e. the ability to recognize the problem and find a structured approach to its solution in the field of “Personal

management”, we observe the following indicators of Spearman’s correlation coefficient: the responses of the Russian students towards the answers of Chinese students ($r = -0.36$) and the answers of Mongolian students ($r = -0.53$) with a weak negative correlation.

Table 1. Correlation in the block “Strategic problem solving”
Correlations

			bloc13_RUS	bloc13_China	bloc13_Mon
Po Spearman	bloc13_RUS	Correlation coefficient	1,000	-,036	-,053
		Value (two-side)	.	,709	,522
		N	150	110	148
	bloc13_China	Correlation coefficient	-,036	1,000	,065
		Value (two-side)	,709	.	,498
		N	110	110	110
	bloc13_Mon	Correlation coefficient	-,053	,065	1,000
		Value (two-side)	,522	,498	.
		N	148	110	148

As we can see, the responses of Chinese students in relation to Russian were ($r = -0.36$) with a weak negative relationship, in relation to Mongolian ($r = 0.065$) with a weak positive relationship. Answers of Mongolian students in relation to Russian were with a weak negative relationship ($r = -0.53$), with Chinese students ($r = 0.065$).

With an average level of IC formation of Russian students in 80.64 % different responses from Mongolian and Chinese students were observed. Despite the fact that the lowest rate of IC in this component in Chinese students (69.97 %), the quality of it is closer to the answers of Mongolian students.

In our opinion, it is necessary to take into account the diversity of results in the development of materials in the formation of intercultural competence. The results in the “Personal management” block suggest that the answers of Mongolian and Chinese students are more similar. If we consider personal management as a way of self-presentation and management of their goals in communication, we can refer to the description of the characteristic properties of communication in cultures. American Manager P. Drucker in his work stressed that management comes from the culture of society, values, traditions, customs, religion, government and regime. The more the management of the organization is based on social traditions, values and faith, the more obvious its success is (Dugarova, 2017).

The student is a full-fledged part of the educational process, which absorbs the main culturally determined ways of communication. V.V. Malyavin in the book “China managed. Good old management” highlights the following features of Chinese communication: they are not accustomed to put their “Self” in the first place, and declare openly their personal interests and desires. They give great, even exceptional, importance to symbolic forms of communication — all kinds of emblems, formulas of politeness, normative gestures and other ways of expression that indicate the nameless and inexplicable in naming and explaining, emphasize the importance of silence in speech, symbols are important in communication. Knowledge in Chinese is survival, “bodily assimilation” (ti Hui) of the very quality of the present situation. Hence the inability of the Chinese to open discussion and to substantiate consistently or develop the point of view he has adopted. The clash of arguments is replaced in China by the exchange of the same private and aesthetically significant formulas, quotations, hints (Malyavin, 2019).

Symbolic thinking is also present in Mongolian culture. Its strength and power is closely related to the views of the Mongols about the unity of objects and phenomena of the world and their external and internal relations (Popkov, 2010).

As for the peculiarities of Russian communicative behavior, it is characterized by self-presentation, in the process of which communication is focused on self-affirmation (Morozova, 2019).

In this setting, the person dominates the interlocutor, does not take into account his opinion, statements and replicas. As a consequence, the interlocutor does not have the opportunity to speak.

This style of communication implies the predominance of the dominant side in the dialogue (Balakay, 2001). The communicants in Russia are characterized by egocentrism, that is, most often they do not know how or do not want to listen to the interlocutor, tend to switch attention exclusively to themselves. In communication of Russian people their communicative reactions are reflected. For example, during a conversation, they lose interest in the interlocutor and, accordingly, to the information that the speaker broadcasts. A distinctive feature of communicative behavior of Russians is manifested in pointing to human speech errors, which is a deviation from the ethical norms of behavior in communication (Tan, 2017).

We can assume that the ability of Mongolian and Chinese students to perceive information figuratively through symbols may be a different way of formulating the goal, less openly and more attentively than in Russian students.

If we consider the sphere of “Social interaction”, then in the block “building professional networks” (the ability to build a network of people consciously in order to meet emerging needs and achieve goals), we can see a correlation with all groups of respondents, but it describes different relationships: Russian students’ responses to Chinese have a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.050$) and a weak positive correlation to Mongolian ones ($r = 0.109$). The responses of Chinese students have a weak negative correlation with Russian students ($r = -0.050$) and with Mongolian students ($r = -0.044$). The responses of Mongolian students showed a weak positive correlation with Russian young people ($r = 0.109$), and the responses of Mongolian students showed a weak negative correlation with Chinese students ($r = -0.44$).

Social interaction is an important part of communication, including intercultural, in which society evaluates human actions in a certain way and reflects the value component of interaction. Marinov M.B. gives one of the definitions of social interaction: “Interaction – dynamic interaction and the relationship between two or more variables, when the value of one variable affects the value of other variables. Social interaction is a process in which individuals and groups in the course of communication influence other individuals and other groups by their behavior, causing responses (Vrublevskaya, 2006). It is important to clarify in the course of the study whether students of different cultures experience difficulties in interaction, whether they are ready to build contacts actively, what answers have one vector of decision-making.

Table 2. Correlation in the block “Building professional networks”

Correlations

			bloc14_RUS	bloc14_China	bloc14_Mon
Po Spearman	bloc14_RUS	Correlation coefficient	1,000	-,050	,109
		Value (two-side)	.	,606	,188
		N	150	110	148
	bloc14_China	Correlation coefficient	-,050	1,000	-,044
		Value (two-side)	,606	.	,648
		N	110	110	110
	bloc14_Mon	Correlation coefficient	,109	-,044	1,000
		Value (two-side)	,188	,648	.
		N	148	110	148

This component of IC is formed in Mongolian students by 70.58 %, almost by 5 %, compared to Mongolian students, the level of IC is lower in Chinese students, the lowest is observed in Russian students. The correlation matrix shows that the choice of components of Chinese students’ answers differs from Russian and Mongolian ones. Despite the fact that the level of IC of Chinese students is above average, it is necessary to pay attention to the allocation of other accents in the construction of professional connections. It is necessary to look for a slightly different approach to build professional connections in teaching or working with Chinese students.

Let us consider another important sphere “Communication”. Communication is understood as the most important factor of human activity, which has its own special characteristics, system, internal processes, social interaction, and interaction of individuals. As an object of research,

communication is studied by different scientists from different points of view. Thus, the most interesting from a practical point of view is the analysis of the so-called intercultural communication, when there is communication between representatives of different cultures. The extent to which communication will be successful depends on a number of factors: the level of foreign language proficiency, knowledge and understanding of the cultural background, sex and age characteristics, the level of tolerance of both communicants, as well as an important characteristic of successful intercultural communication is the simplicity, clarity and plainness of the statement (Grice, 1975). Communication can be considered successful if statements are formulated in such a way that they are clear and understandable to the recipient.

Table 3. Correlation in the block “Communication”

			Correlations		
			b1_RUS	b1_China	b1_Mon
Po Spearman	b1_RUS	Correlation coefficient	1,000	,114	,060
		Value (two-side)	.	,237	,467
		N	150	110	148
	b1_China	Correlation coefficient	,114	1,000	,195*
		Value (two-side)	,237	.	,041
		N	110	110	110
	b1_Mon	Correlation coefficient	,060	,195*	1,000
		Value (two-side)	,467	,041	.
		N	148	110	148

*. The correlation is significant at 0.05 (two-side).

In the process of correlation analysis of variables in the block “Clarity of communication” it was revealed: the answers of Russian students in relation to Chinese students show a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.114$), as well as to the answers of Mongolian ones ($r = 0.060$). Mongolian and Chinese students have more similar answers to questions about clarity and plainness in communication.

The results of Chinese students in the block on the clarity of communication in relation to the answers of both Russian ($r = 0.114$) and Mongolian ($r = 0.195$) are characterized by a weak positive correlation. Mongolian and Chinese students have the closest understanding and attitude to communication.

As for the degree of communication of the answers in the block on the clarity of communication of Mongolian students, we can distinguish a weak positive correlation with the answers of Russian students at $r\text{-Spearman} = 0.060$.

Thus, the Spearman correlation coefficient in the block “Clarity in communication” is characterized by a weak positive correlation and shows that students from Mongolia, China and Russia responded relatively equally to the test tasks. However, it should be noted that Mongolian and Chinese students have a more similar understanding of the clarity of communication than Russian students.

4. Conclusion

A comparison of the responses of students from the three countries shows that the components of IC in young people of Russia and Mongolia are closer than in Chinese. In other components, Mongolian and Chinese students often differ from Russians in their answers.

The reflection of ethnic and psychological features is certainly the system of higher education of the country, which broadcast the values of the state and proven methods of teaching of the native country. At the same time, the university is an important component in the formation of social interaction.

Through the method of observation, it was revealed that when Chinese students come to Russia and are in a language environment, they do not seek to communicate with native speakers. The researchers highlight the peculiarity of the psychology of the Chinese, which consists

in their isolation and restraint. For example, it is difficult for them to decide to initiate communication with strangers. Traditional teaching methods and the Chinese educational system also have a huge impact on the ways of communication. The main goal for a student in China is to memorize a large amount of information and reproduce it. This method of training does not provide for the analysis and expression of their opinions to the received material. Students do not form the skill of predicting the content of the text by its name, by keywords, by the beginning of a sentence or word. When learning foreign languages, including Russian, most Chinese have a non-communicative style of learning other languages, wildcard exercises are performed easily by them, but they hardly master speech skills. Even if they successfully master the rules of the Russian language for a long time, they feel uncertainty in the use of lexical and grammatical forms; it is difficult for them to overcome the psychological barrier in the communication process.

From a psychological point of view, we believe that this is a consequence of one of the features of the Chinese mentality, more focused on internal mental and intellectual activity. M.T. Fakhruddinova believes that “the Chinese have a concept of honor, literally translated into Russian as “face”: this category involves the fear of making a mistake and losing their “face” in society” (Fakhruddinova, 2016).

In communication, it is unacceptable for the Chinese to lose respect; this explains the reluctance of the Chinese to share their opinions in public. For this reason, the teacher should correct errors correctly, exercise restraint when analyzing incorrect answers. For effective social integration of Chinese students, this is an important factor of successful communication. Most likely, active methods of training should be applied carefully, gradually and constantly increasing the degree of dynamism in dialogues and team games (Tan, 2017).

As for the interaction of Mongolian students with Chinese and Russian ones, a more positive correlation is observed in the construction of social ties between Russian and Mongolian students.

On the one hand, we can talk about already existing methods of communication between the Mongols and the Russians: the Mongols for a long period, cooperated with the Russian, for example, the Soviet period is characterized by the knowledge of the Russian language and Russian culture in Mongolia. In the blocks on building professional networks, creating trust, creating and maintaining contacts, there are similarities in the answers.

On the other hand, mentality, culture is different: the results, for example, in the block “Integration in the group” suggest that Mongolian students choose other answers in achieving interaction.

Based on the findings of the study “Cultural value orientations of Russian and Mongolian students” conclusions are made that Russian students focused more on traditional (focus on traditions, the past, the nature is mysterious, decision-making happens more collectively) and dynamically developing culture (future orientation, independence from society, the goal is to achieve success and material wealth is on the 1st place) and less focused on contemporary culture (emphasis on the present, interested in environmental issues, important rights and human values etc.); Mongols are more oriented to dynamically developing culture and less oriented to traditional culture (Dugarova, 2017).

In this case, Mongolian students’ individual values prevail and it is important to show the priority of their values.

Thus, in general, we can talk about the stability of the test, as the correlation can be traced in all blocks, which indicates the relationship of the responses of the subjects with the content of the test and the fact that the respondents were dealing with one phenomenon. The correlation analysis revealed different degrees of connection between the respondents’ answers, which indicates the difference in perception and behavior, the students’ assessment of the phenomena of intercultural communication. This allowed us to determine the vector in which components of the IC have the same understanding, and where to look for radically new approaches.

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