



## Cultural Values and Intercultural Communication Competence: A Review of Individualism and Collectivism Studies

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| Article Info                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
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| <p><b>Received:</b> 2026-04-07<br/> <b>Revised:</b> 2026-05-19<br/> <b>Accepted:</b> 2026-09-16</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/> <i>Cultural Values;<br/> Intercultural<br/> Communication<br/> Competence;<br/> Individualism–<br/> Collectivism; Cultural<br/> Awareness; Digital<br/> Intercultural<br/> Communication</i></p> <p><b>DOI:</b><br/> 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.10903</p> <p><b>Corresponding Author:</b><br/> Naza Fanisa<br/> naza.fanisa8@gmail.com<br/> English Department, University<br/> of North Sumatera, Medan</p> | <p><i>Purpose. This article reviews the relationship between cultural values and intercultural communication competence (ICC), focusing specifically on individualism and collectivism, in order to answer two review questions: (1) How do individualism and collectivism shape communication style, conflict management, cultural awareness, and adaptability as components of ICC? and (2) What gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding digitally mediated intercultural communication? Design/methodology. This study used a thematic literature review of sources published between 2001 and 2025, drawn from Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, and ScienceDirect, with explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to every source consulted (see Section 3.2). Findings. Five themes emerged: communication style, conflict management, cultural awareness, adaptability, and newly foregrounded in this revision digitally mediated intercultural communication. Individualistic orientations are consistently associated with direct, low context communication and explicit conflict engagement, while collectivist orientations favor indirect, high context communication and harmony preserving conflict strategies; however, several recent studies complicate this binary, particularly in online and hybrid identity contexts. Originality/value. Unlike prior narrative reviews that treat individualism–collectivism as a static dichotomy, this review synthesizes classic frameworks (Hofstede, Hall, Gudykunst) with recent (2022–2025) research on virtual exchange and computer mediated communication, and it identifies contradictory findings rather than only convergent ones.</i></p> |

*Practical implications. The review offers implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and intercultural training, and argues that ICC development should be integrated into language education rather than treated as a supplementary skill.*

## **1. Introduction**

Communication across cultural boundaries has become an increasingly important aspect of contemporary society. Individuals regularly interact with people from different cultural backgrounds in educational settings, workplaces, social communities, and online environments. While such interactions provide opportunities for collaboration and mutual learning, they may also create challenges due to differences in cultural values, beliefs, and communication practices.

The success of intercultural interactions depends not only on linguistic proficiency but also on the ability to understand and respond appropriately to cultural differences, an ability commonly referred to as Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC). ICC encompasses cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and effective communication skills, and individuals with high levels of ICC are generally better equipped to navigate cultural differences and establish meaningful relationships with people from diverse backgrounds.

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding cultural differences is Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory. Among the dimensions Hofstede proposed, individualism and collectivism have received the most sustained attention in ICC research because of their direct relationship with communication behaviors: individualistic cultures tend to emphasize personal autonomy, self expression, and individual achievement, whereas collectivist cultures prioritize group harmony, social obligations, and interpersonal relationships.

Previous studies have investigated the influence of cultural values on communication behaviors in education, business, and multicultural communities. Three gaps, however, limit the current state of knowledge. First, existing findings remain scattered across disciplines and often focus on a single cultural group or communication setting, so a comprehensive account of how individualism and collectivism jointly shape ICC is still lacking. Second, most reviews treat individualism and collectivism as a fixed binary, which does not adequately capture hybrid, bicultural, or context dependent identities that are increasingly common in globalized and migratory contexts. Third, the bulk of the foundational literature (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; Hall, 1976; Deardorff, 2006) predates the shift toward digitally mediated communication, and comparatively few narrative reviews have

integrated recent (2022–2025) research on virtual exchange, computer mediated communication, and online intercultural learning into the individualism–collectivism framework. This review addresses these three gaps directly.

- To synthesize how individualism and collectivism shape four established components of ICC: communication style, conflict management, cultural awareness, and adaptability.
- To identify convergent and contradictory findings across the reviewed literature, rather than reporting only confirmatory evidence.
- To extend the review to digitally mediated intercultural communication, an area underrepresented in earlier ICC literature reviews.
- To derive implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and intercultural training.

Accordingly, the review is guided by two questions: RQ1 How do individualism and collectivism shape communication style, conflict management, cultural awareness, and adaptability as components of ICC? RQ2 What contradictions and gaps remain in this literature, particularly regarding digital and hybrid identity contexts?

### 1.1 Conceptual Framework

This review is organized around the following conceptual sequence, which integrates the three theoretical traditions discussed separately in prior literature (Hofstede's value dimensions, Hall's context theory, and Deardorff's process model of ICC):

*Cultural Values (Individualism–Collectivism) → Communication Style (Hall's high/low context) → Cultural Awareness & Empathy → Adaptability → Intercultural Communication Competence (Deardorff's attitude–knowledge–skill outcomes)*

Hofstede's dimension explains why cultural groups differ in underlying orientation; Hall's high/low context distinction explains how that orientation surfaces in communication style; and Deardorff's process model explains how awareness and adaptability convert into measurable competence outcomes. Treating these frameworks as sequential rather than parallel clarifies how the literature reviewed in Section 2 fits together, and it structures the thematic synthesis presented in Section 4.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Cultural Values

Culture has long been recognized as one of the most influential factors shaping human behavior and communication. According to Hofstede (2001), culture can be understood as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group from another, a definition that foregrounds culture's role in shaping how individuals think, feel, and behave within specific social contexts. Hall (1976) similarly argues that culture is deeply embedded in communication

practices and often operates at an unconscious level, learned and internalized through socialization from childhood.

Cultural values serve as guiding principles that influence individuals' judgments, priorities, and behaviors, affecting how people define appropriate communication, manage relationships, and respond to social situations. In intercultural encounters, differences in cultural values may lead to misunderstanding because individuals often interpret messages based on their own cultural frameworks, which is why understanding cultural values is treated in this review as a prerequisite for, rather than simply a correlate of, effective intercultural communication.

## **2.2 Individualism and Collectivism**

Among the dimensions proposed by Hofstede (2001), individualism and collectivism remain the most widely discussed in intercultural communication studies, explaining the extent to which individuals prioritize personal goals or collective interests within a society.

Individualism refers to a cultural orientation that values personal autonomy, independence, and self expression; people are encouraged to pursue personal achievement, express opinions openly, and take responsibility for their own decisions. Communication in individualistic cultures tends to be direct and explicit, often interpreted as a sign of confidence, transparency, and professionalism. In contrast, collectivism emphasizes interdependence, group harmony, and social relationships, and communication is often characterized by indirectness and contextual sensitivity, conveyed through shared understanding and nonverbal cues rather than explicit verbal statements.

These contrasting orientations have important implications for intercultural communication: direct communication may be perceived as honest and efficient by individualists but as impolite by collectivists, while indirect communication may be interpreted as respectful by collectivists but as vague by individualists. It is important to note, however, that Hofstede's dimensions describe population level tendencies rather than fixed individual traits; the following sections and the discussion in Section 5 return to this caveat when addressing hybrid and multicultural identities.

## **2.3 Intercultural Communication Competence**

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Deardorff (2006) conceptualizes ICC as a multidimensional construct involving attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal and external outcomes; effective intercultural communicators demonstrate respect, openness, curiosity, and willingness to learn from cultural differences, alongside knowledge that enables them to adapt their behavior across situations. Fantini (2009) similarly argues that intercultural competence involves awareness, attitudes, skills,

and knowledge (the AASK model) that facilitate successful intercultural interaction.

Researchers have identified several recurring components of ICC: cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, communication skills, and tolerance for ambiguity. ICC has become increasingly important in higher education and professional environments, where universities, multinational organizations, and international communities frequently require individuals to collaborate across cultural backgrounds

#### ***2.4 Digital and Virtual Intercultural Communication***

A limitation of the foundational ICC literature is that it developed largely before intercultural contact routinely occurred online. Recent studies address this gap directly. Li, Liu, and Jiang (2024) conducted a quasi experiment with international students in China and found that virtual reality based intercultural exercises produced measurable gains in awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills the same four components identified in Deardorff's (2006) model suggesting that immersive digital environments can substitute, at least partially, for physical intercultural contact. In a broader synthesis, Basantes Andrade et al. (2025) conducted a PRISMA guided systematic mapping of 23 studies published between 2005 and 2024 and found that adaptability/management and communication skills were the most frequently studied ICC dimensions in digitally mediated learning, with Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and virtual exchange emerging as dominant instructional formats.

These findings complicate the individualism–collectivism binary discussed in Section 2.2 in two ways. First, computer mediated communication often strips away the contextual and nonverbal cues that collectivist communicators rely on, which may force more explicit, individualist style communication regardless of a participant's cultural orientation. Second, virtual exchange frequently places participants in hybrid, mixed orientation groups, making it harder to attribute communication outcomes to a single cultural value dimension. This review therefore treats digital ICC as a distinct, fifth theme in the synthesis presented in Section 4, rather than folding it into the four classic themes.

#### ***2.5 The Relationship Between Cultural Values and Intercultural Communication Competence***

The relationship between cultural values and ICC has attracted considerable attention in intercultural communication research. Scholars generally agree that communication behaviors are shaped by culturally embedded values, norms, and expectations, which influence how individuals interpret messages and interact with others (Hofstede, 2001; Martin & Nakayama, 2018). Individuals from individualistic cultures tend to value directness, self expression, and personal autonomy, whereas those from collectivist cultures often emphasize relational harmony, group cohesion, and indirect communication strategies (Gudykunst, 2004; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019), differences that affect how people manage

conversations, negotiate disagreement, and build relationships in intercultural contexts.

Research demonstrates that awareness of cultural values contributes positively to ICC. Deardorff (2006) argues that effective intercultural communicators possess not only cultural knowledge but also attitudes of openness, respect, and curiosity that enable them to recognize cultural variation and adapt accordingly; Fantini (2009) similarly emphasizes that intercultural competence requires the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness, all of which are shaped by cultural values. Cultural sensitivity and empathy help individuals interpret messages accurately and respond appropriately (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009), reducing stereotyping, ethnocentric judgment, and communication misunderstanding. Cultural values also influence adaptability and behavioral flexibility: according to Kim (2017), successful intercultural communicators negotiate cultural differences and adjust their communication styles across diverse settings a capacity that is particularly important in multicultural educational settings, international workplaces, and, as Section 2.4 suggests, digitally mediated communication environments. Jackson (2020) and Yashima (2024) extend this argument, showing that intercultural learning and language learning are mutually reinforcing rather than separable objectives.

## **2. Method**

This study employed a thematic literature review, partially informed by PRISMA reporting conventions (explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, described in Section 3.2), to examine the relationship between cultural values and ICC, with particular attention to individualism and collectivism. Unlike a full PRISMA systematic review, this study does not report a record count flow diagram (see Section 3.3). A thematic review rather than a systematic review or meta analysis was chosen because the literature spans multiple disciplines (communication studies, education, psychology) and methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, and conceptual), which makes the pooled effect size estimation required by meta analysis inappropriate; a thematic approach instead allows recurring conceptual patterns to be identified across heterogeneous study designs, consistent with Zhu's (2022) guidance on method selection in intercultural communication research.

### **3.1 Search Strategy**

Literature was collected from four databases: Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, and ScienceDirect. Search terms combined the following keywords using Boolean operators: "cultural values" AND "intercultural communication competence"; "individualism" AND "collectivism"; "cultural awareness" AND "adaptability"; and "digital" OR "virtual" AND "intercultural communication." The search covered publications from 2001 (the publication year of Hofstede's revised *Culture's Consequences*) to 2025.

### **3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Studies were included if they: (a) were peer reviewed journal articles, academic books, or book chapters; (b) were published in English between 2001 and 2025; (c) addressed cultural values (particularly individualism–collectivism) in relation to intercultural communication or ICC; and (d) reported sufficient methodological detail to assess relevance and quality. Studies were excluded if they: (a) were not peer reviewed (e.g., blog posts, opinion pieces); (b) addressed intercultural topics unrelated to communication competence (e.g., purely economic or legal analyses); (c) were inaccessible in full text; or (d) duplicated findings already captured by an included source.

### **3.3 Study Selection Procedure**

Records identified through database searching were screened by title and abstract against the inclusion and exclusion criteria in Section 3.2, and the remaining records were assessed in full text before final inclusion. This review did not track a formal record count (i.e., the number of records identified, duplicates removed, records screened, and records excluded at each stage) during the original search, and therefore does not report a PRISMA style selection flow diagram. This is acknowledged as a methodological limitation in Section 3.6 and Section 5.5; the inclusion and exclusion criteria in Section 3.2 were nonetheless applied consistently to every source consulted.

### **3.4 Quality Assessment**

Each full text article was assessed against three criteria: (a) publication in a peer reviewed venue or by an academic press; (b) clarity of theoretical framing or empirical method; and (c) direct relevance to individualism–collectivism and ICC rather than incidental mention. Articles meeting all three criteria were retained; articles meeting only one or two criteria were excluded or, where they offered unique conceptual value (e.g., foundational theoretical texts such as Hall, 1976), retained with their limitations noted in the synthesis.

### **3.5 Thematic Analysis Procedure**

The included studies were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach, adapted for a literature review rather than primary qualitative data. Each study was first coded for the ICC component(s) it addressed (communication style, conflict management, cultural awareness, adaptability, or digital/virtual communication); codes were then grouped into candidate themes, which were reviewed against the full dataset to check for coherence and for cases where a single study's findings did not fit a candidate theme. Where a study reported findings that contradicted the dominant pattern within a theme, this was recorded explicitly rather than merged into the majority finding (see Section 4.5).

### **3.6 Limitations of the Review Procedure**

Because the search was restricted to four databases and to English language

sources, studies published in other languages or indexed only in regional databases may have been missed, introducing a possible selection bias toward Western and English medium scholarship a limitation that is itself relevant given this review's discussion of individualism collectivism as a potentially Western centric framework (Section 5.5). In addition, because this is a thematic rather than a systematic review, no formal risk of bias tool (e.g., GRADE) was applied to individual studies, and no record count of identified, screened, or excluded sources was kept during the search process; quality was instead assessed narratively, as described in Section 3.4, and the criteria in Section 3.2 were applied consistently to each source consulted.

### 3. Result

The reviewed studies demonstrate that cultural values influence ICC in five interrelated ways, summarized in Table 2 and discussed in turn below: communication style, conflict management, cultural awareness, adaptability, and digital/virtual intercultural communication. Of these, communication style and cultural awareness were the most frequently discussed themes across the reviewed literature, followed by adaptability, conflict management, and, most recently, digital communication.

| Author(s)        | Context                                           | Key Finding                                                                                                 | Contribution to This Review                                                           |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hofstede (2001)  | Cross national values survey, 50+ countries       | Established individualism–collectivism as a core cultural dimension shaping self construal and behavior     | Foundational framework for classifying communication styles                           |
| Hall (1976)      | Theoretical/ethnographic                          | Distinguished high context and low context communication                                                    | Explains why indirectness is normative rather than deficient in collectivist settings |
| Gudykunst (2004) | Intergroup communication theory                   | Linked uncertainty and anxiety management to cultural value orientation                                     | Connects individualism collectivism to conflict and adaptation strategies             |
| Deardorff (2006) | US higher education administrators (Delphi study) | ICC is a process of attitudes, knowledge/comprehension, and skills producing internal and external outcomes | Provides the attitude knowledge skill structure used to organize this review's themes |

|                                |                                                            |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fantini (2009)                 | Conceptual/assessment review                               | ICC comprises awareness, attitudes, skills, and knowledge (AASK)                                                             | Cross checks Deardorff's model; supports the awareness/adaptability themes          |
| Ting-Toomey & Dorjee (2019)    | Conflict management theory                                 | Face negotiation differs systematically by cultural value orientation                                                        | Basis for the conflict management theme and its contradictions                      |
| Zhu (2022)                     | Methodological guide                                       | Outlines rigor standards for intercultural communication research                                                            | Used to justify this review's methodological revisions                              |
| Yashima (2024)                 | Language education, global contexts                        | Intercultural competence and L2 motivation are mutually reinforcing                                                          | Supports implications for English language education                                |
| Li, Liu, & Jiang (2024)        | Quasi experiment, international students in China (n = 30) | VR based intercultural exercises improved awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills                                        | Evidence for the digital/virtual ICC theme added in this revision                   |
| Basantes-Andrade et al. (2025) | PRISMA based systematic mapping, 23 studies (2005–2024)    | Adaptation/management and communication skills are the most frequently studied ICC dimensions in digitally mediated learning | Model for this review's PRISMA informed methodology; supports the digital ICC theme |

Table 2. Synthesis of key sources by theme and contribution.

#### 4.1 Communication Style

Studies consistently indicate that individuals from individualistic cultures tend to prefer direct communication, explicit messages, and open self-expression, while individuals from collectivist cultures generally favor indirect communication and relationship oriented interaction (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst, 2004). These differences affect how messages are conveyed and interpreted during intercultural encounters, and they recur across the education, business, and multicultural community contexts covered in the reviewed literature.

#### 4.2 Conflict Management

Collectivist cultures tend to emphasize harmony and relationship preservation when addressing disagreement, leading individuals to avoid direct confrontation and seek compromise (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019). Individuals

from individualistic cultures, by contrast, are generally more willing to address conflict openly and express disagreement directly. This pattern is broadly convergent across the reviewed sources, though the strength of the association varies by context, as discussed in Section 4.5.

#### **4.3 Cultural Awareness**

Cultural awareness plays a central role in developing ICC: individuals who understand cultural differences are more capable of adapting their communication behavior and avoiding misunderstanding. This finding is consistent with Deardorff's (2006) and Fantini's (2009) models, both of which position awareness as a precondition for, rather than a byproduct of, competent intercultural communication.

#### **4.4 Adaptability**

Adaptability the ability to adjust communication style according to cultural context emerges consistently as a distinct contributor to ICC, separate from awareness alone. Several studies indicate that effective communicators combine cultural knowledge with the behavioral flexibility to apply it, which facilitates relationship building and improves communication effectiveness in multicultural environments (Kim, 2017).

#### **4.5 Digital and Virtual Intercultural Communication, and Contradictory Findings**

Findings in this theme are less uniform than in the four classic themes above. Li, Liu, and Jiang (2024) found that a short virtual reality intervention improved ICC outcomes regardless of participants' cultural backgrounds, suggesting that structured digital tasks can offset, rather than simply reproduce, individualism–collectivism differences. This contrasts with the assumption implicit in much of the foundational literature (Hofstede, 2001; Hall, 1976) that cultural orientation deterministically shapes communication outcomes; Basantes-Andrade et al. (2025) similarly report that digitally mediated ICC outcomes depend heavily on instructional design (e.g., the presence of structured facilitation in COIL/virtual exchange formats) rather than on cultural orientation alone. Read together, these two sources represent a genuine contradiction of the review's dominant narrative: they suggest that, at least in digitally mediated and instructionally structured contexts, communication style may be more malleable than the individualism–collectivism literature typically implies. This review treats that contradiction as a substantive finding rather than an anomaly to be explained away, and returns to it in Section 5.5.

### **4. Discussion**

The findings of this review demonstrate that cultural values play a

significant role in shaping ICC, while also revealing where the individualism–collectivism framework requires qualification rather than simple confirmation.

### ***5.1 Communication Style and Conflict Management***

The review's findings on communication style and conflict management are broadly consistent with Hofstede's (2001) and Hall's (1976) foundational claims: individualistic cultures favor direct, low context communication and open conflict engagement, while collectivist cultures favor indirect, high context communication and harmony preserving conflict strategies. Both styles are effective within their respective cultural contexts, and misunderstandings tend to arise specifically when individuals interpret an interlocutor's behavior through their own cultural framework rather than the interlocutor's.

### ***5.2 Cultural Awareness and Adaptability***

Cultural awareness and adaptability function as complementary rather than interchangeable competencies: awareness without adaptability produces recognition of difference without the behavioral capacity to respond to it, while adaptability without awareness risks superficial code switching that does not address the underlying value difference. This distinction, implicit but underdeveloped in Deardorff (2006) and Fantini (2009), is one respect in which synthesizing the two models rather than citing them separately, as in prior narrative reviews adds analytical value.

### ***5.3 Digital and Hybrid Contexts***

Contemporary communication increasingly occurs online, and the findings in Section 4.5 indicate that this shift does not simply transplant offline individualism–collectivism patterns into digital settings. Video conferencing, social media, and virtual exchange platforms often reduce the contextual and nonverbal cues on which collectivist, high context communicators typically rely, which may push interaction toward more explicit, individualist style norms irrespective of participants' underlying cultural values. At the same time, well designed digital formats such as COIL and structured virtual exchange appear able to build ICC across cultural orientations (Li, Liu, & Jiang, 2024; Basantes-Andrade et al., 2025), suggesting that instructional design, not cultural background alone, increasingly mediates ICC outcomes in digital environments. This is a genuinely new implication relative to the foundational literature and represents this review's clearest theoretical contribution beyond summarizing prior work.

### ***5.4 Cultural Complexity and Hybrid Identities***

A further limitation of the individualism–collectivism literature, including much of the literature synthesized above, is its treatment of the dimension as a binary attached to national culture. In practice, individuals increasingly hold hybrid or bicultural identities through migration, international education, or multicultural upbringing that do not map cleanly onto either pole. Hofstede's

(2001) framework describes population level tendencies rather than individual psychology, and later scholars (e.g., Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019) have noted that individuals routinely draw on both individualist and collectivist repertoires depending on context (e.g., family versus workplace). This review's synthesis is therefore best read as describing tendencies that interact with, rather than override, individual and contextual variation.

### **5.5 Limitations of the Existing Literature**

Three limitations recur across the literature synthesized in this review. First, much of the foundational research (Hofstede, 2001; Deardorff, 2006) draws on Western, and particularly North American and European, samples, raising the selection bias concern already noted in Section 3.6. Second, most individual studies use cross sectional designs, which can establish association but not the direction of influence between cultural values and ICC. Third, as Section 4.5 shows, the digital communication literature remains comparatively small and methodologically varied (quasi experimental, mixed methods, and systematic mapping designs are not directly comparable), which limits how confidently conclusions in this theme can be generalized.

### **5.6 Implications for Education and Training**

For English language education specifically, the findings suggest that language learning should not be separated from cultural learning: communicative competence involves not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to understand cultural meaning and communication practice (Yashima, 2024). Three practical implications follow. For curriculum design, intercultural topics and authentic communication tasks should be embedded across the language curriculum rather than taught as a stand alone unit. For teacher education, instructors require explicit training in facilitating cross cultural interaction, since Basantes-Andrade et al. (2025) suggest that outcomes in digital ICC formats depend on facilitation quality rather than the technology itself. For intercultural training programs more broadly, structured virtual exchange offers a scalable, lower cost complement to physical mobility programs, though Section 5.5's limitations suggest such programs should be evaluated locally rather than assumed to generalize from the existing evidence base.

### **5.7 Future Research Directions**

- Longitudinal designs that can establish the direction of influence between cultural values and ICC development, rather than relying on cross sectional association.
- Studies sampling beyond Western and English medium populations, to test whether the individualism–collectivism patterns synthesized here hold in underrepresented regions.
- Research explicitly addressing hybrid, bicultural, and multicultural identities, rather than treating individualism–collectivism as a fixed binary.

- Further empirical work on digitally mediated ICC, particularly comparative studies isolating the effect of instructional design from that of participants' cultural orientation.

Empirical (rather than purely literature based) studies involving students, educators, and multicultural communities, to test the practical implications proposed in Section 5.6.

## 5. Conclusion

This review examined the relationship between cultural values and intercultural communication competence, with particular attention to individualism and collectivism, guided by two questions: how these value orientations shape communication style, conflict management, cultural awareness, and adaptability, and what contradictions and gaps remain in the literature. The findings confirm that individualistic cultures generally favor direct communication and personal expression, while collectivist cultures favor harmony, relationship maintenance, and indirect communication but the review also identifies a genuine contradiction in the digital communication literature, where structured virtual exchange appears able to build ICC across cultural orientations rather than simply reproducing offline value differences (Section 4.5).

Beyond confirming prior theory, this review's contribution is threefold: it synthesizes Hofstede's, Hall's, and Deardorff's frameworks into a single conceptual sequence (Section 1.3) rather than treating them as parallel but separate literatures; it foregrounds digitally mediated intercultural communication as a distinct theme rather than an afterthought (Section 2.4, 4.5); and it explicitly reports contradictory as well as convergent findings, consistent with the more critical synthesis called for in literature review methodology.

This study is limited by its reliance on previously published literature, by the English language and four database search restriction noted in Section 3.6, and by the comparatively small and methodologically heterogeneous digital ICC evidence base discussed in Section 5.5. Future studies are encouraged to pursue the directions outlined in Section 5.7, particularly empirical work involving students, educators, and multicultural communities, and research that engages directly with hybrid and multicultural identities rather than a binary individualism–collectivism framework. Greater awareness of cultural values and communication differences can, in the meantime, contribute to more effective communication, stronger interpersonal relationships, and increased mutual understanding across cultures.

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