

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Making the most of general education foreign language requirements

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The Challenge

Many postsecondary institutions require one or more semesters of foreign language (FL) study among the general education requirements. Can FL educators foster students' intercultural competence in these required courses? To what extent can, or should, FL course outcomes be aligned with an institution's mission to prepare interculturally competent undergraduates?

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Abstract

Given that most postsecondary institutions have recognized the need to prepare interculturally competent undergraduates, this study used the Intercultural Development Inventory to measure the extent to which one group of undergraduate learners demonstrated increased intercultural competence after taking a first-semester foreign language (FL) course. Drawing on research on the role of culture in the FL curriculum and on intercultural competence development, the findings illustrate that (a) beginner-level language courses contribute minimally to students' intercultural competence development, and (b) FL departments need to substantially redesign their beginner-level curriculum if they hope to contribute in meaningful ways to their institution's intercultural, diversity, global learning, and/or 21st-century goals. The data suggest that in addition to re-envisioning the beginner and intermediate FL

instructional sequence, universities need more robust FL requirements for general education.

KEYWORDS

foreign language courses, general education requirements, intercultural competence

1 | INTRODUCTION

Rationales for a foreign language (FL) requirement as part of a learner's postsecondary general education program of study across colleges and universities in the United States are often justified by the recognition that if postsecondary institutions are to successfully prepare graduates to function effectively in the integrated world system of the 21st century, students must have opportunities to develop and demonstrate intercultural competence. In its explanation of the need for FL study as part of effective and rigorous general education programs, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) stated that

There is no better tool for understanding the perspectives of different cultures than the study of foreign languages. To learn a culture's history or art or traditions is secondhand knowledge; to learn its language is the first step to true understanding. In an increasingly interconnected world, competency in a foreign language molds students into informed participants in the international community—and highly prized employees. (ACTA, 2017–2017, pp. 9–10)

While this familiar rationale seems accurate, logical, and even comfortable to FL educators, its premise warrants exploration and refinement. Certainly, FL courses can and in many cases do play an instrumental role in the development of intercultural competence and foster a mindset that is attentive to engagement with difference. However, this mission can only be realized when the outcomes of language study shift from primarily linguistic competence to intercultural competence. As Furstenberg (2010) explained,

[A] profound change has taken place in the last 10 years: It is the growing realization, brought on by the globalization of our world, that our students will work and interact with people of diverse cultures and will therefore need to be able to communicate effectively across boundaries that are not just linguistic. This means that our mission as language teachers is more important than ever and that our goal should no longer be limited to helping students develop and achieve linguistic and communicative competence. Our foreign language curriculum needs to expand not just to include intercultural competence but also to make it the main objective of the language class. (p. 330)

The Modern Language Association, ACTFL, and the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL), among others, have worked diligently to provide frameworks, learning goals, and learning outcome statements that emphasize both translingual and transcultural competence. Two ACTFL collaborative projects of key importance for the teaching of foreign languages, the 21st Century Skills Map for World Languages (2011) and the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015)

explicitly position language learning within a broad range of interdisciplinary themes and skills designed to equip students to understand, address, and communicate about global issues in culturally effective ways across diverse settings. Recent special issues of scholarly journals such as *NECTFL Review: Developing Intercultural Competence through World Languages* (2017) and *The Modern Language Journal: Teaching Foreign Languages in an Era of Globalization* (Kramersch, 2014), include illustrations of the rich array of practices and reconceptualizations that are occurring within FL education as instructors across the K–16 spectrum align their practices with global learning goals.

However, the paradigm shift from teaching language for linguistic and communicative competence to teaching language for intercultural competence is not an easy one to navigate, in spite of almost 60 years of research that has investigated the role of culture in the FL classroom. As Kramersch (2014) noted, “[i]n the last decades, [the] world has changed to such an extent that language teachers are no longer sure of what they are supposed to teach nor what real world situations they are supposed to prepare their students for” (p. 296). Global technologies and the dominance of online communication have effectively “changed the conditions under which FLs are taught, learned and used” and call into question “the purity of the standard language and the authenticity of its use” by native speakers (Kramersch, 2014, p. 300). With globalization, “[a]lternative sites of language use, such as the Internet and online exchanges, are exposing students to the heteroglossic real world of linguistic hybridity... and phatic exchanges that are no longer what communicative language pedagogy had in mind when it aimed at teaching learners how to interpret, express, and negotiate intended meanings” (p. 300). Moreover, as globalization weakens the link between language and the nation-state, it complicates the association of a language with a distinct (national) culture and further problematizes the teaching of the relationship between language and culture.

What emerges clearly from this convergence of complex variables that have altered the landscape for FL education is the need for, in Kramersch’s words, “a more reflective, interpretive, historically grounded, and politically engaged pedagogy than was called for by the communicative language teaching of the eighties” (2014, p. 302). As general education requirements for FL study in the United States generally range from one to four semesters and these courses often constitute the only exposure most students will have to FL education in their undergraduate academic careers, investigating how curricular goals are framed and how language is taught and learned takes on particular urgency, especially if required general education courses aim to contribute to both an institution’s broader goals and 21st-century learning expectations (see, for example, Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2009, 2011). To better understand the extent to which a required general education course actually supported undergraduate students’ intercultural skills, this study measured students’ intercultural competence at the beginning and end of one semester of language study.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Two of the five goals stated in the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) address culture learning. The Cultures goal area addresses learners’ ability to “interact with cultural competence and understanding” (n.p.), specifically by demonstrating the ability to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the products, practices, and perspectives of the cultures studied. The Communities goal area targets learners’ ability to “communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate

in multilingual communities at home and around the world” (n.p.). The implementation of the World-Readiness Standards has received much critical attention as FL educators continue to grapple with culture’s place in the language curriculum (see Arens, 2010; Durocher, 2007; Kramsch, 2014). In the context of general education FL requirements, however, an additional key question arises: To what degree do these nationally accepted goals align with postsecondary institutions’ mission to prepare interculturally competent students who possess the ability to analyze and engage with the complexity and diversity of a global context by the time of graduation? Answering this question is further complicated by the lack of consensus concerning the definition of intercultural competence and the terminology that is used to discuss it (Deardorff, 2011). This study drew on several theoretical frameworks whose definitions and measurements of intercultural competence have received broad acceptance.

Deardorff’s (2011) intercultural competence model was developed “through a research methodology called the Delphi technique, an iterative process used to achieve consensus among a panel of experts” (p. 66). Specifically “derived from the need to assess this nebulous concept” and unique in that it was the “first study to document consensus among leading intercultural experts, primarily from the United States, on aspects of intercultural competence” (p. 66), the intercultural competence model stresses the lifelong process involved in intercultural competence development. The model charts how individuals acquire a combination of attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery), knowledge and comprehension (cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness), and skills (listening, observing, evaluating to interpret and relate with other cultural frameworks) that ultimately lead to two desired outcomes: an internal outcome constituted by individuals’ ability to shift their frame of reference to engage in intercultural situations adaptively, flexibly, empathetically, and from an ethnorelative view, and an external outcome constituted by individuals’ ability to effectively and appropriately communicate and behave in an intercultural situation (p. 67). As Deardorff explained, any attempt to assess intercultural competence as it is expressed in this model would involve opportunities for self-reflection alongside an assessment of critical thinking skills, attitudes, global perspectives, and the ability to understand other worldviews. What is vital to retain from this model and others that are discussed herein is the understanding that

deep cultural knowledge entails a more holistic, contextual understanding of a culture, including the historical, political, and social contexts. Thus, any assessment of culture-specific knowledge needs to go beyond the conventional surface-level knowledge of foods, greetings, customs, and so on. Further, knowledge alone is not sufficient for intercultural competence development; as Bok (2006) indicated, developing skills for thinking interculturally becomes more important than actual knowledge acquired. (Deardorff, 2011, p. 68)

Another framework that has received wide attention in relation to the assessment of intercultural competence and therefore presumably has affected how it is defined and taught is the AAC&U (2009) VALUE rubric for intercultural knowledge and competence. Drawing on the work of J. M. Bennett (2008), M. Bennett (2004), Deardorff (2006), and others, the AAC&U defined intercultural competence as “a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (2009, p.17). This framework breaks down Deardorff’s (2011) model discussed above into more discrete measurable qualities and skills that educators can use to facilitate the design

of courses, experiences, and assignments to effectively move individuals toward increased cultural growth and personal transformation.

One advantage of this rubric is that it effectively captures the movement in Deardorff's (2011) model between the individual/internal level (attitudes) and the external/interaction level (outcomes) by creating a framework to measure the degree to which individuals reflect appropriate attitudes (e.g., curiosity and openness) and act on them (empathy and verbal and nonverbal communication). The VALUE rubrics are widely used by colleges and universities in the United States (see Rhodes, 2009; Sullivan & Drezek McConnell, 2018) and thus have enormous potential to create common reference points and models in the sea of scholarly literature devoted to culture and intercultural competence.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is a psychometrically and cross-culturally validated questionnaire (Hammer, 2009a) that was designed to determine an individual's level of intercultural competence based on the intercultural development continuum (IDC). Both the IDI and the IDC are grounded in and adapted from M. Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (M. Bennett, 1986, 1993, 2004, 2013). They place individuals into one of five mindsets, or stages of development, that reflect monocultural (denial and polarization), transitional (minimization), or intercultural (acceptance or adaptation) orientations. As individuals develop along the continuum, they increasingly demonstrate the ability to deeply shift cultural perspective and adapt behavior across cultural differences. As an externally developed, rigorously tested assessment tool that has cross-cultural generalizability both internationally and with domestic diversity, the IDI allows faculty to transcend the local academic context and individual course learning outcomes to objectively measure students' transferable skills in the area of intercultural competence. A substantial body of scholarship addressing the use of the IDI in both academic and nonacademic contexts (Altshuler, Sussman, & Kachur, 2003; Greenholtz, 2000; Hammer, 2011; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013) has lent credibility to this instrument and bridges the gap between skills that are developed in academic contexts and those that are required in professional and personal life.

Finally, M. Byram's (1997) large body of work on intercultural (communicative) competence is perhaps most relevant to language educators because his multidimensional model of intercultural communicative competence is oriented toward the relationship between language teaching and intercultural competence development. M. Byram specifically addressed the approaches and methods that language instructors can adopt to develop learners:

as intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity... Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching involves recognizing that the aims are: to give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence; to prepare them for interaction with people of other cultures; to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours; and to help them to see that such interaction is an enriching experience. (M. Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, pp. 5–6)

In sum, the World-Readiness Standards' (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) Culture and Communities learning goals align with existing theoretical models and scholarly studies conducted by specialists in the field of intercultural training and education discussed above and are fully supported by the related scholarship concerning those models in that they

emphasize effective communication using diverse (cultural) perspectives and a deep understanding of culture and language through a comparative, reflective lens. However, while these interrelated frameworks provide a unified approach to designing

a culture curriculum, addressing not just the language resources available to a “native speaker” (writer, reader) but also a set of interlocking cultural literacies, including the history, traditions, and the pragmatic patterns used by individuals... to construct and assert their identities, and to manage their negotiations with infrastructure, the community, and historical norms... the sticking point is, of course, how to transpose this... field of culture into practical goals for “language learning.” (Arens, 2010, p. 322)

Framed in this way, this study addressed two core questions: (a) If language learning remains the goal, how much impact can limited exposure via required general education FL requirements have on students’ intercultural competence development? and (b) To what extent can, or should, FL course outcomes be aligned with an institution’s mission to prepare interculturally competent undergraduates?

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Context

At the institution under consideration, the general education FL requirement is a first-semester course. Students have the option of taking a placement test to waive this requirement, or they may take a class. Dramatic declines in enrollment for second-semester courses at this liberal arts college indicate that 85% of students who take the first-semester class do not in fact continue in FL courses once they have met their requirement. Thus, this single first-semester course represents the entirety of most students’ formal exposure to and engagement with the FL and cultures in the postsecondary classroom setting. Given that students are unlikely to develop significant levels of proficiency in the language due to the very reduced amount of seat time, a number of attempts were made to make intercultural competence development, rather than linguistic competence alone, a core focal point in beginner-level language courses at this institution. However, as recently as 7 years before this study, culture was still approached as the acquisition of factual information from the textbook and was assessed using lower-level (recall) questions on exams. Because departmental data collected over 5 years revealed that students consistently underperformed in this area, students were subsequently required to complete additional research and write reflective essays based on a prompt provided to them by their instructors. Still, students’ essays largely conveyed factual information, and it appeared that they were not especially engaged in the process of cultural discovery, in developing a more dynamic view of culture, or in gaining intercultural competence.

In the next iteration of the cultural component of the curriculum, faculty used three films or documentaries accompanied by short-answer questions and reflective essays in English as a means of promoting deeper analysis of and connections to various dimensions of culture. Further, speaking, writing, reading, and listening comprehension skills were increasingly emphasized to enable students to work more intensively on making meaning with the target language—instead of seeing the language primarily as a system of grammatical rules—and to relate to and reflect on language as a cultural product and vehicle for enacting different perspectives and practices. However, even as efforts to bring intercultural competence

development to the fore in beginner-level language courses increased as the course outcomes were aligned with the culture outcomes of the World-Readiness Standards (i.e., students would be able to identify some perspectives, products, and practices of the target culture and compare them to those of their own culture; National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015), beginner language instruction remained textbook-driven and primarily oriented toward communicative language teaching and the development of linguistic competence.

3.2 | Participants

Participants were recruited from three beginner language sections (two Spanish and one French). Of the 43 students who initially volunteered to participate in this study and who completed the pretest at the beginning of the semester (29 in Spanish and 14 in French), 25 also completed the postassessment (16 Spanish learners and 9 French learners).

Since 5 participants did not complete the background questionnaire, demographic data were only available for 20 of the 25 participants. These 20 students ranged in age from 18 to 25 years (mean = 20) and included eight freshmen, seven sophomores, three juniors, and two seniors. Two of the 20 participants were born in Jamaica and had lived abroad for 13 and 21 years, respectively, and one participant was born in South Yemen and had lived there for 4 years. Of these participants, all three reported speaking English as well as another language (Jamaican Patois and Arabic). Four other participants' parents had immigrated to the United States and spoke other languages (a Haitian parent who spoke Creole and French, a Lithuanian parent who spoke Lithuanian, a stepparent who spoke Spanish, and a parent from South Australia). All other participants and their immediate family were born in the United States and were native English speakers. Because one might expect that bilingual students or students who had extensive previous contact with another language and/or culture would start out at higher levels of the intercultural continuum, pretest scores for these 7 students were compared with pre-test scores for the other 18 students. Of these seven students under consideration, three began at the polarization level and four began at minimization. Since these students did not evidence higher initial placements on the continuum, data for all 25 participants regardless of personal linguistic background were included in the analyses.

3.3 | Instrument

As explained on the IDI assessment Web site (<https://idiinventory.com/publications/the-intercultural-development-inventory-idi/>),

the IDI is a 50-item questionnaire available online that can be completed in 15–20 minutes. It includes contexting questions that allow respondents to describe their intercultural experiences in terms of (a) their cross-cultural goals, (b) the challenges that they face navigating cultural differences, (c) critical (intercultural) incidents that they face when they encounter cultural differences, and (d) the ways they navigate those cultural differences. These questions allow individuals to reflect on how their IDI results relate to their cross-cultural goals and challenges, increasing cultural self-understanding, and enabling improved accomplishment of key cross-cultural goals.

After individuals complete the IDI, each person's responses to the 50 items are analyzed by the company that manages the test. The company then prepares reports that include the test results and the person's written responses to the contexting questions. The test can only be given by a qualified administrator, who undergoes training to use the tool and to provide feedback on the results to individuals and groups. Information regarding IDI validation research can be retrieved at <https://idiinventory.com/idi-validation/>. Figure 1 charts the stages of intercultural development as described in and measured by the IDI and shows the progression that individuals follow as they achieve increased levels of competency. For detailed descriptions of each level, see Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003).

3.4 | Procedures and analyses

Once Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, the researchers described the goal of the study to participants in the three beginner language sections, noting that students would receive extra credit toward their culture assignments if they provided demographic data and other information about their language and cultural background on an initial questionnaire and then completed the IDI at the beginning and again at the end of the course. A qualified administrator purchased two IDI IDs for each participant, which came with a unique password. The IDI was administered each time online, independently, and at the location of the students'

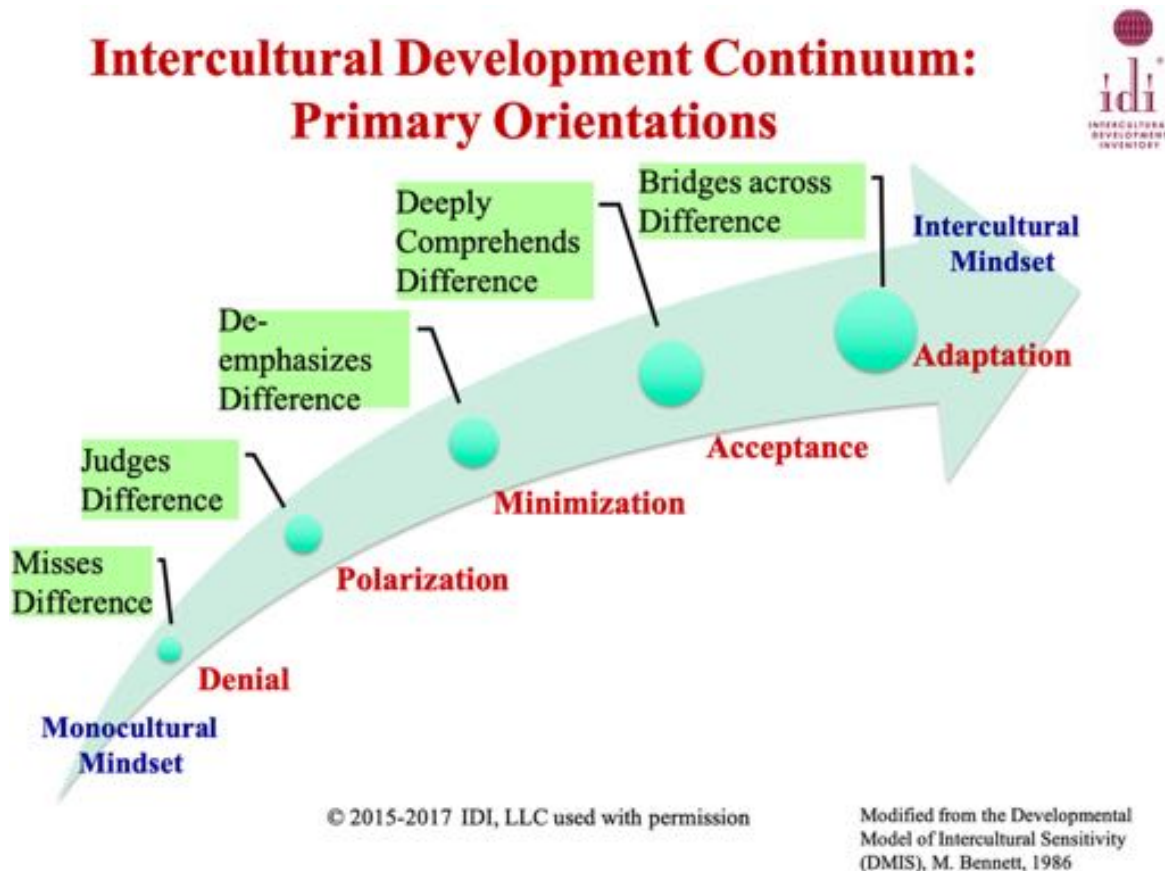


FIGURE 1 IDC: primary orientations. Reproduced from the Intercultural Development Inventory Resource Guide by Hammer (2015-2017), IDI, LLC. Abbreviation: IDC, intercultural development continuum [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

choice. Students were informed that each round of testing was time-limited and that the test had to be completed within 3 days of that date.

Official IDI scores were calculated by the company according to its proprietary psychometric protocols for each of the two assessment sessions. Each participant received an individual profile report that provided a detailed analysis of the participant’s placement on the IDC (to see a sample individual profile report, visit <https://idiinventory.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Sample-IDI-Individual-Profile-Report.pdf>). Scores from both testing sessions, which were numerical values ranging from 55 (denial) to 145 (adaptation), were tabulated by the authors and compared to measure any gains or losses of each participant’s perceived orientation (PO), developmental orientation (DO), and orientation gap (OG).

4 | RESULTS

Scores for both the first and second administrations of the IDI are shown in Table 1. At both Test 1 and Test 2, 40% of the participants were rated at the minimization level and 36% were assessed at the polarization level.

Gain (loss) scores reflecting the extent of movement across development levels from the first to the second administration of the IDI are presented in Table 2. At the end of the semester, scores for 24% of the participants had increased by one level, 36% showed no movement, and 40% regressed, with one student regressing two levels from minimization to denial. Most progressions represented movement beyond the denial and the polarization levels; two students who were rated at the minimization level progressed beyond that level by Test 2. In addition, the table illustrates that some students who were initially rated at the polarization or minimization levels experienced slight regressions.

Table 3 summarizes participants’ PO, DO, and OG from both testing sessions. The PO referred to where individuals placed themselves along the IDC, the DO indicated individuals’ primary orientation toward cultural differences and commonalities along the continuum as assessed by the IDI, and the OG score represented the gap between individuals’ PO and DO. The larger the orientation gap, “the more likely the [individual] may be ‘surprised’ by the discrepancy between their [PO] score and their [DO] score” (Hammer, 2009b, p. 5).

A paired-samples *t* test was run to compare the PO means between Test 1 and Test 2. On average, participants did not differ in how they rated their PO ($M = -0.494$, standard error [SE] = 1.058); the difference was not significant ($t[24] = -0.467$, $p = .644$, $d = -0.07$). When

TABLE 1 IDI levels

Level	Test 1		Test 2	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Denial	6	24	4	16
Polarization	9	36	9	36
Minimization	10	40	10	40
Acceptance	0	0	2	8
Adaptation	0	0	0	0
Total	25	100	25	100

TABLE 2 Movement among levels from Test 1 to Test 2

Level	Movement				
	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
Denial	1	3	2	0	0
Polarization	0	4	4	1	0
Minimization	0	2	5	2	1
Acceptance	0	0	0	0	0
Adaptation	0	0	0	0	0

comparing the DO means for Test 1 and Test 2, no significant differences were found ($M = -1.527$, $SE = 2.988$; $t[24] = -0.511$, $p = .614$, $d = -0.09$). Comparisons of the OG means ($M = 1.029$, $SE = 2.035$) from Test 1 and Test 2 were also not significant ($t[24] = .506$, $p = .618$, $d = 0.1$). Overall, the data showed that there was no difference in students' ratings from Test 1 to Test 2, no measurable advancement in interculturality, and no progression between how the participants perceived their own competence and how they stated they would behave from Test 1 to Test 2. However, although the differences were not statistically significant, 14 participants showed progress in closing the gap between their perceived orientation and their developmental orientation, ranging from a closure of 0.48 points to 19.04 points. However, the OG scores for the other 11 participants showed a regression, ranging from 0.11 to 21.98.

Comparisons of participants' PO scores with their DO scores from each testing period indicated that for Test 1, the difference in how participants perceived their competence compared to their developmental competence ($M = 32.363$, $SE = 2.000$) was significant ($t[24] = 16.179$, $p = .000$, $d = 2.9$). For Test 2, the difference between the two means ($M = 31.330$, $SE = 1.997$) was also significant ($t[24] = 15.684$, $p = .000$, $d = 2.9$). Again, this result demonstrates that participants largely overestimated their intercultural competence at both testing periods.

5 | DISCUSSION

Of the six participants who tested at denial at the beginning of the semester, four moved up one level to polarization by the end of the semester, while two remained in denial. For those who started off in polarization ($n = 9$), four participants increased one level to minimization, four remained in polarization, and one regressed one level to denial. However, 53% of participants at the denial, minimization, and polarization levels progressed in their intercultural development

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics for Test 1 and Test 2

	Test 1			Test 2		
	Mean	Range	SD	Mean	Range	SD
PO	117.01	22.37	6.35	117.50	22.14	6.12
DO	84.64	47.02	15.83	86.17	51.87	15.47
OG	32.36	31.58	10.00	31.33	35.38	9.99

Abbreviations: DO, developmental orientation; OG, orientation gap; PO, perceived orientation; SD, standard deviation.

after one semester. Since individuals at the denial level exhibit little recognition of more complex cultural differences and may even appear disinterested or avoid situations where they are likely to encounter cultural differences (Hammer, 2012), a beginner-level FL class is well suited to learners at the denial level because it exposes students to cultural differences that are not threatening, such as celebrations or different foods, and thus helps them begin to recognize cultural differences and to be more comfortable with them. That said, the results of the IDI assessment clearly demonstrate that when language learning is the goal, a beginner-level FL course only minimally impacts students' intercultural competence development.

The results also show that 10 participants began at the minimization level, and by the end of the semester two progressed, five remained at the same level, and three regressed. Hammer (2012) explained that individuals in minimization emphasize cultural commonalities that can mask a deeper recognition of cultural differences. This means that certain beliefs about equality and fairness may lead students to think that it is inappropriate to focus on differences, which they believe can lead to unnecessary conflict. In this case, students must become aware that their own values and principles may mean something different in other cultures. A beginner-level language course would not be likely to present enough context for students to attain this awareness, so movement out of minimization is less likely to occur without specifically designed tasks that address students' own values around cultural difference.

While the absence of measurable movement or even slight advancement on the continuum seems easy to understand, regressions require some explanation. According to M. Bennett (2004), individuals in the early stages of intercultural development (such as denial and polarization on the IDC) tend to perceive cultural difference as a threat, which can provoke negative attitudes and defense issues: For these individuals, "the tenets of one's own culture are experienced as central to reality in some way" (p. 63). Within the framework of this developmental model, it is possible that regressions emerge because students are being urged to understand and accept another culture when they are not developmentally ready. After finding regressions in his own study using the IDI, Durocher (2007) explained that "insisting too strongly on the value of cultural difference to individuals in defense will make them more defensive, not more accepting" (p. 153). Mantle-Bromley (1992) clarified that at this early developmental milestone, students may fear that by accepting a new culture or way of being, they will lose their own identity (p. 119). One could also hypothesize that students at these levels define culture mainly through its objective manifestations (food, customs, clothing, etc.) and therefore, because they have not yet become aware of the subjective dimensions of culture (values, meanings, and context) or because the perspectives element that is central to the World-Readiness Standards (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) Culture goal is de-emphasized or missing from instruction, they judge the new culture as "wrong" or "weird." Regressions that were observed in the IDI results of both Durocher's students and of those in this study highlight the fact that as Durocher (2007) pointed out, instructors must effectively address negative student attitudes in their teaching or "they run the risk ultimately of doing more harm than good" (p. 156).

A statistical analysis of students' PO, DO, and OG revealed that there was no significant difference in how students evaluated their own level of competence from pre- to posttest. These results indicate that students' ability to analyze their own intercultural competence did not improve as a result of completing the required general education FL course. Furthermore, in the comparison of participants' PO scores with their DO scores from each testing period, results revealed that students consistently overestimated their intercultural competence for both tests. Nevertheless, the minimization in the gap between the PO and the DO for 14 of 25 participants

opens up the possibility that some students can develop increased self-awareness in relation to culture after completing one semester of language study; however, it also shows that students may erroneously think that their level of intercultural competence has improved when in fact it has not. These ambiguous results highlight at a minimum that students struggle with self-awareness when it comes to culture and suggest that this is a prime area for instructor intervention in beginning-level courses.

Given that the limited exposure to FLs and cultures in the context of a single required course has a minimal impact on students' intercultural competence development, FL programs must ask themselves what contributions their courses actually make to general education programs and institutional priorities. This study suggests that as long as FL instructors continue to prioritize linguistic competence over intercultural competence, "the problem of culture" in the FL classroom (see K. Byram & Kramersch, 2008; Durocher, 2007, pp. 144–145) will continue to persist in spite of the publication of multiple models, frameworks, and pedagogical innovations that call for the integration of intercultural competence into the FL curriculum (see Galeano & Torres, 2014). In fact, given that most students cannot gain fluency in the lower-level language courses (first to fourth semesters) that constitute many general education requirements, it could be argued that a primary focus on linguistic competence in these courses actually risks undermining the relevance of FL study within the liberal education curriculum and compromises the goals that general education requirements explicitly aim to address (21st-century readiness, including intercultural competence). On this point, M. Byram and Wagner (2018) noted that "the reference to language and the task of teaching and learning a difficult 'subject' is no longer enough.... Language educators need to critically examine their own professional identity and views of language and culture. They also need to reexamine their view of language education and its goals" (p. 148).

Responding to this situation will require a substantial reconceptualization of language education from institutional, departmental, and instructional perspectives simultaneously because room would have to be made in the curriculum to accommodate the skill development and reflective activities that must be integrated for intercultural competence development to occur; in addition, more robust FL requirements (four semesters) for general education would need to be implemented. At the same time, this reconceptualization places FL educators in a difficult situation:

Foreign language teachers are the first to be called upon to foster [cultural] understanding but they are not historians, nor anthropologists, nor sociologists. They are called upon to teach language as it represents, expresses, and embodies mindsets and worldviews that might be different from those of our American students. In other words, they are challenged to teach not language and culture, but language as culture.
(K. Byram & Kramersch, 2008, p. 21)

Language instructors in this context must learn to facilitate an analytic process of discovery, helping learners to ask questions, interpret answers, and develop an awareness of values. As K. Byram and Kramersch (2008) articulated it, "the goal is for students to recognize the assumptions they make when they use language—their own or the target language—to describe and understand that other culture" (p. 31). To achieve this, they advocated for engaging students in the analysis of representations of events or primary texts as an alternative to studying the events or primary texts themselves because "representations make assumptions visible, especially when compared with each other, and by placing them at the center of a lesson, teachers can help students think critically about *all* of the positions and values involved" (p. 31).

While such an approach seems somewhat out of reach for the early stages of language learning, particularly when both instructors and students attempt to conduct instruction primarily in the second language, a productive place to start may very well lie in helping students to develop a definition of culture that is dynamic and sensitive to the process of meaning-making in given social contexts. As M. Bennett explained,

for a praxis of intercultural relations, the minimum conceptual requirement is a self-reflexive definition of culture.... How we define culture is itself a product of culture. Any definition of culture needs to take into account that it is defining the human activity of defining. When we encourage intercultural learning, we are asking people to engage in a self-reflexive act. (2012, p. 101)

Students' own definitions, perceptions, and experiences of culture thus constitute an important point of departure for intercultural learning.

The 2017 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication are useful in this regard, for both instructors and learners. Designed to be used in a variety of learning and life environments and at all levels of language proficiency, the Can-Do Statements recognize that "rather than a linear process, [intercultural communicative competence] is more iterative and interactive, like a mosaic of various cultural experiences informed by self-reflection. Each individual begins at different cognitive, cultural and linguistic stages and progresses at various rates" (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017, Introduction). Providing a framework by which to evaluate learners' progress and growth, the Can-Do Statements also acknowledge that learners' language proficiency and cultural competence do not always align: "One individual may possess strong cultural competence yet demonstrate a low level of language proficiency. Another individual may display high language proficiency but minimal cultural competence" (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017, Introduction). The integration of language proficiency and cultural competence within this instrument allows learners to set goals and reflect on their progress, thus facilitating their involvement in the learning and assessment process. At the same time, this tool enables educators to identify the extent to which learners can demonstrate their intercultural competence through their use of the target language by establishing "a set of benchmarks, indicators, examples, and scenarios that... describe what intercultural communicative interaction looks like within varied cultural and social contexts, using culturally appropriate functional language and behavior across the five major proficiency levels (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished)" (Bott Van Houten & Shelton, 2018, p. 35). Perhaps most important, given that most students do not continue their language study beyond the general education requirement and therefore do not reach advanced levels of proficiency, the Can-Do Statements facilitate movement in intercultural competence development from even the earliest levels of language learning and thus provide a bridge by which to connect and align FL courses to other disciplines as well as to broad general education outcomes and institutional multicultural, diversity, global, and 21st-century goals.

As with the majority of studies, the findings in this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. The small number of participants is cause for hesitation; a larger sample size would allow for a more accurate statistical analysis. While a more detailed background questionnaire that inquires about participants' travel history, foreign language(s) studied in high school, and other college courses taken would be informative, it would only allow researchers to speculate. Ongoing assessment at the early levels using the IDI or other reliable measures appears to offer an effective way to determine an individual's intercultural development as part of a lifelong growth process. Moreover, local context and the manner in which culture is approached and taught within courses

and across programs will vary considerably. Even when all first-semester sections of language are coordinated by a director and use the same syllabi and teaching materials to maintain uniformity, instructors do not necessarily teach and discuss culture in the same manner, and their own degree of intercultural competence will come into play. While these results attempt to shed light on the intercultural development of students who take a first-semester language class, moving forward, this line of inquiry can benefit from more testing in order to learn where language *minors* score after 2–3 years of study, as well as where language *majors* score upon graduating from college. This would require the collection of longitudinal data to see if the use of a series of interventions throughout a program of study can positively influence students' orientation level. In addition, further research using the IDI to determine how the Can-Do Statements (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017) contribute to the effective teaching of intercultural competence development within an FL course sequence for general education could provide useful information to FL departments and institutions that seek reliable data on student learning in this area.

6 | CONCLUSION

There exists a widespread misconception that teaching a language automatically also includes the teaching of culture and that a curriculum that focuses on developing language proficiency inherently also addresses the development of intercultural competence (M. Byram & Wagner, 2018). It is this misconception that is often cited in formal rationales for FL requirements within general education programs at institutions of higher learning in the United States. However, data from IDI assessments that were used in this study to measure the impact of one beginner-level language course on students' intercultural competence development suggest that while limited gains can be made, language courses that do not explicitly focus on intercultural competence development are insufficient; that is, they do not successfully support learners' progress in this area. The current authors propose that unless FL educators explicitly align course outcomes with broad institutional goals for global learning and intercultural competence and reconceptualize curriculum, instruction, and assessment to overtly focus students' attention on the practices, products, and perspectives of culture (World-Readiness Standards, Goal 2; National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015), FL courses for general education risk becoming irrelevant and the concept of "language learning for all" will never become "the new normal" (Moeller & Abbott, 2018, p. 16). The Can-Do Statements (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017) offer a promising avenue to facilitate the changes that must occur in language teaching if language educators truly wish to enable our students to participate effectively in global contexts as intercultural citizens.

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