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The analysis of intercultural conflicts between students of tertiary education

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Abstract

The study focuses on analysis of intercultural conflicts between students of tertiary education. The author focuses on the definition of intercultural conflicts as a consequence of interculturally incompetent behavior. Intercultural competences are important part of intercultural education and their development is very important to archive intercultural dialogue between people without intolerance and disrespect.

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1. Main text

With globalization, the constant interactions between people, cultures and civilizations will increasingly become and the mobility and migration will create an intercultural society and the question of peaceful coexistence in the context of the cultures will be an ongoing challenge. Intercultural society is one in which there is a mutual meetings, cultural exchanges, cooperation and dialogue of people who are culturally different. This difference can be understood as an opportunity to enrich themselves, but can also be a potential source of conflict. Intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts arise because interculturally incompetent behavior during the dealing with people who are different. Intercultural conflicts are also the subject of our study. The theme is intercultural conflicts in the

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school environment, respectively at a university environment. Scientists, teachers, and students agree that the world around them changes both politically and economically, culturally, socially and technologically (Janebová, 2009). The population of students in higher education doubled[†] and it opens the way to increase their skills and qualification and thereby improve the labor market, but provides to tertiary education on the other hand, a new element of socio-cultural variability of students. Variability of students at Czech universities with different cultural backgrounds, values, personality, increases the probability of interpersonal conflicts. According to Crawford & Bodine (1996), many conflicts in the school environment arising from differences - ethnic, ethnicity, gender, class, physical and mental. Such conflicts are called intercultural conflicts, which may take the form of prejudice, discrimination and harassment. However, these conflicts must be viewed comprehensively, because their nature is not only prejudice and discrimination, but are also the result of the structure and relationship of inequality and privilege. Their occurrence should be seen as a very serious problem that affects the environment of the whole institution and thus must logically be reflected in the student performance. According Vallaster (2005) the ways how people interpret their environment, how they think, feel and act, are often too divergent and creates barriers to the smooth cooperation. If people of different cultural backgrounds are more likely to achieve the objectives in different ways, the more this diversity can cause conflicts, which hampers the efficient development of a "shared understanding" (Vallaster, 2005). The impact of conflict on student achieve academic success - from the performance of a task to the work ethic - is undeniable and interests of teachers to teach students effective and non-violent methods of conflict resolution increases.

1.1. Theoretical background

The aim of this article is to present results of our research. Aim of the research was to analyze intercultural conflicts among university students, to analyze the occurrence of intercultural conflicts among students and find out how students are informed about intercultural conflicts, and the awareness about intercultural conflict. Intercultural conflict is defined as a perceived or actual discrepancy of cultural values, norms, customs, habits and traditions. Ting-Toomey & Oetzel (2001) define intercultural conflict as "emotional experience of frustration in conjunction with the perceived incompatibility of values, norms, goals, scarce resources, processes and / or outcomes between at least two people from different cultural communities in an interactive situation." Intercultural Conflict arises from differences between the groups and their socio-cultural misunderstanding. We are often poorly informed about the differences between the various socio-cultural groups and their different behavior, which leads to mutual verbal and nonverbal misunderstandings. Some of the conflicts can begin trivial, because one side interprets the behavior of the other wrongly: I. Confirmation own position ("I got the truth"), II. Verbal abuse and devaluation on a personal level, III. Disallowing of communication, IV. Breakdown in communication and absence of willingness to further communication.

Intercultural conflicts usually occur between two or more opposing parties and we are engaged in conflicts more often because of the differences that exist between our environment and ourselves (Ting-Toomey, 2009). According to Brofenbrenner (1979) relationships between organisms and their environment, studying social ecology and represents social-ecological framework and he categorize environmental influences to the four levels of the system: *micro* (face-to-face interaction in specific situations - interpersonal conflict), *mezo* (the relationship between different microsystems - organizational conflict), *exo* (forces within the higher social system - community conflicts), *macro* (cultural beliefs and values - international conflicts). Oetzel, Ting-Toomey & Rinderle (2006) they have inspired by the framework and implemented socio-ecological framework to the study of conflict. The framework emphasizes that the environment has several levels and contexts, and the relation of these coherence (eg. intercultural conflict) is complex. For understanding of the communication during the conflict in the whole context is this integrated framework necessary. Oetzel, Ting-Toomey & Rinderle (2006) present the four levels of social ecological model of conflict communication: I. Interpersonal, II. Organizational, III. Community, IV. International. During the specific communication always come into play two individuals whose identity is woven of belonging to different groups, from past experiences, the influence of the environment, personal characteristics, etc. (Janebová,

[†][http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/studenti_a_absolventi_vysokych_skol_v_cr_celkem/\\$File/1_VS_studeni_celkem_11.pdf](http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/studenti_a_absolventi_vysokych_skol_v_cr_celkem/$File/1_VS_studeni_celkem_11.pdf)

2009). Therefore, for the purposes of our research, we focus just on an interpersonal level, respectively on intercultural conflicts in interpersonal dimension (conflicts between two people) arising due to lack of understanding of different cultural, ethnic and religious values, different social class, or gender inequality, and most of these conflicts are the result of intolerance and ignorance of these differences, because of the intercultural incompetent behavior. According to Dědina & Odcházal (2007) intercultural conflicts arising from the lack of intercultural competence. Intercultural conflict arises from differences between the groups and their socio-cultural misunderstanding. Often we are not aware of the differences between the various socio-cultural groups and about their different behavior, which leads to mutual verbal and nonverbal misunderstanding. This occurs if the observed behavior is seen as a personality characteristic than the cultural character and vice versa. This leads to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. In most cases, this misunderstanding is basis for future reuse misunderstanding and following the creation of the stereotype. Ting-Toomey & Oetzel (2001) they see the source of intercultural conflict in different expectations in relation to appropriate or inappropriate behavior during conflict situations. If individuals from different cultures continue during the conflict in an inappropriate and ineffective behavior, misunderstandings can easily result in complex and polarized conflict. In such a polarized conflict, respect and trust are at risk and rapidly towards others distorted perceptions and prejudices may exhibit. Intercultural competence is the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness and communication skills during problem solving interactions appropriately, effectively and adaptively. The criteria of communication appropriateness, effectiveness and adaptability can be serve as evaluation criteria to determine whether a conflict of intercultural communication is perceived as competent or incompetent (Ting-Toomey, 2009).

1.2. Design of the research

In this part of the paper we will introduce research objectives, research sample, data collection methods and measurement properties.

Aim of the research

The primary objective of the research, which result from the relationships and connections between intercultural conflicts and intercultural incompetent behavior, was to determine whether students have experience with intercultural incompetent behavior. Intercultural incompetent behavior is based upon the definition of multicultural competence according to Bennett (2003) and Morgenšternová & Šulová (2007) see intercultural competence as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in different cultural contexts. This model of multicultural competence consists of a set *mindset* (cognitive variables), *skillset* (skills to behave appropriately) and *heartset* (affective variables).

Methods

The research sample was N=97 respondents, students studying at the university. The selection of the research sample was available. For data collection was used a questionnaire consisting of three parts, which examined students' awareness and knowledge about intercultural conflict, experiences of students with intercultural incompetent behavior at the universities and the nature of intercultural conflicts which the students experience and they are based on the socio-cultural differences.

The first part of the questionnaire was mainly informative and consisted of eight items in that examined students' awareness of intercultural conflicts, the perception of the seriousness of intercultural conflicts and personal experience with intercultural conflicts at universities.

Part of the questionnaire, investigating students' experiences with intercultural incompetent behavior, contained in a total 60 items and these items were divided into three sets according to Bennetts' (2003) model of intercultural competence and model of multicultural competence of Morgenšternová & Šulová (2007). For each item the respondent stated level of experience with behavior on the Likert scale ranging from 1 - least apt, 5 - the most apt.

The nature of intercultural conflicts which students experience, analyzed part of the questionnaire, which contained a total of 9 items. Items of the questionnaire were created based on the definition of intercultural conflict according to Janebová (2010) intercultural conflicts arise due to misunderstanding of different cultural, ethnic and religious values, different social class, or gender inequality, and most of these conflicts are the result of intolerance and ignorance of these differences. The nature of intercultural conflict was examined in a area of national, ethnic, religious, gender conflicts, conflicts arising from intergenerational differences, conflicts arising because of different

sexual orientations, different subcultural orientation, physical handicap or differences of social class.

1.3. Results of the research

Awareness of students about intercultural conflicts

The first part of the questionnaire investigated students' awareness of intercultural conflicts. Due to the limited scale of article the graphically processed results are not presented. Awareness of intercultural conflicts without this phenomenon was defined by respondents ahead, have 19% of respondents, 51% of respondents weren't sure of what exactly this term means and 30% of respondents said that they have met with this term already. After presenting the definition of intercultural conflicts in the questionnaire answered by 37% of respondents that they knew what this term mean, 50% of respondents said they thought that this is the phenomenon, but were not sure and 13% did not know this term. It also offer interesting findings and the fact that 62% of respondents believe that they have no enough information about intercultural conflicts. As a fairly serious problem it sees 66% of respondents and 33% perceive intercultural conflicts, but rather a normal part of life.

Intercultural conflicts at universities 4% is considered as insignificant and unimportant matter, 46% of respondents considered as a normal part of school life, 40% is perceived as a relatively serious problem and 10% of respondents as a very serious problem.

On the question whether students think that this phenomenon occurs at Czech universities, 48% of students inclined to the positive responses, therefore, that the intercultural conflicts occur at Czech universities and 52% said, that they are not occurs at universities. A total of 21 students said they had already met with intercultural conflicts at their current high school and 76 students said that probably no, or not yet. All respondents evaluated their relationships at university as positive.

Interculturally incompetent behavior

Experience of students with interculturally incompetent behavior was analyzed on the base of model of Bennett (2003). According to this model we created a battery of questionnaire items investigating interculturally incompetent behavior at the cognitive, affective and behavioral level. Due to the limited scope of this article we present a graphical representation for those items for which more than 10% of respondents rated the experience of intercultural incompetent behavior on the scale level 5.

In the **cognitive dimension**, we achieved these results and graphical representation of the results can be seen in the figure number 1 Cognitive variable of intercultural competence - mindset. *Item No. 2 Lack of interest to approach a different way of thinking (to approach a foreign culture)*, 10% of respondents rated on a scale 1, ie. they meet with such behavior at least, 12% of respondents rated the experience on a scale 2, 42% decided to rate the experience on a scale 3, 26% on the scale 4 and 10% on the scale 5, and it means that they have experience with this behavior very often.

Item No. 6 Maintaining a negative attitude towards socio-cultural groups, 9% of respondents rated on a scale 1, so they encounter with such behavior at least, 19% of respondents rated the experience on a scale 2, 30% rated on a scale 3, 24% on the scale 4 and 16% on the scale 5, so they have an experience with the behavior very often.

Item No. 7 The ignorance of minority groups in society (history, traditions, values and customs), 6% of respondents rated on a scale 1, 36% of respondents on a scale 3 and 19% of respondents said that with this phenomenon they have the most experience.

Item No. 8 The tendency to compare myself with other individuals, rated minimal experience with this behavior 4% of the respondents, 41% average experience, on the scale 4 rated experience 30% of respondents and 10% of the respondents meet with this behavior very often.

Item No. 10 Lack of knowledge of foreign languages, rated at the lowest scale 1 6% of the respondents, 21% of respondents on a scale 2, 32% of respondents indicated a moderate level of experience, and 26% rated the experience on a scale 4, and 15% of respondents encountered this phenomenon very often.

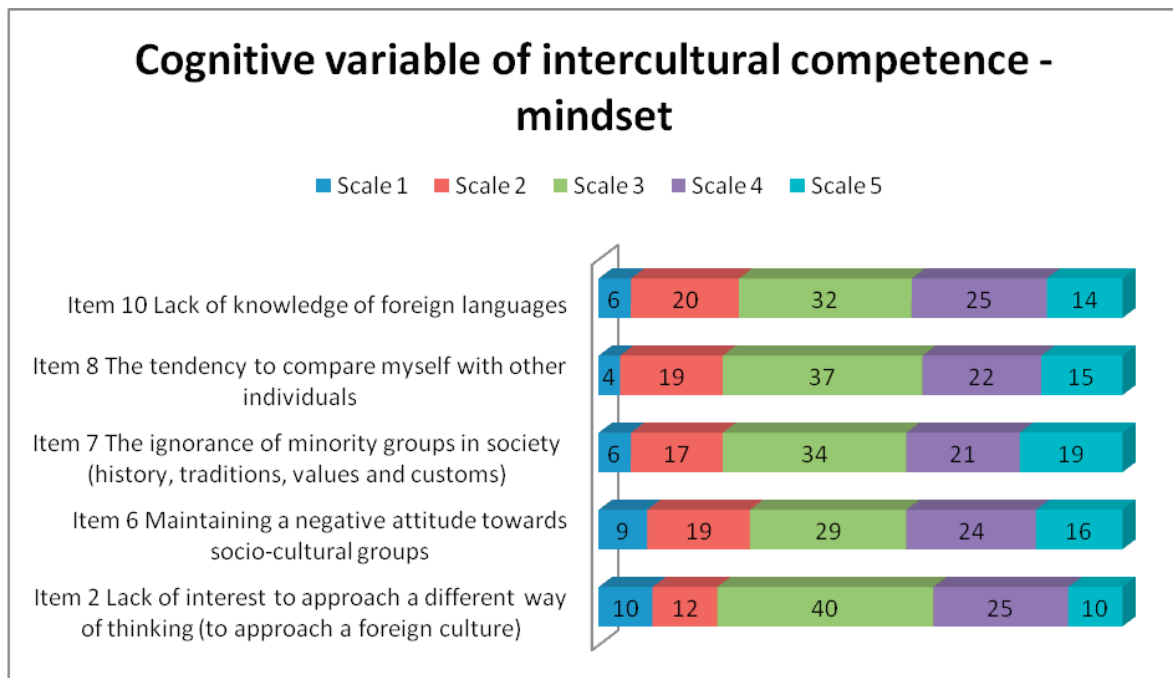


Fig. 1 Cognitive dimension of intercultural competence - mindset

In the **affective dimension** respondents rated these items as the most serious. *Item No. 4 Incorrect identification, perception and interpretation of emotions*, rated by 3% of respondents in the lowest scale 1, 19% of respondents on a scale 2, 36% of respondents rated the medium scale, 31% rated on a scale 4 and 11% of respondents said that this phenomenon they experience very often.

Item No. 5 Misunderstanding of emotions, have a minimum experience 5% of the respondents, 37% of respondents rated on the scale 3, so that is the middle position and 15% of respondents are with such a phenomenon frequently encountered.

Item No. 6 Unawareness of interpersonal distance (remoteness) and close (too personal touch), 6% of respondents meets with this phenomenon at least, 30% of respondents were familiar with the behavior meets more frequently and reported ratings on a scale 2, the mean value, the scale 3 rated the behavior 26% of respondents, on the scale 4 rated 25% of students and very often meets with this behavior 13% of students.

Item No. 7 disregard for the feelings of others, is similar item to Item No. 5 and there we achieved almost identical results.

Here it is clear that the affective dimension, respectively affective competencies, it is important to develop because is not enough to study in detail the history and attributes of a given culture, but also to develop cultural sensitivity. According Morgensternová & Šulová (2007) it means to learn how to correctly interpret emotions in a given culture, to be aware of the interpersonal distance and closeness in a given culture, or other specifics.

Item No. 8 insulting people through humor and irony, 9% of respondents rated on a scale 1, on a scale 2 rated 22%, the middle scale rated 33% of students, scale 4 rated 21% of students and inflammatory form experience has 15% respondents.

Score of the *Item No. 9 Accusation (based on hostility)* and *Item No. 14 Verbal abuse (devaluation on a personal level)* was very similar, as it can be seen in Figure number 2. Affective dimension of intercultural competence – heartset.

Item No. 13 A misunderstanding and embarrassment were rated at the lowest scale by 8% of the respondents, 20% of respondents rated on the scale 2, the mean value rated 33% of students, scale 4 rated 24% of students and 15% of the students experience the inflammatory form.

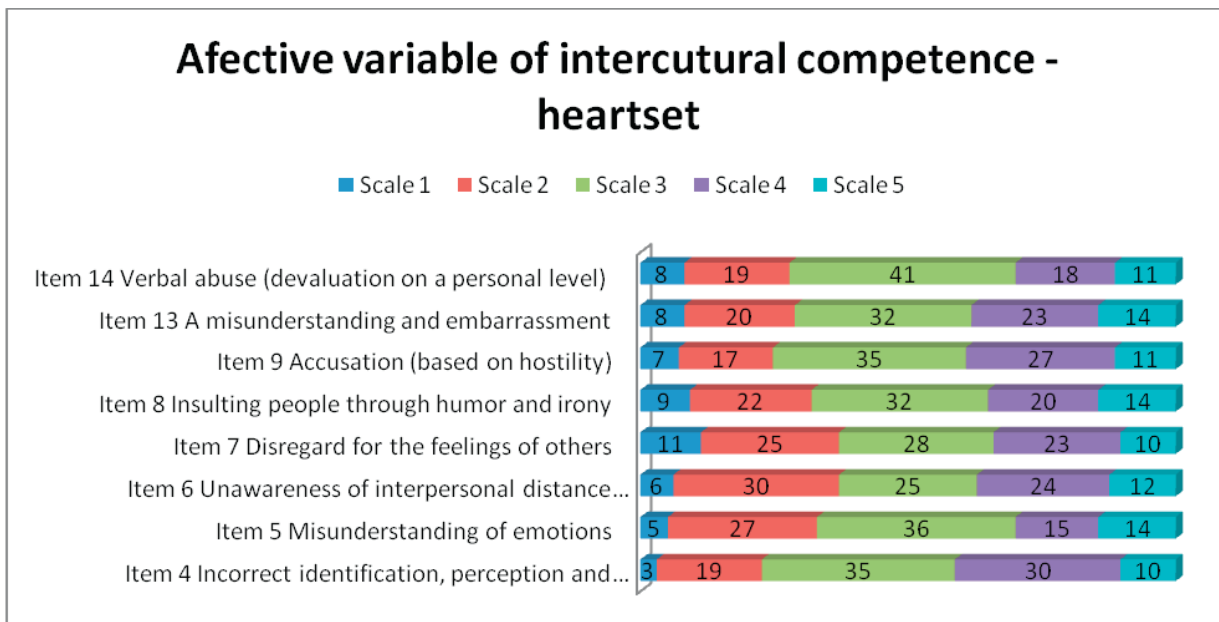


Fig. 2 Affective variable of intercultural competence – heartset

In the Figure number 3 **behavioral dimension** of intercultural competence – skillset, we can see, that it is clear that respondents identified the most experience that relates to inappropriate and ineffective communication. Probably because it is a behavior which is the most easily identifiable. According to Deardorff (2009) is behavioral dimension a desirable outcome of intercultural competence and on the basis of a model of intercultural competence, we also created a list of items to questionnaire which investigated the behavioral dimension of incompetent behavior.

Among the behaviors to which students have the most experience include:

Item No.2 Absence of natural speech and sincerity of expression (speech inauthenticity), Item No. 3 Absence listening to each other (not to suspend their own ideas and not to make a conscious effort to understand the position of others), Item No. 4 Indifference towards an awareness and respect for formal rules, Item No. 5 Inadequate use of humor or irony, Item No. 7 Ignorance of conflict resolution strategies, Item No. 8 Ignoring and lack of interest of my person, Item No. 10 Reluctance to contribute to the development of the team and create an environment for efficient and secure communication, Item No. 11 Avoiding the different communication styles, depending on the purpose of communication and status of communicators, Item No. 13 unfair treatment, Item No. 15 Inability to save face (managing emotions), Item No. 16 Disrespect for traditions, traditional values (family, age, honor), Item No. 17 Ignoring the social hierarchy (loyalty, humility), Item No. 18 Ignoring the order in which the representatives speak, Item No. 22 The practice of discrimination and prejudice (this is different to others because of their membership of a particular group), Item No. 25 Conflict at metacommunication level (speculation on how it is said), Item No. 28 Insulting slurs or demeaning statements, Item No. 29 Ridicule or slander others, Item No. 32 Threats of physical violence and Item No. 33 Oral, telephonic or written threats.

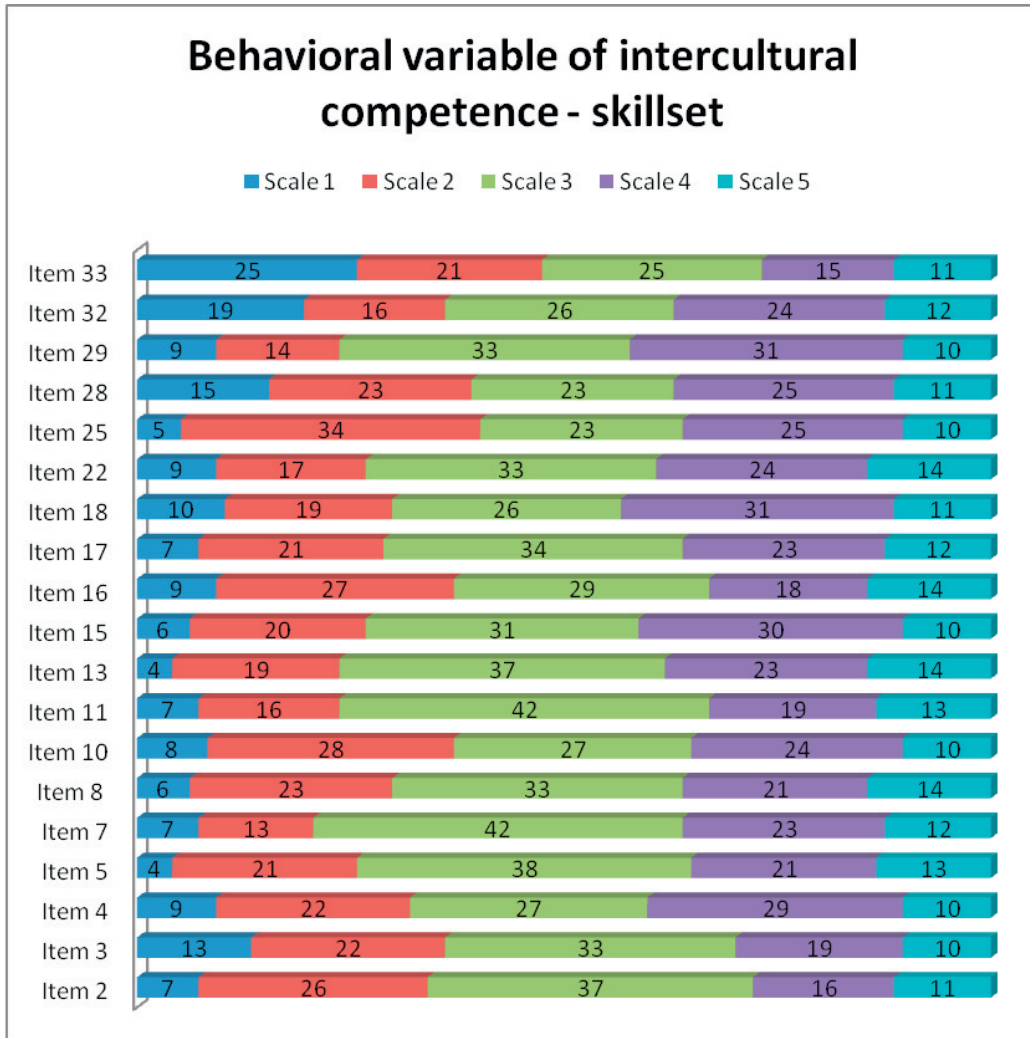


Fig. 3 Behavioral variable of intercultural competence – skillset

The final goal that we set was to find out the nature of the intercultural conflicts which the students experience. In the Figure number 4 Dimensions of intercultural conflicts we can see the frequency of responses by respondents on the scale 1 minimum occurring – to the scale 5 the most commonly occurring. The nature of intercultural conflicts was analyzed from the perspective of *international, religious and ethnic conflicts* which students experience, than we focused on *gender differences* and their impact on development of conflict, *intergenerational differences*. Nature of intercultural conflict was analyzed from the point of view of *different sexual orientation or belonging to a different subculture*. We did not forget the conflicts arising due to *differences in physical disability or a different social class*.

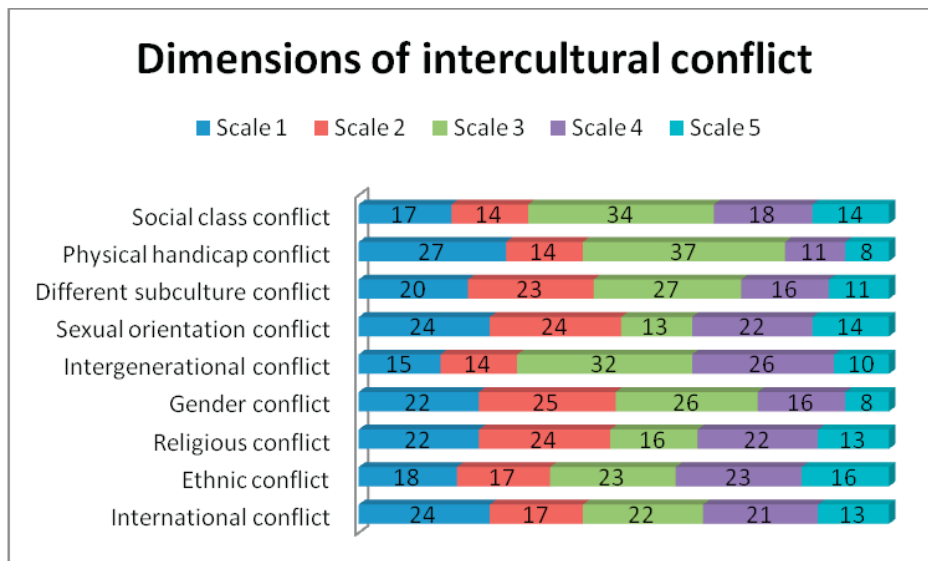


Fig. 4 Dimensions of intercultural conflict

2. Conclusion

In the context of the previously mentioned findings, we can say that students encounter intercultural incompetent behavior, especially in relation to the affective dimension of intercultural competence, and it is a lack of intercultural sensitivity, adaptability and empathy. The second major dimension of intercultural competence is behavioral competence, where most students met with the inability to communicate without communication noise and confusion, inauthenticity of expression and inefficient use of nonverbal communication. Finally, we should say that universities should therefore further strengthen and develop values that will develop intercultural dialogue among students through respectful and open communication regardless of their origin.

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