Cultural Integration and Social Cohesion among UEF students in academic settings

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Abstract

As universities become increasingly multicultural, cultural integration must promote social cohesion for students' success and well-being. This study investigates the impact of five dimensions of cultural integration (intercultural awareness, intercultural contact, positive attitudes toward diversity, perception of openness, and engagement in cultural activities) on social cohesion experienced by students at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF). Grounded in Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Framework (2006) and Earley and Ang's Cultural Intelligence Theory (2003), this research model links the cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects of intercultural interaction to students' sense of belonging, collaboration, and solidarity. Employing a quantitative survey of 354 UEF undergraduates, this study tested a multiple regression model to predict social cohesion. The predictors collectively explained 76.3% of the variance (Adjusted R^2 = .759, p < .001). Intercultural contact emerged as the most important factor (β = .665), followed by positive attitude (β = .520), cultural engagement (β = .313), intercultural awareness (β = .198), and openness perception (β = .179). These results show the importance of direct intercultural experiences and positive attitudes in building a strong learning community. These findings suggest that university administrators should establish structured intercultural workshops and peer mentoring programs to foster significant cross-cultural interactions. Such initiatives promise to strengthen social solidarity and academic collaboration in diverse settings.

Keywords: Cultural integration; Higher education; Social cohesion; UEF

Introduction

In today's globalized higher education system, colleges and universities have to deal with students from many different backgrounds. This means that we need to carefully look at how cultural integration processes help people get along in school (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017). A multicultural campus environment in higher education affects how students interact with each other, encourages them to

work together academically, and improves their health and well-being (Delhey & Dragolov, 2016). Social cohesion is a multidimensional construct encompassing social relationships, identification with the community, and a commitment to the common good, with each dimension being crucial for psychological well-being and community resilience (Delhey & Dragolov, 2016; Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017). At the same time, intercultural competence, which includes being open-minded, understanding things cognitively, and being able to adapt, helps people from different cultures work together and get along (Deardorff & Jones, 2023; Hammer et al., 2003).

The Intercultural Development Inventory and the Global Perspective Inventory are empirical instruments that have demonstrated significant reliability and validity for assessing these dimensions within higher education cohorts (Braskamp et al., 2014; Hammer et al., 2003). While these frameworks and scales have undergone rigorous validation in Western contexts (Veerman & Denessen, 2021), their application in Vietnamese universities remains inadequately explored, impeding the comprehension of cultural integration's influence on social cohesion at UEF. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted this necessity by exposing a decline in neighborhood solidarity and an increase in social divisions, emphasizing the importance of intentional strategies to reestablish communal connections on campus(Borkowska & Laurence, 2021). This study employs acculturation models centered on psychosocial adaptation, heritage preservation, and engagement with the host culture, synthesizing these perspectives to examine the mechanisms through which UEF students navigate cultural boundaries and forge communal connections (Safdar et al., 2003).

This research, informed by theoretical frameworks, operationalizes cultural integration through five dimensions: intercultural awareness, intercultural contact, a positive attitude toward diversity, perception of openness, and engagement in cultural activities. It examines their predictive relationships with social cohesion indicators among undergraduates during the 2024–2025 academic cycle. This study seeks to (1) evaluate the levels of cultural integration and social cohesion, (2) analyze the predictive relationship between dimensions of intercultural competence and cohesion outcomes, and (3) identify institutional and individual factors that promote or hinder cohesive integration within academic environments. This research addresses a significant deficiency in higher education studies by adapting and validating the IDI, GPI, and cohesion scales based on prior research, providing practical insights for university policymakers and educators.

In the subsequent sections, we will initially examine the pertinent literature and theoretical frameworks. Then, we will talk about the quantitative methodology, show the real-world results, talk about what they mean and what they don't, and finally, we will give practical advice and ideas for future research.

1. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical basis

This study examines the impact of five dimensions of Cultural Integration among UEF undergraduates on Social Cohesion within the academic environment. Intercultural Awareness (IA) refers to students' deliberate acknowledgment and comprehension of cultural distinctions and commonalities, encompassing values, norms, and communication styles (Deardorff, 2006). Intercultural Contact (IC) measures the frequency and quality of direct interactions (both formal and informal) among students from various cultural or regional backgrounds (Deardorff, 2006). Positive Attitude (PA) signifies a respectful, empathetic, and receptive stance towards cultural diversity (Deardorff, 2006). whereas Openness Perception (OP) denotes students' evaluation of their academic environment as inclusive and accepting of divergent perspectives (Deardorff, 2006). Cultural Engagement (CE) assesses active involvement in cross-cultural events, workshops, or student-led initiatives that foster intercultural dialogue (Deardorff, 2006). Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) say that Social Cohesion (SC) is the strength of social ties within the student community, which can be seen in trustful relationships, a shared identity, and working together for the common good (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017).

The author utilize four fundamental theories to substantiate these constructs. There are three parts to Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Framework (2006): cognitive (understanding of cultural systems), affective (respect and openness), and behavioral (skills for adapting well) (Deardorff, 2006). In this framework, IA corresponds to the cognitive dimension, PA and OP represent the affective dimension, and IC and CE indicate the behavioral outcomes. Cultural Intelligence Theory by Earley and Ang (2003) breaks down CQ into four parts: cognitive (cultural knowledge), motivational (interest and confidence), metacognitive (strategy use), and behavioral (action adaptation) (Earley & Ang, 2003). It links IA and OP with cognitive and motivational CQ, and IC and CE with behavioral CQ. Schiefer and van der Noll's Essentials of Social Cohesion (2017) delineates cohesion through Social Relations (interpersonal trust and network quality), Identification (sense of belonging), and Orientation toward the Common Good (commitment to shared norms), offering a comprehensive framework for evaluating social cohesion (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017). Veerman and Denessen's Social Cohesion in Schools Framework (2021) modifies cohesion theory for educational settings by focusing on Positive Interpersonal Relations, Sense of Belonging, and Group Solidarity, directly linking IC, CE, and SC metrics to cohesive results (Veerman & Denessen, 2021). This unified theoretical framework will guide our empirical study, which will use survey data from third-year UEF students to look at the predictive relationship between each Cultural Integration dimension and different aspects of Social

Cohesion. This will help us improve programs that strengthen community ties and intercultural engagement in higher education settings.

2.2. Literature review

A variety of psychometrically sound tools have been created to evaluate intercultural sensitivity and communication proficiency. (Hammer et al., 2003) operationalized Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity using the 50-item Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which accurately positions respondents along five orientations, ranging from ethnocentric (Denial, Defense, Minimization) to ethnorelative (Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration). From a communication point of view, (Arasaratnam, 2009) created a short 10-item scale to measure competence that included empathy, motivation, a global outlook, and listening skills. This scale showed good internal consistency and was validly linked to positive attitudes toward other cultures and lower ethnocentrism. Alongside these individual-level metrics, (Braskamp et al., 2014) created the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI), a six-scale instrument evaluating cognitive (knowledge), intrapersonal (self-awareness), and interpersonal (social responsibility) domains. Longitudinal tracking showed that students' grades improved only slightly from freshman to senior year. However, students who studied abroad saw much bigger improvements..

Empirical studies utilizing extensive longitudinal data elucidate the evolution of cultural integration and social cohesion in response to changing conditions. In England, (Borkowska & Laurence, 2021) utilized waves of the Understanding Society Study to record a significant decrease in neighborhood cohesion by June 2020, particularly among Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Black, and "Other" ethnic groups, residents of disadvantaged areas, and individuals with lower educational qualifications, despite a relatively stable trust in neighbors' willingness to assist. At the continental scale, (Delhey & Dragolov, 2016) examined multilevel data from 27 EU countries and discovered that elevated social cohesion, assessed via social relations (trust, networks), connectedness (identification), and orientation towards the common good (solidarity, civic engagement), is a more robust predictor of life satisfaction and psychological well-being than national wealth or income equality. These results highlight the importance of trust and solidarity as key policy tools for improving the well-being of society.

Empirical studies employing comprehensive longitudinal data clarify the progression of cultural integration and social cohesion in reaction to evolving circumstances. (Veerman & Denessen, 2021) analyzed school-based instruments and defined social cohesion through three interrelated dimensions: social relations (the quality of peer and teacher-student interactions, trust, tolerance, and participation), belonging (identification with a class or school), and orientation toward the common good (civic values and behaviors). They noted considerable variability in the operationalization of these aspects by

current tools. Employing acculturation theory, (Safdar et al., 2003) investigated a multidimensional model involving first-generation Iranian immigrants in Canada. Their findings indicated that psychosocial adjustment, cultural and familial connectedness, and daily stressors serve as predictors for strategies of separation and assimilation, which subsequently affect in-group/out-group behaviors and psychophysical well-being. This body of literature collectively emphasizes the complex interaction of attitudes, direct contact experiences, and institutional supports in fostering intercultural competence and social cohesion within academic and broader societal framework.

2.3. Proposed hypotheses and research model

Even though there is more interest in intercultural competence and CQ, there isn't much research on this in Southeast Asia, especially at private schools like UEF. No existing research has concurrently combined Deardorff's framework with Earley and Ang's framework to forecast social cohesion (measured through Schiefer and van der Noll's and Veerman and Denessen's dimensions) among Vietnamese undergraduates. Furthermore, the specific contribution of each integration dimension to cohesion has yet to be measured within a singular regression model. To make intercultural programs work better for Vietnam's rapidly changing campuses, it's important to fill this gap.

RQ1: To what extent do the five dimensions of cultural integration (IA, IC, PA, OP, CE) predict overall social cohesion (SC) among UEF students?

H1: Intercultural Awareness (IA) positively predicts Social Cohesion.

H2: Intercultural Contact (IC) positively predicts Social Cohesion.

H3: Positive Attitude (PA) positively predicts Social Cohesion

H4: Openness Perception (OP) positively predicts Social Cohesion

H5: Cultural Engagement (CE) positively predicts Social Cohesion

This research employs Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Framework and Earley & Ang's Cultural Intelligence Theory to delineate cultural integration as IA, IC, PA, OP, and CE. The multidimensional scales developed by Schiefer & van der Noll and Veerman & Denessen are employed to assess social cohesion. Multiple regression will illustrate the influence of each integration dimension on students' sense of belonging, collaboration, and solidarity, both independently and in combination with other dimensions. The study will elucidate the role of various aspects of integration in fostering social cohesion by analyzing survey data from UEF undergraduates. The model in Figure 2.1 combines five previous ideas to help people understand and do better in school settings with people from different cultures.
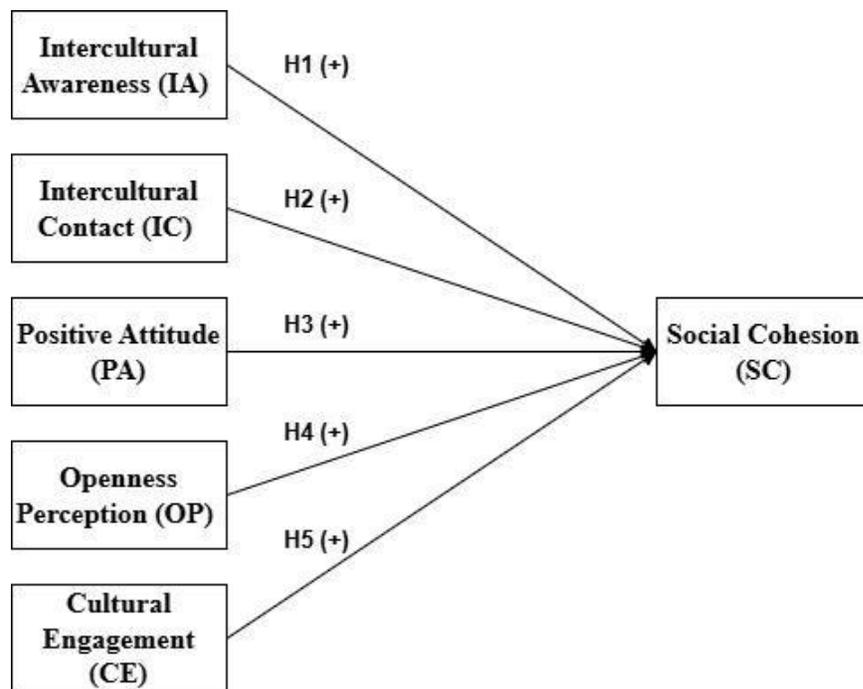
Figure 2.1. Proposed research model

Methodology and data

Data

The sample frame included full-time UEF undergraduates between the ages of 18 and 22 who were majoring in one of five areas: International Business, Logistics and Supply Chain Management, International Economics, Business Administration, or Commercial Business. University records show that there were about 7,000 students who could have applied, and they were in their first through fourth years of school.

The author used Yamane's formula [$n = N / (1 + N*e^2)$] with a 5% margin of error to figure out how big the sample size needed to be. The goal sample size was about 378 people when N was 7,000. The author sent out 440 questionnaires, knowing that some people wouldn't answer or would send back answers that weren't valid.

The survey was done online using Google Forms from April to June 2025. Of the 440 instruments sent out, 354 were returned in full and passed checks for data quality. This means that 80.5% of people responded. The author kept all the answers for analysis and made them anonymous.

The questionnaire had two parts. Part (1) gathered demographic and background data, including age, gender, major of study, and academic year. Part (2) included 32 observable variables that utilized a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) to assess five

independent variables: Intercultural Awareness (IA), Intercultural Contact (IC), Positive Attitude (PA), Openness Perception (OP), and Cultural Engagement (CE), along with one dependent variable: Social Cohesion (SC). Items were altered from validated scales to ensure content validity and alignment with the study's theoretical framework.

3.2. Data analysis method

IBM SPSS Statistics 26 was used to process and analyze the data. The following steps were taken:

Cleaning data: (i) Responses with more than 20% of items missing were discarded; (ii) univariate outliers were detected using z-scores ($> |3.29|$) and scrutinized for data entry inaccuracies; extreme yet credible values were winsorized.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, summarized respondent characteristics and item distributions.

Reliability evaluation: The internal consistency of each construct was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.70$ deemed acceptable, Nunnally, 1978). Items exhibiting corrected item–total correlations inferior to 0.30 were considered for elimination.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): (i) The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity evaluated sampling adequacy (KMO ≥ 0.70; Bartlett's $p < 0.05$); (ii) Principal axis factoring with Promax rotation identified factors with eigenvalues > 1.0 and factor loadings ≥ 0.50 (Hair et al., 2014). It was necessary for the total variance explained to be greater than 50%.

Correlation analysis: Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) and their corresponding p-values assessed the strength and direction of relationships among constructs. Correlations were classified as weak ($|r| < 0.30$), moderate ($0.30 \leq |r| < 0.50$), or strong ($|r| \geq 0.50$). Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$. Multiple Regression Analysis involved: (i) the simultaneous entry of six antecedent variables to predict the dependent variable, "purchase decision"; (ii) the evaluation of model fit through the adjusted R^2; and (iii) the verification of assumptions using the Durbin–Watson statistic (~2.0) for residual autocorrelation, variance inflation factors (VIF < 5) for multicollinearity, and the inspection of standardized residuals for homoscedasticity. The t-tests ($p < 0.05$) were used to determine the importance of each predictor, and the F-statistic ($p < 0.05$) was used to determine the importance of the whole model.

Research results and discussion

Summary of descriptive statistics

This study received 354 valid questionnaires from UEF undergraduates, indicating an 88.5% utility rate. Table 4.1 shows that there were almost the same number of men and women: 47.7% men and 52.3% women. The ages of the people who took part were almost evenly split: 34.7% were younger than 19, 35.3% were between 19 and 21, and 29.9% were older than 21.

There were students from five different majors: Logistics and Supply Chain Management (22.6%), International Business (20.9%), Business Administration (20.3%), Commercial Business (18.9%), and International Economics (17.2%). The students were in their first year (27.1%) to their fourth year (28.0%).

The diversity of this group shows that the sample includes a wide range of UEF students, which helps to support the external validity of future analyses.

Table 4.1. Descriptive statistics

Characteristics		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	169	47.7
	Female	185	52.3
Age	Under 19 years old	123	34.7
	19 – 21 years old	125	35.3
	Older than 21 years old	106	29.9
Major of study	International Business	74	20.9
	Logistics and Supply Chain Managment	80	22.6
	International Economics	61	17.2
	Commercial Business	67	18.9
	Business Administration	72	20.3
Academic year	First year	96	27.1
	Second year	76	21.5
	Third year	83	23.4
	Fourth year	99	28.0

(Source: Author)

Reliability of the scales

The author used Cronbach's alpha coefficients and corrected item–total correlations (CITC) to check that our multi-item scales measuring aspects of cultural integration and social cohesion among UEF undergraduates were consistent with each other. We used the standard thresholds of $\alpha \geq .70$ and CITC $\geq .30$. The survey instrument encompassed 32 Likert‑type statements organized into six latent constructs: Intercultural Awareness (7 items), Intercultural Contact (5 items), Positive Attitude (4 items), Openness Perception (6 items), Cultural Engagement (5 items), and Social Cohesion (5 items). Table 4.2 summarizes the reliability statistics for each scale.

Intercultural Awareness, based on the frameworks of Arasaratnam (2009) and Braskamp et al. (2014), produced an alpha coefficient of .801, with CITC values between .472 and .550. This level of consistency shows that all seven items accurately reflect how well students understand cultural values,

norms, and behaviors. The Intercultural Contact dimension (Hammer et al., 2003; Braskamp et al., 2014) achieved an α = .738, with correlations among the individual items ranging from .459 to .533. This demonstrates that the frequency of student interactions and their comfort in culturally diverse environments are accurately assessed. The Positive Attitude scale (α = .744; CITC = .504–.577), derived from Braskamp et al. (2014) and Arasaratnam (2009), consistently assesses learners' evaluative perspectives on cultural diversity.

According to Arasaratnam (2009) and Safdar et al. (2003), the Openness Perception scale had the highest reliability (α = .874) and strong CITC coefficients (.646–.708). This shows that the scale is a good way to find out how people feel about an academic setting that is open to everyone. Cultural Engagement (Braskamp et al., 2014; Safdar et al., 2003) achieved an α = .799 and CITC values ranging from .558 to .608, thereby confirming the validity of items measuring active participation in intercultural events and exchange programs. Lastly, the Social Cohesion scale, which was based on Borkowska and Laurence (2021) and Safdar et al. (2003), had an α of .766 and corrected correlations that went from .498 to .622. This showed that items pertaining to students' sense of belonging and cross-cultural solidarity were coherent.

In all cases, each scale surpassed the minimum reliability criteria, and no item deletion was warranted. These findings affirm that the measurement scales are both reliable and conceptually sound, thus providing a firm foundation for subsequent exploratory factor analysis and structural modeling of the relationships among intercultural competence, engagement behaviors, and social cohesion in the UEF academic context.

Table 4.2. Reliability of the measurement scales

Variable	Code	Statement	Source	Corrected Item – Total Corelation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Intercultural Awareness (α = .801, n = 7)	IA1	I understand that different cultures have distinct values and beliefs	(Arasaratnam, 2009)	.548	.773
	IA2	I recognize differences in communication styles across cultures		.544	.774
	IA3	I am aware that social norms vary between cultures		.527	.777
	IA4	I can interpret others' behavior based on their cultural background	(Braskamp et al., 2014)	.544	.773
	IA5	I understand that cultural diversity is essential in modern society		.550	.772
	IA6	I notice how cultural differences influence students' learning and interaction		.472	.786
	IA7	I am able to identify cultural elements in everyday communication	(Arasaratnam, 2009)	.543	.774
Intercultural Contact (α = .738, n = 5)	IC1	I frequently interact with students from different cultural backgrounds	(Hammer et al., 2003)	.506	.691
	IC2	I participate in academic activities with students from other regions		.533	.680
	IC3	I feel comfortable working in groups with culturally diverse students		.499	.694
	IC4	I actively seek opportunities to engage with students from other cultures	(Braskamp et al., 2014)	.504	.692
	IC5	I have friends from different cultural backgrounds at university		.459	.708
Positive Attitude (α = .744, n = 4)	PA1	I believe cultural diversity enhances learning and communication	(Braskamp et al., 2014)	.504	.703
	PA2	I value learning from other cultures		.538	.685
	PA3	I enjoy exploring different cultural values		.530	.689
	PA4	I am willing to adjust my perspective when encountering different cultural views	(Arasaratnam, 2009)	.577	.662
Openness Perception (α = .874, n = 6)	OP1	I feel that UEF's learning environment encourages cultural openness		.662	.854
	OP2	I feel respected when sharing my cultural perspectives	(Arasaratnam, 2009)	.646	.857
	OP3	I find students and faculty at UEF open to diverse cultural viewpoints		.662	.854
	OP4	I feel free to express my cultural identity in academic settings		.687	.850
	OP5	I perceive tolerance for cultural differences at UEF	(Safdar et al., 2003)	.708	.846
	OP6	I feel the academic environment promotes intercultural exchange		.690	.849
Cultural Engagement (α = .799, n = 5)	CE1	I regularly attend intercultural events at university	(Braskamp et al., 2014)	.570	.765
	CE2	I actively seek opportunities to connect with culturally diverse students		.558	.768
	CE3	I enjoy participating in multicultural activities		.575	.763
	CE4	I have participated in exchange or international programs at university		.608	.752
	CE5	I actively contribute to activities that promote cultural understanding among students	(Safdar et al., 2003)	.595	.757
Social Cohesion (α = .766, n = 5)	SC1	I feel I am part of the student community at UEF	(Borkowska & Laurence, 2021)	.546	.719
	SC2	I am willing to collaborate with students from different cultures		.622	.691
	SC3	I perceive solidarity and support among students in class		.498	.736
	SC4	I regularly participate in university-wide activities	(Safdar et al., 2003)	.498	.736
	SC5	I feel included in academic activities with other students		.512	.731

(Source: Author)

Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

To analyse the dimensional structure of our measurement instrument for cultural integration and social cohesion among UEF students, we initially confirmed its factorability. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic was 0.813, which is higher than the 0.70 level for sampling adequacy. Bartlett's test of sphericity was also very significant ($\chi2(351) = 2818.221$, $p < .001$), which means that the correlations between items were strong enough to move on to factor extraction.

The author employed Varimax rotation in principal component analysis, retaining factors with eigenvalues exceeding one, to identify five significant dimensions that accounted for 53.95 percent of the total variance (refer to Table 4.4). Table 4.5's rotated component matrix showed that most of the items were on one factor. All of the main loadings were above 0.62, and none of the cross-loadings were above 0.40. This supports both convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 4.3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.813
Barlett's test of Sphericity	**Approx. Chi Square**	2818.221
	df	351
	Sig.	.000

(Source: Author)

Table 4.4. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.793	14.048	14.048	3.793	14.048	14.048	3.726	13.800	13.800
2	3.229	11.958	26.006	3.229	11.958	26.006	3.227	11.951	25.751
3	2.822	10.452	36.458	2.822	10.452	36.458	2.805	10.388	36.139
4	2.703	10.012	46.469	2.703	10.012	46.469	2.515	9.315	45.453
5	2.020	7.481	53.950	2.020	7.481	53.950	2.294	8.497	53.950

(Source: Author)

The exploratory factor analysis revealed five distinct scale among UEF students. Table 4.6 shows how the new factors were found and named. The six observed variables that made up Openness Perception (OP) (OP1–OP6) had loadings between .753 and .810, which showed how people felt about new cultures. Intercultural Awareness (IA) comprised seven observed variables (IA1–IA7) with loadings ranging from .621 to .694, indicating the acknowledgment of diversity's significance in academia. Cultural Engagement (CE) evaluated the intensity of individuals' participation via five observed

variables (CE1–CE5, .730–.761). There were five observed variables on Intercultural Contact (IC) (IC1–IC5, .675–.717) that looked at how well students interacted with each other. There were four observed variables on Positive Attitude (PA) (PA1–PA4, .722–.771) that looked at how well students learned together in multicultural settings.

Even though Social Cohesion (SC) was chosen ahead of time as the dependent variable, its five items (SC1–SC5) also made a clean factor (loadings .683–.793). These six dimensions closely match our conceptual model and give a simple but complete picture of how UEF students see and do cultural integration. The clear factorial structure shows that the survey tool is good for later confirmatory analyses

4.4. Research Model Fit Assessment

4.4.1. Correlation Analysis

Table 4.5. Component Matrix

Observable Variable	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
OP5	.810				
OP6	.796				
OP4	.789				
OP3	.771				
OP1	.770				
OP2	.753				
IA5		.694			
IA1		.690			
IA7		.685			
IA4		.682			
IA2		.682			
IA3		.666			
IA6		.621			
CE4			.761		
CE5			.753		
CE3			.737		
CE1			.736		
CE2			.730		
IC2				.717	
IC1				.701	
IC4				.699	
IC3				.681	

IC5	.675	
PA4		.771
PA3		.750
PA2		.743
PA1		.722

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

(Source: Author)

The Pearson correlation analysis assessed the relationships among five predictors (Intercultural Awareness (IA), Intercultural Contact (IC), Positive Attitude (PA), Openness Perception (OP), and Cultural Engagement (CE)) and the outcome variable Social Cohesion (SC) in UEF students. Convergent validity was confirmed by strong within-scale correlations (IA mean $r = .37$; IC $= .36$; PA $= .44$; OP $= .53$; CE $= .44$; SC $= .43$; all $p < .001$), and all inter-construct correlations were below $r = .70$ (highest off-diagonal $r = .38$), ruling out multicollinearity. Bivariate correlations with SC were all significant ($p < .001$): IA–SC $r = .29$, IC–SC $r = .18$, PA–SC $r = .34$, OP–SC $r = .31$, and CE–SC $r = .41$. These findings demonstrate reliable measurement and support proceeding with regression and structural equation modeling.

Table 4.6. Summary table of Factor Loadings after rotation

Factor	Variable
Intercultural Awareness (IA)	IA1, IA2, IA3, IA4, IA5, IA6, IA7
Intercultural Contact (IC)	IC1, IC2, IC3, IC4, IC5
Positive Attitude (PA)	PA1, PA2, PA3, PA4
Openness Perception (OP)	OP1, OP2, OP3, OP4, OP5, OP6
Cultural Engagement (CE)	CE1, CE2, CE3, CE4, CE5
Social Cohesion (SC)	SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4. SC5

(Source: Author)

Regression Analysis Results and Model Validation Test

To examine the factors influencing social cohesion (SC) among UEF students in academic contexts, a multivariate linear regression analysis was conducted with five predictors: intercultural contact (IC), positive attitude (PA), cultural engagement (CE), intercultural awareness (IA), and openness perception (OP). The overall model was very explanatory, with $R = 0.873$ and $R^2 = 0.763$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.759$). This means that these five dimensions can explain about 76% of the differences in students' social cohesion. The model's standard error of estimate was 0.355, and the Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.029, which is well within the range of 1.5 to 2.5. This showed that the residuals didn't have much autocorrelation.

The ANOVA summary in Table 4.8 shows that the regression model had a very high F-value (F[5, 348] = 223.617, p < .001).   This outcome indicates that IC, PA, CE, IA, and OP collectively serve as an effective predictor of social cohesion within the UEF context.

The analysis produced the following regression equation:

$$SC = 0.665 \times IC + 0.520 \times PA + 0.313 \times CE + 0.198 \times IA + 0.179 \times OP + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

Where: IC = Intercultural Contact; PA = Positive Attitude, CE = Cultural Engagement; IA = Intercultural Awareness; OP = Openness Perception; and SC = Social Cohesion.

Examining the individual coefficients in Table 4.9 reveals that all five independent variables exert statistically significant positive effects on SC (p < .001).   Intercultural contact was the most important thing (standardized β = 0.665, t = 25.180).   This demonstrates the significance of students engaging with individuals from diverse cultures in personally meaningful ways to foster stronger relationships.   A β of 0.520 (t = 19.680) indicated that students with a favorable perception of cultural diversity are significantly more inclined to regard their academic community as cohesive.

A significant aspect of this was cultural engagement (β = 0.313, t = 11.943), indicating that participation in activities with individuals from diverse cultures enhances interpersonal connections. Intercultural awareness (β = 0.198, t = 7.568) and openness perception (β = 0.179, t = 6.821) were less important than the factors that came before them, but they still had a big effect on social cohesion. This shows how important it is to be open-minded and learn about other people's cultures.

There wasn't much multicollinearity among the predictors because all of the VIFs were less than 1.03 and all of the tolerance values were more than 0.97. More programs that focus on getting people more involved in their culture, raising awareness of other cultures, and strengthening ideas of openness can help UEF students work together even more.

Table 4.7. Model Fit Assessment Results

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	Durbin-Watson
1	.873ᵃ	.763	.759	.355	2.029

a. Predictors: (Constant), F_IA, F_PA, F_CE, F_OP, F_IC

b. Dependent Variable: F_SC

(Source: Author)

Table 4.8. ANOVA Results

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1	Regression	141.027	5	28.205	223.617	.000
	Residual	43.894	348	.126		
	Total	184.921	353			

a. Dependent Variable: F_SC

(Source: Author)

Table 4.9. Regression Analysis Results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-2.597	.181		-14.334	.000		
	Cultural Engagement	.296	.025	.313	11.943	.000	.995	1.005
	Openness Perception	.161	.024	.179	6.821	.000	.993	1.007
	Positive Attitude	.514	.026	.520	19.680	.000	.976	1.024
	Intercultural Contact	.676	.027	.665	25.180	.000	.978	1.023
	Intercultural Awareness	.207	.027	.198	7.568	.000	.996	1.004

a. Dependent Variable: F_SC

(Source: Author)

Conclusion and Managerial Implications

In an era of rapidly internationalising campuses, this study confirms that sustained intercultural contact, positive attitudes toward diversity, active cultural engagement, and heightened openness are the cornerstones of social cohesion among Vietnamese university students. Institutions that weave these dimensions into the fabric of student life can transform abstract awareness into genuine cross-cultural bonds.

For UEF administrators and academic policymakers, the following evidence-based measures are recommended:

- Structure Meaningful Interactions. Launch peer-mentoring programs, intercultural dialogue workshops, and joint projects pairing domestic and international students, emphasizing co-creation to deepen mutual understanding.

- Embed Diversity Education. Integrate cultural-intelligence and global-competency modules across curricula, using simulations, study-abroad reflections, or experiential exercises to reinforce inclusive mind-sets.

- Activate Campus Engagement. Co-organize festivals, language tandems, and student-led clubs that showcase diverse traditions and encourage collaboration between local and international cohorts.

- Foster an Inclusive Climate. Regularly survey perceptions of openness, provide faculty training in inclusive pedagogy, and model supportive practices that validate intercultural exchange.

Limitations include the cross-sectional design, a sample restricted to UEF undergraduates aged 18–22, and reliance on self-reported data, which limit causal inference and broader generalizability. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs, conduct focus groups or in-depth interviews, and test contextual moderators (e.g., field of study, prior international experience) to unpack the dynamics of integration over time.

Ultimately, by adopting comprehensive, data-driven intercultural strategies, higher-education institutions can build truly cohesive communities, equipped to thrive in an ever-more globalized world.

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