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# Comparative Analysis of Intercultural Communication Apprehension Displayed by International Students in the US Interacting with American Students and Other Internationals

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The Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Comparative Analysis of Intercultural Communication Apprehension Displayed by International  
Students in the US Interacting with American Students and Other Internationals

by

Laura Nunez Quero

*A Thesis* submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree  
in Communication & Media Technologies

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December 14, 2014

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION  
APPREHENSION DISPLAYED BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE US  
INTERACTING WITH AMERICAN STUDENTS AND OTHER INTERNATIONALS

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Degree: Master of Science in Communication & Media Technologies

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Abstract

This study compares the levels of intercultural communication apprehension of two groups of international students in the United States when interacting with American students and with each other. These groups are Indian students and Dominican students. Results indicate no significant difference on the levels of anxiety that both populations experience while interacting interculturally. However, in both cases, subjects with a poorer dominance of the English language, regardless of other variables such as gender and age, experience higher levels of intercultural communication apprehension (ICA).

*Keywords:* intercultural communication, communication apprehension, international students

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In the globalized world that we live in, communicating effectively across cultures has a stronger significance than ever before. Thus, understanding intercultural communication is key to avoid racial or ethnic tensions (Neuliep, 2014). In the particular case of international students, which are a growing population in English-speaking countries like the United States, developing abilities to communicate interculturally has a positive impact on their academic performance (Mak, Brown, & Wadey, 2013) and can also lead them to “personal growth through increased tolerance” (Neuliep, 2014, p. 6).

Intercultural communication, defined by Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Roy (2013) as “interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems differ enough to influence the communication event” (p. 8), has become a required subject of instruction for students due to the increasing internationalization of college campuses worldwide (Fall, Kelly, MacDonald, Prim, & Holmes, 2013).

Only in the United States, which is currently the top choice for international students from countries of Asia (especially China), Africa, and Latin America, the number of foreign students enrolled in universities during the 2013-2014 academic year was 886,052 (Institute of International Education, 2014). This number represents an 8% increment from the previous year and over 4% of the overall graduate and undergraduate enrollments across the country, according to the Open Doors Report on International Education (Institute of International Education, 2014).

Unfortunately, due to factors such as language barriers, cultural uncertainty, and unfamiliarity with the new environment, many international students may face what is known as *intercultural communication apprehension* or ICA (Liu, 2007). This is a phenomenon that

contributes to them feeling anxiety during academic and social activities that require interaction with members of both the host society and other cultures. In fact, ICA could be experienced in any scenario where interaction between people from different ethnicities, cultures, languages, backgrounds, and even beliefs takes place (Fall et al., 2013).

Anxiety is usually experienced in the form of noticeable loss of control, psychological arousal (a feeling similar to having a panic attack), fear of visual scrutiny, and fear of revealing said anxiety (Horowitz, 2002). It can also be described as feeling frightened before the possibility of engaging in interaction, creating with this a predisposition against encounters that require communication (Pate & Merker, 1978). This phenomenon affects a large number of students, particularly in their first two years of college; therefore, efforts to overcome apprehension should be done early in students' careers, if not prior to their insertion in an academic environment (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989).

Apprehensive feelings while communicating interculturally, or being faced with the possibility of doing so, have been identified as a causal agent in student success, academically and socially, according to the findings of McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, and Payne (1989). Academically, higher levels of communication apprehension (CA) are often related to lower grade averages and less likelihood for the completion of studies for a college degree (McCroskey et al., 1989). "Higher communication apprehension is always implicated with poorer outcomes of academic achievement" (McCroskey et al., 1989, p. 104).

In another study, McCroskey, along with Rosenfeld and Grant (1995), found that when it comes to communication apprehension and academic success, anxiety to communicate in dyads (conversation between only two people) and in groups are the types of apprehension that have the strongest negative impact in said success. This means that the higher the levels of



apprehension, the lower the probability of academic success. Since academic systems emphasize considerably these two types of interaction, students find themselves at a disadvantage.

High levels of ICA, specifically in international students, also seem to be related to having negative expectations prior to a study abroad experience (Kim & Goldstein, 2005). This can happen when a student is preparing to relocate to a society traditionally considered as ethnocentric because the members of said societies tend to have higher chances of behaving in a suspicious, hostile, and defensive manner to international students, especially those who were raised under different cultural and social norms than their own (McKeiver, 2013).

In addition to this, having a poor previous knowledge of the language as well as the verbal and nonverbal communication styles of the nation where international students are going to be relocating to are also considered as variables that contribute to the development of ICA (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). Samovar et al. (2013) argue that the consequences of lacking these skills can even contribute to culture shock and delay the adaptation process. About this matter they quote Ralph Waldo Emerson who said that “No man should travel until he has learned the language of the country he visits. Otherwise he makes himself a great baby, so helpless and so ridiculous” (p. 13).

## **Review of Literature**

### **Intercultural Communication**

A definition of intercultural communication places it next to the concepts of interethnic, interracial, and intergroup communication, explaining that this is a type of interaction in which all participants perceive themselves as different in many levels like background, language, or culture in general (Kim, 2007). As Fall et al. (2013) point out intercultural communication

cannot be limited to geographical distance and verbal interaction when there are sign systems and diverse cultural behaviors that play a role in these types of interaction as well.

Intercultural communication as a proper concept can be considered recent. It was in 1959 when Edward T. Hall published in his book *The Silent Language* what is known as the first reference of this type of interaction. Due to this, Hall is generally considered the founder of intercultural communication as a social discipline. The basic concept explained in the publication is that culture is communication (Neuliep, 2014).

For Neuliep (2014) intercultural communication is a consequence of the increasingly diverse world that we have today, and this, far from being negative, is very beneficial because communicating and relating to people from cultures different than our own can help develop better communities, national and international commerce, social tolerance, and also can reduce conflict in any scale. He argues that “only when diverse people come together and interact can they unify, rather than separate. Unity is impossible without communication. Intercultural communication is a necessity” (p. 10).

In educational settings, intercultural communication is a very valuable practice to encourage in students because it promotes the development of intercultural proficiency and openness to cultural diversity. These assets have become indispensable in today’s “multicultural global market” and that is why academic institutions of today make great efforts to design a variety of study abroad programs (Clarke III, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009).

A first and essential step towards the development of intercultural communication is the acquisition of a fund of knowledge about other cultures in order to increase cultural awareness. This means learning about fundamental characteristics of the culture an individual is going to interact with, such as religion, history, political system, and common values (Samovar et al.,

2013). According to Dodd (1998), failing to achieve this will result in anger, frustrations, and difficulties in establishing social relationships.

The ultimate objective of these intercultural practices is to eventually achieve what has been conceptualized as “true intercultural communication, which is a global state where everybody shares a common interest in one another, where one is eager to give and the other to take” in equal manner (Young, 1996, p. 183) cited in Kim (2007)). Baraldi (2006) suggests that this “harmonious” state of intercultural communication can be fulfilled by constructing a multicultural identity with universal values.

Looking at intercultural communication more in depth, and following that idea, interculturalist Carley Dodd (1998) designed a model that explains how intercultural communication happens and, more importantly, introduces the concept of a “third culture” created by different communicators with different cultures. In the model, a person from culture A and a person from culture B come together with their own personalities and interpersonal relationship styles, and from these they build a culture C, which is the third culture.

The model emphasizes that only after both communicators from cultures A and B have overcome their perceived cultural differences, which could lead them to feel uncertainty and anxiety, and have found motivation to practice adaptive strategies of communication, they could build a third culture, leaving their own cultures intact. However, in some cases, such as with international students, individuals do not work to create a third culture because they tend to focus their efforts on learning and adjusting to the new culture instead (Dodd, 1998).

This last idea of adaptation and acculturation through intercultural communication is the core of Kim’s integrative communication theory of cross cultural adaptation, which explains that

significant experiences of intercultural communication are crucial for an individual with an original cultural identity to gradually reach a new social adaptation (Kim, 2007).

Another theory that was developed in direct relation with the concept of intercultural communication is Orbe's co-cultural communication theory (1998). This one looks at the interaction of members of co-cultural groups and provides a guideline of how this interactive activity could develop, especially regarding the groups commonly referred to as minorities.

### **Co-cultural Communication Theory**

In the US, which is a very diverse nation with a dominant culture that Samovar et al. (2013) identify with a variety of terms including "umbrella culture" of mainstream culture (p. 8), there are many cultures that co-exist within the biggest umbrella culture. These groups are formed due to similarities based on age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and many other variables. And these groups, which some may call "minorities," are what Mark P. Orbe (1997) conceptualized as co-cultures.

"The word co-culture is embraced over other terminologies to signify the notion that no one culture in our society is inherently superior to other coexisting cultures" (Orbe, 1997, p. 2). Orbe refers to other terminologies with negative connotations like "sub-culture," and of course, "minority." Samovar et al. (2013) explain that a "co-culture" implies a "dual membership," because individuals who are part of these groups are also part of a larger culture, which usually is the dominant one. The authors exemplify being gay, a person of color, disabled, Latino, Chinese American, female, young, or old as being part of a co-culture.

Following that same line, being an international student in the United States, for instance, could be considered a co-culture as well because individuals of this group share perceptions of the world due to the knowledge and experiences that they have in common. In fact, Urban and

Orbe (2007) consider that since international students are cultural outsiders, and this reality has a significant effect in their communication practices, they are indeed a co-culture.

Departing from the concept of a co-culture, Orbe's co-cultural communication theory predicts the communication behaviors that members of these groups will adopt to deal with their underrepresentation in the media and other public communication structures (Orbe, 1997). "In its most general form, co-cultural communication refers to interactions among underrepresented and dominant group members" (Orbe, 1998, p. 233). Orbe notes that the theory was constructed based on the approach taken by members of a co-culture when faced with interaction with members of the dominant culture and their cultural differences arise.

According to Orbe (1998), there are nine different communication orientations assumed by members of a co-culture while communicating with members of other cultures. These orientations depend on the preferred outcome and the approach taken by the communicator. The preferred outcomes can be separation, accommodation, or assimilation, while the possible approaches could be aggressiveness, assertiveness, and non-assertiveness.

In everyday interactions, however, co-cultural group members could adopt more than one communication orientation, and this will depend on other variables that are going to influence their approach. These other factors, according to Orbe (1997), are their field or experience, perceived costs and rewards from every particular interaction, their individual capability, and the situational context in which an interaction with members of other cultures is set to happen.

Going back to international students in the US as a co-culture, Urban and Orbe (2007) point out that even though they are outsiders of the American culture, there is not much concern regarding their communication approach as an underrepresented community, because these

sojourners are simply expected to develop intercultural communication skills and adapt to the new culture.

### **Intercultural Communication Apprehension**

When communicating with others, some people experience fear or anxiety, and this is known as communication apprehension, as previously defined in this document. The father of this concept, Dr. James C. McCroskey, then went further and developed the model of intercultural communication apprehension based on similar emotions and thoughts than CA, but in relation to culture and linguistic barriers instead (Neuliep, 2014).

Just as the original concept of communication apprehension, ICA can be classified in four types, based on McCroskey's findings. These types are: "trait-like," context-based, audience based, and situational.

Trait-like ICA refers to an apprehension that is felt as part of someone's personality, a trait present in around 20% of adults in the US (Neuliep, 2014). Content-based apprehension is only experienced in certain contexts, usually considered as stressful such as job interviews, public speaking, and so forth (Gumus, Hamarat, & Dursun, 2005). Audience based ICA depends on the people the interaction would happen with, such as strangers from another culture, and situational ICA, which can happen to anyone, "occurs with the combination of a specific context and a specific audience" (Neuliep, 2014).

Regarding trait-like ICA, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1997) argue that in this specific scenario, where the intercultural communication element is present, apprehension may not necessarily be part of the personality of an individual. Instead, it may be more of a situational apprehension, which occurs when the individual is faced with the possibility of interaction with people from a different cultural background. This means that people who have

experienced ICA may not necessarily feel communication apprehension in their own cultural environment; therefore, it is not a trait of their personality (Apaibanditku, 2006).

The most commonly identified effects of ICA over people are negative perceptions of cultural differences and a display of uncomfortable behavior in cases of imminent cross cultural interaction (Mak et al., 2013). Being more specific, these emotions tend to be, but are not limited to, uncertainty, frustration, stress, and unpleasantness.

An important variable related to ICA is emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to process emotional thoughts and perceive those of others as well. It is a trait said to allow people to work through emotions in order to achieve goals (Fall et al., 2013). According to the findings of Mak, Brown, and Wadey (2013) it is a direct predictor of intercultural communication apprehension. That is, higher levels of emotional intelligence are often associated with lower levels of ICA, meaning that between these variables exists an inverse relationship. “The implication of this finding is that individuals with higher emotional intelligence may be able to mitigate apprehension caused by intercultural communication” (p. 8).

Higher levels of ICA are often related to high levels of ethnocentrism. This happens when an individual believes that no significant gain comes from interacting with people that are culturally different from the individual’s own background, which may add to the anxiety this individual could feel when facing the possibility of engaging in contact with another culture (Kim & Goldstein, 2005). On the contrary, Chen (2010) states that lower levels of ethnocentrism are usually predicted by a tendency to intercultural engagement.

Another influential variable against intercultural communication that could set the ground for communication apprehension is intercultural sensitivity. The lower it is the higher are the chances an individual has to experience ICA. In the opposite case, an individual with respect for

cultural differences and feelings of intercultural enjoyment is less likely to experience communication apprehension (Chen, 2010).

ICA could also be triggered by the presence of speech anxiety during the first opportunities for cross cultural interaction of an individual (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996). However, this anxiety can be overcome with language competency (Apaibanditku, 2006), which is one of the reasons why many individuals successfully face cross cultural interactions with lower chances of experiencing ICA.

Campbell (1967), cited by Apaibanditkul (2006), argues that not every culture values speech skills as much, and for this reason the practice of “silence” can be considered a key element in communication apprehension as well. This is because in many Asian and African cultures, in contrast to Western cultures like the United States, oral behavior is not as important and silence is not considered an asocial practice. The author concludes these cultural differences, when it comes to speech, can be considered influential on the chances of an individual to develop uncertainty and ICA.

Low levels of ICA are generally perceived as qualities from more competent and intelligent people, which are important characteristics of young professionals, according to Fall et al. (2013), based on the findings of McCroskey. This is especially true when professionals are required to perform at an international level, like usually happens in multinational corporations in today’s global market.

To contribute to the establishment of these and other correlations, Neuliep and McCroskey (1997a) developed a data gathering tool that “measures the fear people experience when interacting with others from different cultural groups.” The instrument is called the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension, often referred to as PRICA.



ICA in general has been a well-researched subject by social scientists, but there are still variables that have not been tested in relation to it. Lin (2012), for instance, notes that the number of literature on ICA and international students in the US is not large regarding variables such as length of time in the US, number of American friends, an individual's educational level, and English competency. Fall et al. (2013) agree that ICA and its relation to particular demographics, has not been well explored yet.

### **ICA and International Students**

International students are very valuable in higher education, not only for their contribution to an understanding of this globalized world, but for more practical reasons such as the economic benefits they bring. For instance, in the United States, international students represent a significant percentage of the contribution for education. During the 2012-2013 academic year, international students contributed around 24 billion to the U.S. economy (NAFSA, 2013).

The presence of international students represents a growing opportunity for educational institutions because they increase intercultural learning, represent future business connections, and promote foreign policy interest; for these reasons many universities have created strategies to attract students from abroad, such as simpler visa and college application processes (Snow-Andrade, 2006).

However, attracting internationals is only the beginning of it, because after they enroll, the university must orient its efforts to their successful adaptation, looking to provide them with a positive college experience. This can be achieved by promoting the development of intercultural communication skills to avoid the rise of ICA and other communication barriers, not only in them as guest students, but also in their local students who will act as hosts.

These skills have been differently identified by many scholars through many years of research since the 1980s. These skills include communication competence, verbal and nonverbal sensitivity, and cross-cultural adaptability. “Essentially, effective intercultural communicators must have an understanding of cultural differences, an ability to overcome barriers, and a desire to use these communication skills” (Williams, 2005, p. 359).

Othman, Ruslan, and Ahmad (2012) suggest that educational systems should be able to support the practice of intercultural processes. By doing this, academic institutions would not only be counting on less apprehensive international students in terms of intercultural communication, but also on more interculturally skillful local students, who will tend less to display negative attitudes toward foreign students and avoid experiencing high levels of ICA (Mak et al., 2013).

This is an approach that can be taken out of this specific context of universities for a moment and applied to the general American population, according to Neuliep (2014), because, he notes, even though the US “prides itself on being a nation of immigrants,” there might be some sense of “uncertainty, fear, and disgust” among different cultural and ethnic groups (p. 10).

Either these feelings of uncertainty, when it comes to intercultural communication in the case of students, come from both ends of the equation (Americans and Internationals) or not. The tendency is that international students have been found to affiliate and form interpersonal relationships with Americans only when there are small numbers of individuals from their own cultural background present on their campus. Arguments of international students as to why this happens refer to communication difficulties as the main reason, specifically in terms of language barriers, which promotes anxiety (Urban, Orbe, Tavares, & Alvarez, 2010).

Said anxiety and communication apprehension have been perceived by international students—concretely non-native English speakers—as stronger when interacting with native speakers of the host culture than when interacting with members of other cultural groups who also happen to be non-native speakers of English (Liu, 2007).

Ironically, international students with less access to individuals from their own nationality happen to gain a better competence of the English language than the ones that do have such access (Ying & Han, 2008). Even though for some cultural groups, like Dominicans, having a supportive group of nationals provides them with emotional support, an increased English fluency would probably be more effective to help lower their levels of ICA.

These differences in interaction of international students with Americans and with other internationals have been discussed by Urban, Orbe, Tavares, and Alvarez (2010) in a study focused on Dominican international students. They found that internationals tend more to interact with other internationals with the desire to “understand the American culture together” (p. 239). However, usual interactions between them and Americans mostly occur just for academic or work purposes, not social purposes.

Vezzali, Crisp, Stathi, and Giovannini (2014) also report that there is consistent evidence of the preference of international students to interact with each other more than with host students. They argue that the possibility of those interactions may be affected by the common perception of host students that internationals have cultural adjustment difficulties. However, in most cases, according to their research, international students are the ones that segregate the most from local students than the other way around.

Liu (2007) suggests that after understanding the social, cultural, and academic benefits of increasing their interaction with local students, internationals should opt to, for instance, share

dorm rooms with American students instead of their co-nationals, make American friends, not just limit interactions to classroom activities, or find other ways to increase their usage of English outside the classroom, which is one way the research revealed helps to decrease ICA.

Lin (2012) remarks that for Asian, especially Chinese, international students in the US, ICA is practically unavoidable. He discusses that cultural differences also influence this, but above all, language issues are the most important promoters of communication apprehension when interacting with Americans. According to Snow-Andrade (2006), these issues not only include verbal communication in English as a foreign or second language, but also other English-related skills such as listening and reading comprehension, as well vocabulary and, of course, writing.

All these findings about English competence make it easy to conclude that English fluency plays an important role in predicting possible levels of intercultural communication apprehension in new international students. In fact, findings suggest that even the adaptation of international students with strong foreign accents and communication issues can be difficult (Urban et al., 2010).

Other findings reveal that gender could imply a difference in predicted levels of intercultural communication apprehension in favor of women, who have been found to be less likely to experience it (Lin & Rancer, 2003). This may be because in general men are “more apprehensive than women in interpersonal conversations” and when encountering an intercultural scenario the feelings of anxiety could grow (p. 198).

Another variable that has been tested in relation to ICA in some studies is age (Apaibanditkul, 2006; Lin, 2012), but it was only found to be significantly related to be able to

predict high levels of ICA in Apaibanditkul's study, which focused on international students from Thailand in English speaking contexts.

### **Hypotheses**

Considering all the previous findings on ICA, the following six hypotheses have been proposed:

*H1* Dominican students will report higher levels of apprehension when interacting with American students than with Indian students.

*H2* Indian students will report higher levels of apprehension when interacting with American students than with Dominican students.

*H3* Indian and Dominican students will differ in anxiety levels when interacting with each other.

*H4* Males will report higher levels of apprehension than females.

*H5* English fluency is negatively related to intercultural communication apprehension.

*H6* Age is positively related to intercultural communication apprehension.

### **Method**

This study conducted a comparative analysis between two samples of culturally different populations of international students in an American university. The purpose was to compare their levels of ICA when interacting with American students as opposed to interacting with each other as internationals. The comparison was based on results obtained through a survey that required some demographic data, self-perceived levels of English fluency, and the participant's responses to the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA), developed by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997b).

## **Participants**

The study sampled 100 graduate students at an American university from the non-English speaking countries of Dominican Republic, located in the Caribbean, and India, located in South Asia. The population of Dominican students in the university where the study took place is 108. The population of Indian students is 844.

The subjects were only selected if they were holders of student visas and not permanent immigrants in the US. Both groups were contacted through email by the International Students Services office of the university. At the end of the data collection process, 66 students completed the survey.

## **Research Instrument**

To gather the main data for this study an adapted version of the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension was used. The PRICA measures communication anxiety in situational contexts and was developed after Neuliep and McCroskey (1997b) realized that “intercultural communication may be more anxiety producing than other forms of communication” (p.147), and that the number of individuals who may suffer from ICA at one point in their lives is considerable. This fact inspired them to create a measurement that could allow researchers to identify those individuals, as a first step towards a more successful intercultural communication.

The personal report presents statements that are “frequently made by people with regard to communication with people from other cultures” (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997a). It asks for an indication of agreement with each statement using a seven element Likert scale that begins with *disagree strongly* and moves all the way to *agree strongly*.

PRICA was developed along with the Personal Report of Interethnic Communication Apprehension (PRECA), based on the concept of ICA, as well. Neuliep and McCroskey initially administered both scales to 396 individuals to test their effectiveness. These individuals were undergraduate students of a liberal arts college located in Midwestern United States. More than half of these students were females and the overall average of their ages was 19 years. Another relevant piece of data is that 97 % of these students were Caucasian. The other 3 % corresponded to Native American and, in a minor range, other ethnicities.

During that first stage of the PRICA and PRECA, which were directly modeled after the PRICA24 (scale to measure general communication apprehension), the scales had 32 items, half of them worded positively and the rest negatively. At the end each scale ended up with 14 items (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997b).

In their conclusions, Neuliep and McCroskey (1997b) agreed that both scales are “reliable and generally valid” (p. 152). Also, they discuss how the scales are unidimensional and stable. According to Fall et al. (2013), PRICA has “excellent face and convergent validity” (p. 7), with a reliability score equivalent to .95.

## **Results**

This study hypothesized about the differences in reported levels of communication apprehension of two populations of international students when interacting with American students and with each other. To test H1, which refers to the levels of ICA of Dominican students when interacting with Americans as opposed to when interacting with Indians, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. The results did not support the premise ( $U = 318.5$ ,  $p = .902$ ), showing that the mean ranks in both interaction cases were very similar.

The same procedure was used to test H2, which refers to the levels of ICA of Indians when interacting with Americans as opposed to their levels when interacting with Dominicans, and again the results were not statistically significant; thus they did not support the hypothesis ( $U = 456.5, p = .608$ ).

The third hypothesis, “Indian and Dominican students will differ in anxiety levels when interacting with each other,” was also tested using a Mann-Whitney U test and the results followed the same trend ( $U = 456.5, p = .608$ ), not supporting the premise. These first three results were all confirmed by running a Wilcoxon W test for each case, as well. These tests confirmed the results previously obtained.

In the case of the fourth hypothesis proposed in this study, “Males will report higher levels of intercultural communication than females,” a Mann-Whitney U test determined that even though the results were slightly more significant than the previous tests conducted, there was not enough support for this hypothesis ( $U = 443.5, p = .229$ ). However, H5 tested with a Spearman’s rho test of correlations did result in statistically significant data ( $r_s = .314, N = 66, p < .05$ ), demonstrating a relation between levels of ICA and self-perceived levels of English fluency in both groups of international students.

The final hypothesis, which proposed a relation between levels of ICA and age, was also tested using a Spearman’s rho test and its results revealed that these particular variables are not related. The data obtained ( $r_s = .110, p = .379$ ) did not support the premise.

### **Discussion**

This study had the objective of comparing the levels of intercultural communication apprehension displayed by two different populations of international students in terms of nationality (Indians and Dominicans) and culture, in order gain a solid understanding of the two



and to be able to draw conclusions of significant importance to the prediction of future trends on intercultural communication regarding these particular groups. The first group is the largest present on the college campus where this study took place, and the latter is one of the fastest growing populations of international students in the US, particularly in New York State (Urban et al., 2010).

Contrary to the findings of Liu (2007) and Urban (2010), the present study did not find statistically significant data to be able to contrast the levels of ICA displayed by these groups when interacting with Americans, than when interacting with each other. These findings suggest that the studied groups have a similar approach before the possibility of any intercultural interaction; however, they also raise the question of whether a qualitative approach to the same population would have been able to result in a different outcome. Another possibility is that these results simply provide evidence of the idea that nowadays international students are a population integrated by individuals who are more aware of cultural diversity and therefore more capable of embracing intercultural communication with the same approach, regardless of the culture or ethnicity.

Results also show that demographic variables like gender and age do not work as predictors of intercultural communication apprehension, contrasting with the work of Lin and Rancer (2003) and Apaibanditkul (2006), respectively. However, English fluency does indeed behave as a strong predictor of ICA.

For these two populations of non-native English speakers, their self-perceived levels of language competence of English seem to directly influence their likeliness to experience anxiety during intercultural interactions. This variable was measured using the Interagency Language Roundtable scale, which ranks from no proficiency at all to bilingual proficiency. At the same

time, agreeing with Liu (2007), it can be concluded that any improvement on international students' levels of English competence could be considered a point in favor of reducing high levels of ICA or even avoiding it from being experienced in the first place.

### **Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research**

The present study had significant limitations in terms on the size of both samples of the studied population. In addition to this, only 66% of the total of international students targeted to participate in the research process responded to the survey, which reduced even more the general sample used to obtain these findings. For this reason, the results obtained must be interpreted with much caution.

A second limitation of this study could be the usage of the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension or any other qualitative measure because, considering how much the world has changed in the past decades in terms of globalization and intercultural communication, a qualitative approach, or even better a triangulated approach, combining both types of research styles, could deliver richer data to be able to reach more wide and deep conclusions about the subject.

Future research departing from this study using a small sample once again is recommended to be done by conducting in depth interviews or organizing focus groups. However, if the study were to be replicated using qualitative research tools once again, then it is suggested a bigger sample of subjects and maybe even the involvement of other populations of international students be included. A suggestion would be to compare international students from China and Brazil, which are other countries with large numbers of students present in American universities.

For future research also it is suggested to experiment with other variables like emotional intelligence and, of course, to look further into the relationship between ICA and English proficiency in non-native speakers.

Another possibility for future research is to focus on the experiences with intercultural communication apprehension of host students, since much of the research done so far has been focused exclusively on the perspective of the sojourners and their struggles. Looking at the host population would provide a new point of view that could reveal new possibilities to improve intercultural competency in students in general.

### **Conclusion**

For international students, traveling abroad to pursue an academic degree in a new environment constitutes a great personal challenge; not only are they required to succeed in the classroom, but also they must reach a level of adaptation and acculturation in a short period of time that could empower them to socially function. It is not an easy task, but the rewards in the form of intercultural proficiency are worth the struggle due to the high desirability of these skills in professionals in the global market.

Intercultural communication apprehension is one of the barriers between international students and those intercultural skills, because it hinders their necessary process of adaptation and also affects their academic success. These facts are part of what justifies this study and provide significance to the findings that resulted from this research process.

In a world where globalization has set the base for constant intercultural interaction through technology accessible for many, such as social media, findings that suggest that differences in culture are not a significant variable to predict intercultural communication

apprehension can be seen as even pleasant because they evidence a growing sense of an international community where individuals are more interculturally sensitive and aware.

Also, findings that reveal that age or gender do not make a difference in the chances for a population to experience apprehension to intercultural communication are also good news, especially because this conclusion allows a deeper focus on the matter that does have an influence on this area: language.

It seems that being able to communicate in the language of others, using the same codes, nonverbal communication styles, and understanding appropriately simple expressions, means a lot to the success of intercultural communication, and the particular success of an individual in a new environment as well. In the case of this study, English proficiency is the most important tool that an international student from a non-English speaking nation should have prior to an abroad experience in the US.

It is this researcher's opinion that language issues are a less controversial element to predict ICA than, say, cultural differences, unwillingness to communicate interculturally, or cultural stereotyping. Language competency is an issue that can be corrected for present and future international students worldwide who will, most likely, have a more productive and satisfactory intercultural experience in the future if findings like the ones provided by this study are taken into consideration.

One important addition is that even though the results of this study are intended to be useful to international students' offices of universities in the US or to exchange student programs, they are not exclusively valuable in an academic context alone. These conclusions can be applied to big corporations with large bodies of international employees handling operations

in different points of the world, or even to tourists coming to or from the US, or any other nation in this interconnected world that we live in today.

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## Appendix A

## Survey

1 **Gender?** Male Female

2 **How old are you?**

3 **What is your level of English knowledge?**

Elementary Limited Working Proficiency Professional Working Proficiency

Full Professional Proficiency Native or Bilingual

4 **Provide your impression of the following statements about your usual interaction with American students. Use the using the following choices:**

**Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree.**

- 1 Generally, I am comfortable interacting with a group of students from the American culture.
- 2 I am tense and nervous while interacting with students from the American culture.
- 3 I like to get involved in group discussion with others who are from the United States of America.
- 4 Engaging in a group discussion with students from American culture makes me nervous.
- 5 I am calm and relaxed with interacting with a group of students who are from American culture.
- 6 While participating in a conversation with a student from the American culture, I get nervous.

- 7 I have no fear of speaking up in a conversation with a student from the American culture.
- 8 Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in a conversation with a student from the U.S.
- 9 Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations with a student from the U.S.
- 10 While conversing with a student from the American culture, I feel very relaxed.
- 11 I am afraid to speak up in conversations with student from the American culture.
- 12 I face the prospect of interacting with students from the American culture with confidence.
- 13 My thoughts become confused and jumbled when interacting with students from the American culture.
- 14 Communicating with American students makes me feel uncomfortable.

**5 Now provide your impression of the following statements about your usual interaction with Indian students. Use the using the following choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree.**

- 1 Generally, I am comfortable interacting with a group of students from the Indian culture.
- 2 I am tense and nervous while interacting with students from the India culture.
- 3 I like to get involved in group discussion with others who are from India.

- 4 Engaging in a group discussion with students from Indian culture makes me nervous.
- 5 I am calm and relaxed with interacting with a group of students who are from the Indian culture.
- 6 While participating in a conversation with a student from the Indian culture, I get nervous.
- 7 I have no fear of speaking up in a conversation with a student from the Indian culture.
- 8 Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in a conversation with a student from the India.
- 9 Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations with a student from India.
- 10 While conversing with a student from the Indian culture, I feel very relaxed.
- 11 I am afraid to speak up in conversations with student from the Indian culture.
- 12 I face the prospect of interacting with students from the Indian culture with confidence.
- 13 My thoughts become confused and jumbled when interacting with students from the Indian culture.
- 14 Communicating with Indian students makes me feel uncomfortable.

## Appendix B

## Letter to Research Subject

Dear student,

International students are a growing population in America and for academic institutions it is important to acquire new knowledge about any phenomena that could hinder their adaptation process, academic and social performance. This study looks at how we, as international students, interact with our peers from local or international backgrounds in different scenarios. The purpose is to be able to predict with variables affect the usual communication process of international students between peers and for that reason we are requesting your participation in the study by completing a survey.

If you decide to participate, know this survey will only take around 10 minutes to complete and the questions that will be asked are exclusively about demographic data, language fluency, and your usual interaction with American students or international students from another country.

Please note that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Also know that your responses will be kept in complete confidentiality, since you will not be asked to provide any personal data or even log in with any account to participate.

Furthermore, the individual results obtained will not be disclosed under any circumstances.

The researcher does not anticipate any risks or harms related to your participation in the study, however, if there is any inconvenience or if concerns arise, don't hesitate to reach her or the Associate Director of the Human Subjects Research Office here at RIT.

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Thank you for your participation.