



## Developing Intercultural Communication Course: Key Considerations for a Jordanian Context

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### Article Info

Received: May 2, 2025

Accepted: September 4, 2025

Published: October 22, 2025



[10.46303/jcve.2025.32](https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2025.32)

### How to cite

Eltaiba, N., Almadi, B., Al-Issawi, J. AlTaher, B., Haddad, E., Althawabih, H., Al-Banna, N., & Al-Tawabeyeh, M. (2025). Developing Intercultural

Communication Course: Key Considerations for a Jordanian Context. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 8(3), 159-178.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2025.32>

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### ABSTRACT

There is a growing interest in incorporating intercultural studies into higher education curricula, reflecting their increasing relevance in a diverse global society. This research aims to examine the essential intercultural knowledge and skills required for effective engagement with Jordanian communities. The study aimed to answer the question, "What are the key considerations when developing intercultural communication courses within the Jordanian context?" This qualitative, participatory, and exploratory study involved seven academics in 2024 who engaged through meetings and WhatsApp groups to reflect on the subject, analyze data, and review findings. Thematic analysis revealed the importance of understanding cultural and religious dimensions, political and social considerations, and communication styles. The findings emphasize the need for sustained cultural competence training for future graduates to ensure their ability to engage effectively with diverse communities and promote inclusive, culturally responsive practices that honor and integrate distinct cultural and religious values.

### KEYWORDS

Intercultural communication; cultural competence; courses; communities; Jordan.

## INTRODUCTION

Studying intercultural communication is essential in today's world, where diverse cultures increasingly interact (Deveci et al., 2022). This field encompasses various dimensions, including intercultural competence, the impact of intercultural communication on professional practices (AlTaher, 2020; Braslauskas, 2021; Tétreault et al., 2020), and the role of educational programs in fostering intercultural sensitivity (Takyi et al., 2024). Research demonstrates that learning about cultures enhances students' intercultural sensitivity and communication skills (Deveci et al., 2022; Yuwita, 2023). It emphasizes the importance of developing cultural competency and responding respectfully and effectively to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds—across differences in language, social class, race, ethnicity, religion, and other factors (Yuwita, 2023). The goal is to recognize, affirm, and value the dignity of individuals, families, and communities (Garran & Werkmeister, 2013). Cultural competence requires professionals to be knowledgeable, highly skilled, and constructive (Yussupova & Tarman, 2025; Li & Longpradit, 2022). Developing cultural sensitivity is a critical component of intercultural practice—centered on appreciating and valuing the lived experiences of others (Tétreault et al., 2020).

Adopting intercultural communication skills and knowledge is vital when working with diverse communities, as it reflects a fundamental aspect of human rights. It involves inclusion, empathy, and respect for others (Ting-Toomey, 2010). Effective engagement with communities in Jordan requires a respectful understanding of their spiritual beliefs, social norms, and communication practices (Al-Eid & Al-Zboon, 2018). Showing cultural sensitivity, tolerance, and a genuine willingness to learn about and adapt to these customs fosters trust, strengthens relationships, and promotes effective communication (Oweis et al., 2012).

Despite the substantial growth of intercultural studies, notable gaps still exist (Cubero, 2022; Presbitero, 2021; Ting-Toomey, 2010). These gaps are particularly evident in non-Western contexts, where research that bridges theoretical frameworks with practical applications is urgently needed. Existing literature reveals that intercultural research remains limited and underdeveloped in the Middle East, particularly in Jordan. There is a clear need for studies that focus on course content design within Jordanian universities. Much of the existing intercultural communication literature is rooted in Western contexts, with minimal emphasis on political or cultural frameworks relevant to the region (Sakharova et al., 2017).

There is a clear lack of studies on intercultural studies in higher education in Jordan (Al-Eid & Al-Zboon, 2018). Few localized, in-depth studies examine how intercultural communication functions specifically within Jordanian communities. This study seeks to address the gaps in intercultural research, particularly within the higher education sector, by developing course content tailored to intercultural communication. The content should support students from diverse backgrounds and reflect Jordan's distinctive cultural, social, and religious attributes, as well as its rich historical context and strategic location. The German Jordanian University, established in 2005, presents a unique educational model that integrates applied learning with theoretical foundations. The university provides valuable opportunities for local

and international students through academic exchange and cross-cultural engagement. Designing a course on intercultural communication is a crucial addition to the curriculum.

This study aims to answer the main research question: “What are the main considerations in preparing the content for intercultural communication courses?” along with the following sub-questions:

- What are the key aspects of the political context that should be considered?
- What are the main elements of the social and cultural context that should be taken into account?

### **BACKGROUND**

Jordan is a Middle Eastern country located in Western Asia. It shares borders with Saudi Arabia to the south and east, Iraq to the northeast, Syria to the north, and Israel and Palestine to the west, with a small coastline on the Red Sea at the Gulf of Aqaba. The geography is diverse, featuring deserts—most notably the vast Arabian Desert—fertile plains in the northwest, and the Jordan Rift Valley. Jordan is a constitutional monarchy, with King Abdullah II serving as head of state since 1999. The king holds significant executive and legislative powers, including the authority to appoint the prime minister (Torki, 2017).

Jordan has unique sociocultural dynamics shaped by tribal traditions, religious values, and regional politics (Tell, 2013). Its population is approximately 11 million (as of 2024), with the majority identifying as Sunni Muslims. Christians and other smaller religious communities also contribute to the country's diverse social fabric. Jordan is home to minority groups, including Shia Muslims, Circassians, Chechens, Armenians, and Kurds, which together create a microcosm of cultural diversity within the Arab world (Singh, 2021). In addition, the country hosts large numbers of refugees—mainly from Syria, Iraq, and Palestine—who have played a major role in shaping its domestic and foreign policies (Torki, 2017). Arabic is the official language, while English is widely used in business and education.

Jordan's unique position on the regional and international stage reflects the success of its internal political and social systems. Its stable political regime, reinforced by socio-political cohesion and inclusive policies, enables it to bridge conflicting parties in the Middle East, positioning the country as a key player in peace-building initiatives and regional diplomacy (Barari, 2020; Yom, 2022). The integration of diversity, inclusion, and both traditional and modern values provides important insight into the interplay between culture and communication in pluralistic societies. Such understanding is essential for building systems that ensure a safe environment where people can live, practice their values and beliefs, and respect those of others. Jordan also benefits from valuable resources, including universities, cultural institutions, and heritage sites. Its contemporary contributions serve as a model for interaction within the international arena.

### **The Socio-Cultural and Educational Context of Jordan**

The socio-cultural and educational context of Jordan constitutes a critical thematic area in designing an intercultural communication course that is both relevant and effective for local learners. Jordan's religious, political, linguistic, and social structures shape the foundation of cultural interactions and learning environments. There is a need to tailor a course based on the local characteristics of Jordan that also meets international standards. Understanding Jordan's specific culture and education system can inform course design, content, and instructional strategies.

### **Theories of Intercultural Communication**

The research is informed by diverse foundational frameworks that enhance understanding of the effects of intercultural differences on communication processes. These frameworks equip students with conceptual tools to better identify and manage cultural conflicts in both interpersonal and professional contexts. Edward T. Hall's model distinguishing high-context and low-context cultures offers valuable insights into intercultural communication (Gamsriegler, 2005). The framework elucidates how culture impacts behavior, values, and how these are conveyed in social exchanges. High-context cultures are typically collectivistic, emphasizing social cohesion and implicit communication grounded in shared cultural knowledge. In contrast, low-context cultures are generally individualistic, preferring direct and explicit verbal communication.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory offers a framework for understanding how cultural values affect human behavior and communication across societies (Gerlach & Eriksson, 2021). The theory outlines six dimensions: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. These dimensions help explain how individuals from different cultural backgrounds perceive authority, manage complexity, deal with ambiguity, form relationships, and express their perspectives. In intercultural communication, Hofstede's model is particularly useful for identifying potential areas of conflict, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and promoting effective interaction in diverse contexts (Scutariu & Bodnărescu, 2023). Other frameworks also offer insights into how individuals engage and negotiate, especially in conflict situations (Hou, 2023; Ting-Toomey, 2013).

### **Cultural Competence and Pedagogy**

Research emphasizes the importance of promoting cultural awareness, empathic responses, and inclusiveness among students. Banks's influential model provides a structured framework and practical steps for integrating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum and learning environments (Banks, 2016). It aims to equip educators to better prepare students within diverse contexts by incorporating the histories, contributions, and experiences of various cultural groups.

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity presents a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals transition from ethnocentric attitudes to more

inclusive intercultural perspectives (Sakharova et al., 2017). This model is frequently applied in training programs aimed at enhancing intercultural competence across different fields and settings. Together, these models shape instructional strategies that foster students' cultural awareness, empathy, and ability to engage inclusively, while offering guidance for designing learning environments that promote intercultural development.

### **Curriculum Development in Intercultural Education**

The development of the curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, strategic communication, and intercultural competence. It is theoretically grounded in both classical and contemporary educational perspectives, ensuring that the proposed course is responsive to Jordan's unique context while contributing to the broader goals of academic innovation and global citizenship. Tyler's objectives model highlights the importance of establishing clear, measurable learning objectives, shaping experiences, and assessing outcomes to systematically foster intercultural competence among students (Button, 2021). Taba emphasises the democratic and dynamic role of incorporating community voices in the educational process and curriculum development. Instructors play a crucial role in assessing students' needs when designing curriculum content to create more effective learning experiences that reflect Jordan's cultural and socio-political realities (Sekyere & Jamgade, 2025). These principles align with contemporary perspectives on education as a collaborative and participatory endeavor. While classical theories provide the foundation for curriculum design, modern educational approaches address equality and the challenges of rapid global change (Tsapayi & Samuel, 2023).

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

### **Research Design**

Participatory research employs a qualitative, collaborative approach in which participants are actively involved in developing and responding to research questions, collecting and analyzing data, and shaping the outcomes (Mayrhofer et al., 2019; Omodan & Dastile, 2023). The co-research model aims to enrich the findings by incorporating diverse perspectives. Its collaborative nature emphasizes critical consciousness and collective understanding (Littlechild et al., 2015).

### **Participants and Procedure**

The question was examined by an interdisciplinary team of seven academics: one female social worker; one male and one female expert in political science; two females specializing in English literature; one female specializing in curriculum and instruction; and one male specializing in Arabic, who also served as Dean of the School of Applied Humanities and Social Sciences (SAHSS). All participants hold PhDs in their respective fields and have experience teaching courses on intercultural communication and diversity. The study employed a convenience sampling method. All participants were affiliated with the German Jordanian University (GJU) within the College of Applied Humanities and Social Sciences, while two were also affiliated with other universities and joined the project due to their interest in intercultural communication.

The SAHSS is particularly well-positioned to conduct this research, as it offers four courses in intercultural communication skills to all university students.

The team members met three times in person to reflect on the main aspects of introducing Jordanian culture to non-Jordanians from Arabic or Western backgrounds. The findings were subsequently incorporated into the content of the intercultural courses and the design of workshops offered to interested personnel from international communities. Three intercultural courses were provided in English and taught across different departments.

After several meetings, the following sub-questions were proposed: *“With respect to the political context, what are the main considerations when preparing the content for intercultural communication courses?”*

*“With respect to the social context, what are the main considerations when preparing the content for intercultural communication courses?”*

*“With respect to the cultural context, what are the main considerations when preparing the content for intercultural communication courses?”*

To address these questions, team members held three meetings and created a WhatsApp group titled *Intercultural Communication* to exchange ideas and collaboratively explore them. Reflections were recorded in both written notes and voice messages. The research was conducted between June 2024 and January 2025.

### **Data Analysis**

The Thematic Analysis framework was employed to identify patterns. One of the researchers compiled the material obtained from the transcripts of the recorded meetings and WhatsApp group discussions into a single comprehensive document to ensure that all significant data was centralized for review. The transcripts were read repeatedly to build familiarity with the content, and initial notes were taken to highlight potential patterns and areas of interest. Two researchers then coded the transcripts to identify recurrent words, phrases, and perceptions relevant to the research questions. Coding was conducted manually, and interpretations were compared to ensure consistency, reliability, and to minimize potential bias. Thematic analysis coding was used to extract the main themes (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The themes were subsequently presented and discussed with team members to collaboratively modify and validate them (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This process ensured that the themes were representative of the data and firmly grounded in participants' perceptions. The final stage involved refining and confirming the main themes, ensuring their alignment with the research aims.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis highlighted three main themes relevant to intercultural communication in Jordan: understanding political aspects, family dynamics and structure, and communication style. These themes reflect the sociopolitical, familial, and communicative contexts that shape interactions and should guide the design of intercultural communication courses in Jordan.

**Table 1.***Main Themes and Sub-Themes Identified*

Main themes	Sub-Themes
1. Understanding political aspects	
2. Family dynamics and structure	2.1 The Centrality of the Family
	2.2 Parenting Role
	2.3 Elderly Role
	2.4 Gender Role
	2.5 Interaction with Women
	2.6 The Role of Women in Jordanian Families
	2.7 Women and Education in Jordanian Society
3. Communication style	3.1 Indirect Communication
	3.2 Gestural Communication

**1. Understanding political aspects**

The team members specialized in political science consider understanding Jordan's political aspects to be of paramount importance, as the country's unique political and historical context contributes to its cultural values. Since the establishment of the first government in 1921, the Jordanian regime has successfully conveyed a reassuring message to its citizens, guaranteeing the freedom to practice fundamental (Tell, 2013) religious beliefs. The regime's transparency and commitment to ensuring religious freedom have affirmed the legitimacy of religion within the political system, which views itself as the heir to the first Islamic state led by the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). This relationship has fostered intellectual and ideological bonding between the state and the Jordanian people. As a result, the socio-political structure of Jordan has been codified into laws and legislation that strongly emphasize the Islamic dimension while also preserving traditional societal values. This framework has shaped the nature of social and family values and has defined the boundaries of interaction and communication among various groups within Jordanian society (Ryan, 2018; Hashemi, 2014).

One of the comments was as follows:

“Maintaining the social, cultural, and religious norms of the Jordanian people has contributed to the stability of the political climate in the country throughout the stages and development of the political formation in the state of Jordan.”

In a region known for instability and ongoing conflicts, Jordan's resilience is attributed to its social coherence, which reinforces the nation's stability and fosters an environment rooted in respect, diversity, and shared values. Inclusive governance has enabled the country to navigate difficult periods and respond to challenges effectively. National unity, underpinned by

common values, has been a key factor in maintaining internal security and minimizing the potential for domestic unrest. The collaborative approach during crises has positioned Jordan as a refuge for both its citizens and displaced populations. Integrating tribal and religious communities into political processes has enhanced public trust in state institutions and cultivated a strong sense of national belonging (Loewe, 2019).

One of the female participants said: *“The regime has long recognized the valuable presence of Christians in Jordan and has balanced the country’s Islamic identity with the protection of Christians’ rights to practice their religion and preserve their identity under the law. The communal ties shared by Muslims and Christians within Jordanian society have consistently served as a strong example of brotherhood and coexistence.”*

Jordanian Christians represent one of the oldest Christian communities in the world (Robins, 2019), with a heritage that dates to the earliest days of Christianity. The country is home to major historical and religious sites, including Madaba—famous for its Byzantine mosaics—and Mount Nebo, a revered pilgrimage destination

Another participant added:

*“Integrating traditional values with modern political structures has enabled Jordan to become a model of moderation and resilience. The social cohesion and sense of identity among its people have allowed the country to withstand external attempts to undermine national unity or create divisions among Jordanians. Jordan’s proactive engagement in humanitarian efforts, particularly its role in hosting refugees, underscores its strategic importance and commitment to fostering global stability. This serves as a notable example of effective intercultural communication and attests to Jordan’s strategic role at both regional and international levels.”*

From a socio-political perspective, the political and social openness pursued by the Jordanian state, along with exposure to the experiences of others, has considerably contributed to the adoption of new fields of knowledge. This, in turn, has helped generate solutions to challenges faced by Jordanian society in general and Jordanian families in particular (Fakhoury, 2021). Social experts have also become an integral part of Jordan’s societal structure, playing a vital role in addressing diverse social issues that cannot be overlooked (Khamis, 2018) Jordan’s unique socio-political model stems from the regime’s ability to integrate Islamic heritage with inclusive governance, promoting shared values while respecting social diversity and reinforcing them through institutionalized policies and laws. This model provides legitimacy not only for the political system but also as a viable intercultural communication framework that fosters effective interaction within Jordan’s diverse society (Momani et al., 2021). Diversity, inclusion, and the integration of traditional and modern structures and values offer a critical understanding of the interplay between culture and communication in diverse societies, demonstrating how a system can succeed by ensuring a safe environment where people live, practice their values and beliefs, and respect those of others (Momani et al., 2021).

## 2. Family dynamics and structure

All group members agreed that the Jordanian family, like the Arab family more broadly, is unique. Practitioners, academics, and human rights advocates working with Jordanian families should be familiar with essential family patterns and dynamics (Khosh et al., 2020). The structure of Jordanian families reflects a blend of traditional values and modern influences shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors. Understanding these structures is crucial for interpreting broader societal interactions in Jordan, particularly within the context of Arab family dynamics (Khosh et al., 2020; Eltaiba, 2019). Jordanian culture is deeply rooted in Arab traditions, emphasizing hospitality, family ties, and respect for elders (Tell, 2013). While urban areas such as Amman are modern and cosmopolitan, rural and tribal communities often maintain traditional lifestyles and customs

One of the participants assured *“One of the characteristics of Arab culture is its strong emphasis on family and community. Individual actions are often regarded as reflections of the family’s values and social expectations.”*

The collectivist tendency within Jordanian society fosters a strong sense of belonging and responsibility among family members, with efforts made to preserve family honor and unity. Recent research supports this traditional role of the family, reaffirming the importance of group identity in Arab Jordanian communities (Khosh et al., 2020).

Another team member emphasized the need to highlight empathy when communicating with Jordanian individuals and families:

*“Building trust, showing respect for cultural and religious practices, and recognizing the importance of family and community in individuals’ lives are essential for effective interaction and communication.”*

### 2.1 The Centrality of the Family

The family is a central unit in Jordanian society, and family structures and dynamics can vary widely (Oweis et al., 2012). The social structure in Jordan is predominantly patriarchal, with the family serving as the cornerstone of social organization. Family ties are strong, and social interactions often revolve around familial relationships. This orientation is crucial for understanding social dynamics and individual behavior within Jordanian culture (Welsh et al., 2021). Families also maintain strong connections with local communities and religious groups, which provide additional support and resources. Social gatherings such as weddings, funerals, and religious celebrations further reinforce family and community bonds. Family members are expected to support one another emotionally, financially, and socially, with this mutual support extending to the extended family as well. While some families operate in a more hierarchical manner and others adopt more egalitarian structures, devotion to the extended family remains a fundamental value that often takes precedence over individual interests. These family ties play a vital role in shaping a collective identity.

One of the female participants said: *“While there is significant change within Jordanian families due to international influence, the Jordanian family is still preserving traditional values.”*

## 2.2 Parenting Role

Unlike the misconception that parenting is limited to raising children, the parental role in Jordan encompasses broader responsibilities, including provision, guidance, and education. These parental activities are expected to align with society's cultural values and norms. Muslim and Christian Jordanian families share common values and standards, and according to social and family experts, Jordanian families are comparable to non-Muslim families in terms of classification and types.

*"It is important for students to understand the uniqueness of parenting roles in Jordan. Some may be surprised to learn that children typically remain in the family home until they marry. The parental role does not end when children reach adulthood; rather, it often shifts toward a consultative role as parents grow older. Nevertheless, parents remain actively involved in their children's lives."*

While parenting in Jordanian families involves a variety of activities, all of them embody *the socio-religious spirit of children in society*. Understanding the different parenting styles, which are shaped by religious outlooks in the community, is therefore crucial. These styles range from democratic to authoritarian to permissive, each with distinct characteristics and implications (Yom, 2022).

Mothers are regarded as the primary social influences within the family and are thus seen as better equipped to offer unique insights into their children (Taleb, 2025). In democratic parenting, parents create a balance between their children's interests and their own, providing logical explanations for their expectations and rules when necessary (Istisaroh, 2020). In authoritative parenting, parents maintain absolute control over their children. In contrast, permissive parenting is characterized by a passive approach, where parents accept all their children's actions without attempting to influence their decisions or behaviors (Sarwar, 2016). Regardless of the parenting style used in raising children in Arab societies, the parenting role remains both significant and essential.

## 2.3 Elderly Role

The elderly in Jordanian families are integral members whose contributions are highly valued (Hweidi et al., 2021). Their role encompasses advising, caregiving, cultural transmission, and community involvement. Recognizing and respecting the place of the elderly within these families is essential for effective and culturally sensitive practice. Providing support that aligns with these family dynamics can enhance the well-being of both the elderly and their families (Halim et al., 2024). The role and status of the elderly are deeply rooted in cultural, religious, and social traditions, underscoring the importance of cultural sensitivity in social welfare practice (Eltaiba, 2019). Elders are revered and respected, reflecting cultural and spiritual teachings that emphasize honoring and caring for one's parents and elders.

One female academic emphasized the importance of exploring religious and spiritual values in any intercultural studies concerning Jordanian families: *"Religious teachings mandate*

*kindness and respect toward the elderly, particularly parents. Religious values highlight the importance of treating the elderly with dignity and respect.”*

The elderly often serve as esteemed advisors in family matters, with their wisdom and experience sought in important decisions such as marriage, financial issues, and conflict resolution. This underscores the respect they command and their essential role in maintaining family harmony.

It is common for elderly parents in Jordan to live with their adult children, a co-residence arrangement that ensures they are well cared for and remain integrated into daily family life. The extended family structure also promotes support even when members do not live under the same roof, as elderly relatives often reside nearby and maintain strong ties and regular interaction with their children and grandchildren (Mostofa, 2017). As one participant noted, *“Grandparents have an important role in transmitting cultural values and traditions. This should be further acknowledged within extended Jordanian families.”*

*“Many grandparents participate in raising their grandchildren to support their children, especially when the parents are employed.”*

Elders play a critical role in passing down cultural traditions, religious practices, and family history to younger generations. They often share stories and experiences that help preserve the family’s heritage. Grandparents commonly take part in raising grandchildren, providing guidance, moral education, and childcare support. Many elderly individuals also actively engage in religious activities, including regular prayers, attending the mosque, and participating in community events, thereby reinforcing both their spiritual and social roles (Khosh et al., 2020).

## **2.4 Gender Role**

Gender roles in Jordanian families are often traditional. Men are typically regarded as breadwinners and protectors, while women are generally responsible for managing the household and raising children (Khan, 2024; UN Women, 2020). Although these traditional roles continue to prevail, there has been a gradual shift, with more women pursuing higher education and advancing their careers (Awajan & Zuraikat, 2024; Alhalholi & Awajan, 2023). Nonetheless, balancing professional and family responsibilities remains a challenge for many women.

*“In Jordanian families, women hold a central and multifaceted role shaped by cultural, religious, and social norms.”*

Their position within the family encompasses diverse responsibilities that vary depending on individual circumstances, family dynamics, and societal expectations. Key aspects to consider include:

## **2.5 Interaction with Women**

Cross-gender communication, which involves interactions between men and women, is an inevitable aspect of social life (Öztürk, 2023). In Muslim societies, where Islam emphasizes moderation and modesty, certain restrictions and rules govern such interactions. This does not

imply that cross-gender communication is prohibited; rather, it indicates that men and women are expected to interact reasonably, intentionally, and within socially appropriate boundaries.

*“Respecting cultural norms regarding interactions between men and women is important. In more conservative settings, direct communication between unrelated men and women may be limited.”*

In general, men and women are expected to interact with formality, avoid prolonged eye contact, and communicate with politeness (Eltaiba, 2019).

## **2.6 The Role of Women in Jordanian Families**

Women are often the primary caregivers in Jordanian families, responsible for nurturing and raising children, managing the household, and ensuring the family's overall well-being. They are highly respected as mothers and play a critical role in their children's moral and ethical upbringing (Öztürk, 2023). Women are regarded as the foundation of the family, instilling values, traditions, and religious practices. Their role is multifaceted, encompassing responsibilities as caregivers, educators, and preservers of cultural and spiritual values. While traditional roles remain influential, there is an increasing trend of women excelling in educational and professional fields. Recognizing and understanding these evolving dynamics is essential for delivering effective and culturally sensitive services, while also respecting and empowering women's roles within their cultural and religious contexts (Koburtay et al., 2023). Modernization has provided women with greater prospects for personal and economic growth. However, the rapid globalization of society has also introduced challenges, such as rising divorce rates, shifting gender roles, and difficulties in balancing traditional values with modern lifestyles.

## **2.7 Women and Education in Jordanian Society**

Education is a transformative factor in Jordan, as it has reshaped society's perception of the family's role and underscored the importance of women's educational attainment. As a result, many families now encourage their daughters to pursue academic excellence at all levels. Kalemis (2022) argued that Jordanian education has developed rapidly, noting that “the positive attitude regarding the equal access of women to all levels of education is evident, and the high position of Jordan in the field of education among all Arabic-speaking countries is confirmed” (p. 2).

According to the Department of Statistics in Jordan, the literacy rate among Jordanian women is 93%, with 83% completing secondary education. Ambitious Jordanian women continue to advance their academic and professional aspirations, achieving distinguished levels of success nationwide. In 2021–2022, women accounted for approximately 61% of bachelor's degree graduates, 60% of master's degree holders, and 56% of PhD holders (Department of Statistics, 2022).

## **3. Communication style**

Communication skills are a core element of intercultural studies, enabling individuals to express their perspectives, enhance cultural awareness, accurately interpret messages, and navigate diverse cultural contexts with sensitivity (Xu, 2024; Al-Eid & Al-Zboon, 2018). Integrating

communication skills into the curriculum equips students to engage effectively in diverse environments, resolve misunderstandings, and foster relationships rooted in inclusion, empathy, and mutual respect.

### **3.1 Indirect Communication**

Jordanians may use indirect communication to avoid confrontation and maintain harmony (Al-Ali & Abu-Abah, 2021). This includes paying close attention to nonverbal cues and reading between the lines. Within families, communication can be indirect, especially when addressing sensitive topics. Nonverbal signals and implicit understanding are essential in these interactions. Jordanians are also known for their hospitality (Shryock, 2004). Accepting offers for tea or coffee is customary, as refusal may be considered disrespectful. Face-to-face meetings are typically preferred over written communication or phone calls.

### **3.2 Gestural Communication**

Placing the right hand over the heart after shaking hands or during greetings conveys sincerity and respect. This nonverbal gesture expresses a range of emotions, including greetings, welcomes, condolences, and sympathy. However, handshaking across genders is a sensitive issue in Jordanian culture (Eltaiba, 2019).

*“Due to this cultural sensitivity, many Muslim women do not shake hands directly with people of the opposite gender. Therefore, placing a hand over the heart is a solution to avoid awkwardness and misunderstanding.”*

Another form of gestural communication in Jordanian culture is the seating hierarchy. Most families follow traditional seating arrangements where the most honored guests or elder family members are given designated seats. The culture places strong emphasis on care and respect for the elderly, assigning them a prominent role in society. As such, Muslim families strive to ensure a harmonious life for elderly members by giving them priority in various aspects of daily life, including food and seating. This gesture of offering seats and serving food first is also extended to guests and visitors, reflecting deep-rooted values of respect and appreciation (Halim et al., 2024).

One of the participants emphasized the importance of understanding how globalization and urbanization have introduced a stronger emphasis on punctuality in Jordanian culture, especially in professional and educational settings. However, attitudes toward time in social contexts may still reflect traditional norms.

*“Although punctuality is valued, there is often a more relaxed attitude toward time. Individuals may not always adhere strictly to time constraints, as many Jordanians tend to be patient and flexible with meeting schedules. As a result, this can sometimes create negative perceptions among other cultures, leading them to view Arab societies as unpunctual.”*

Practical intercultural communication skills are essential when engaging with Arab communities in Jordan. These skills help build relationships founded on trust, respect, and understanding. Active listening is a key skill in this context, as it demonstrates attentiveness to

others' narratives and nonverbal cues, which are often culturally nuanced. Active listening goes beyond hearing words; it involves engaging with the speaker's emotions, maintaining appropriate eye contact, and using verbal affirmations that signal attentiveness and respect (Kadirova, 2023). This approach enables communicators to better understand diverse perspectives, validate experiences, and create an environment that fosters trust and openness (Ibrahim & Heuer, 2016).

Understanding others' perceptions and challenges is especially important in culturally diverse settings. It requires comprehending different worldviews without imposing one's own personal biases. This, in turn, calls for cultural humility and a continuous commitment to learning about the cultural, religious, and social factors that shape individual lives (Li & Longpradit, 2022). For example, acknowledging the role of religion, family dynamics, and community expectations can deepen understanding of the challenges faced by Jordanian communities.

One of the female participants commented: *"I would like to emphasize the importance of a non-judgmental approach when interacting with Jordanians. This approach requires setting aside personal judgments and preconceived notions to create a safe space where individuals feel respected and valued."*

Accepting individuals' perceptions and viewpoints is another critical aspect of intercultural communication. Acceptance does not mean agreement; rather, it recognizes others' right to hold their own beliefs and experiences (Haddad, 2021).

As participants noted: *"Acknowledgment of others' values is not about agreeing with everything, but about respecting differences."*

Mahoney (2015) underscores the importance of recognizing religious and spiritual beliefs within family contexts, emphasizing that religion profoundly shapes individuals' worldviews and relationships. Communicators should be open to listening and engaging with these perspectives, thereby fostering an inclusive atmosphere that encourages dialogue and mutual respect.

Empathic verbal and nonverbal communication are essential for building rapport and conveying understanding. Empathic listening, as a core communication skill, involves actively attending to and accurately reflecting on others' experiences, thereby creating a safe and non-judgmental environment (Eltaiba, 2019). This approach not only validates individuals' feelings but also strengthens relationships.

Culturally appropriate greetings are fundamental in intercultural interactions. In Jordan, greetings such as *"Assalamu Alaikum"* (peace be upon you) or a respectful nod accompanied by a hand over the heart are more than simple courtesies; they are cultural expressions that set a positive tone for communication (Eltaiba, 2019). Observing social norms—such as waiting for women to extend a handshake—demonstrates respect for cultural boundaries and helps foster trust. These gestures reflect cultural awareness and sensitivity, laying the foundation for mutual respect and stronger relationships.

The findings of the study align with intercultural communication frameworks that emphasize the impact of cultural principles, identity negotiation, and relational customs in cross-cultural contexts. Participants highlighted the importance of incorporating concepts such as maintaining congruence and recognizing unique cultural communication styles, as outlined in Ting-Toomey's Face-Negotiation Theory. They also emphasized extended family obligations, collective decision-making, relational hierarchies, social cues, and the preservation of core religious and cultural values—elements reflected in Hall's High-Context Communication Theory (Gamsriegler, 2005) and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). By integrating these perspectives into the curriculum, learners gain skills and knowledge that foster appreciation for cultural diversity and respect for different cultural practices. This approach enhances intercultural competence, builds trust, and improves communication across cultures. The findings offer a foundation for developing an intercultural communication curriculum tailored to the Jordanian context. Embedding such frameworks ensures that education prepares practitioners to respond to diversity with competence, empathy, and cultural humility.

#### **Current limitations and future directions**

While the current narrative highlights important political, societal, and cultural considerations essential for developing a strong intercultural communication curriculum, the scope of the study remains limited. It focuses solely on one academic discipline and does not incorporate perspectives beyond those of academics. The study was conducted at a single institution and involved a small group of academic participants. Moreover, it did not include input from students. To address these limitations, future research should aim to gather insights from students and community members to better understand what content should be included in intercultural studies. Such efforts would broaden the scope and enhance the relevance of the curriculum. Future initiatives should also continue to explore these themes, promoting practices that honor the richness of Jordanian culture and its contribution to a globalized world.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This study offers an in-depth exploration of the key considerations for developing course content on intercultural communication within Jordanian university settings. The findings emphasize the importance of ongoing cultural competence training for international students engaged in diverse Jordanian contexts. Recognizing and respecting the unique cultural values of Jordanian communities is essential for promoting inclusivity and building respectful relationships. The study highlights the importance of integrating political dimensions, family structures, and culturally relevant communication styles. Understanding Jordan's socio-political and cultural dynamics is integral to professional competency, particularly in fields where cross-cultural engagement is frequent and unavoidable. Such understanding enables more meaningful connections between individuals from diverse backgrounds, helping to bridge cultural divides and foster equitable, respectful relationships.

Beyond the academic context, this study calls for a sustained commitment to intercultural awareness that goes beyond surface-level cultural knowledge. It advocates for

teaching and learning practices that foster dialogue, critical reflection, and continuous growth. These approaches not only prepare students to work effectively in Jordan but also equip them with transferable skills for thriving in other multicultural and multilingual environments. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on intercultural communication by demonstrating how culturally responsive education can create environments where diversity is not only acknowledged—but actively embraced and celebrated.

This study serves as a call to deepen intercultural awareness by encouraging meaningful dialogue, thoughtful reflection, and a lifelong commitment to learning—essential components in fostering respectful and inclusive interactions.

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