Short Videos as a Tool for Developing Intercultural Competence

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of Instagram Reels on the development of intercultural competence among university students. The research seeks to determine whether systematic exposure to short-form video content from diverse world regions can foster cultural awareness, empathy, and openness towards diversity.

Methods. The experiment involved students, divided into five groups (10 participants in each group. Five of them experimental group, five of them control group), each exposed for ten consecutive days to a curated set of ten Reels per day. The videos represented five distinct cultural regions: the Balkans, South-East Asia, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Central Asia. Diagnostic tools include: authors` developed questionnaire comprising 24 closed-ended and 5 open-ended questions and "Integrative Intercultural Competence Questionnaire".

Results. The findings demonstrate a notable increase in participants' cultural awareness and readiness for intercultural engagement. Students reported improved recognition of cultural practices, stronger interest in interacting with foreign peers,

and a reduced reliance on stereotypes. Quantitative data revealed that over 70% of participants expressed greater confidence in intercultural communication following the experiment.

Conclusions. The study confirms the potential of Instagram Reels as an effective instrument for enhancing intercultural competence in educational settings. The accessibility, visual richness, and emotional appeal of the format make it a valuable tool for integrating cultural learning into students' everyday media practices.

Research restrictions. The relatively small sample size and limited duration of the experiment (10 days) restrict the generalisability of the findings. For the further research, we recommend larger cohorts and extended exposure periods.

Practical application. The outcomes of this study may inform the development of digital education strategies designed to strengthen intercultural competence through the purposeful use of social media platforms.

Originality. This research constitutes one of the first empirical attempts to explore Instagram Reels as a medium for intercultural education, highlighting the potential to bridge cultural divides and enrich internationalised learning environments.
Keywords: intercultural competence, Instagram Reels, social media, cultural learning, digital education, experiment

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalisation and the rapid development of digital technologies, the development of intercultural competence, understood as an individual's ability to effectively interact with representatives of different cultures, demonstrating respect for their values and norms, has become particularly important. In the modern world, intercultural communication is moving beyond traditional forms of education and professional training, increasingly moving into the online environment. Social media, in particular, has become a powerful tool capable of transforming the learning process. The use of social media has increased dramatically in recent years, with people using these platforms for both personal and professional purposes. Social media creates unique conditions for the transmission and perception of cultural experiences (Joseph, 2025).

Instagram is one of the most popular digital platforms, and its short video format (Reels) has in recent years become a global media space for the exchange of cultural practices. Due to its recommendation algorithms, Reels allows users to go beyond their own information space and engage with content created by people from other countries and regions (Otto, 2025). At the same time, the brevity and entertainment nature of this format create mixed results: on the one hand, it facilitates access to cultural diversity, but on the other, it can lead to fragmentation and stereotyping of perceptions (Aslan, 2025).

Despite growing interest in digital socialisation, research on the impact of Reels on the development of intercultural competence remains limited. Researchers are inter-

ested in the question: to what extent can this format exert educational and developmental influence beyond its primarily entertaining function?

Therefore, the relevance of this study is determined by the need to analyse Instagram Reels as a tool that potentially influences the development of students' intercultural competence. The theoretical significance of this study lies in expanding our understanding of digital media as a factor in intercultural learning, and its practical significance lies in testing an experimental design that allows us to identify the dynamics of cultural content perception under controlled conditions.

A Comparative Analysis of Short Video Platforms. Why Reels?

Nowadays, short-form video has radically transformed media consumption patterns, creating new opportunities for educational strategies, including developing students' intercultural competence. Among the key players –TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and Instagram Reels – significant differences exist that determine their suitability as educational tools.

The platforms exhibit different algorithmic focus and demographic compositions, which influence the nature of the content presented (Varga & Cucu, 2025). TikTok positions itself as a purely entertainment platform focused on virality (Ewen, n.d.). TikTok's algorithm "For You Page" prioritises immediate engagement over established connections, actively promoting trends and challenges (Varga & Cucu, 2025). The dominance of the Gen Z audience and the emphasis on entertainment may lead to a distortion of authentic cultural representations in favour of superficial, quickly changing virality.

YouTube Shorts, integrated into the YouTube ecosystem, primarily serves as a tool for driving traffic to longer educational content, using its function as a "gateway" for viewers (Ewen, n.d). While Shorts can provide high average reach for smaller accounts, its role in developing intercultural competence is limited to a promotional function rather than a standalone platform for deep cultural exchange (Varga & Cucu, 2025).

In contrast, Instagram Reels is a feature integrated into the broader Meta social ecosystem, which combines photos, Stories, and long-form posts. This platform has a more balanced demographic, including both Gen Z and Millennials, providing a broader range of cultural interests and content.

Effective development of intercultural competence requires not only the consumption of diverse content but also its contextualisation, critical analysis, and the possibility of guided interaction. In this context, Instagram Reels offers several key advantages over its competitors.

As part of Instagram, Reels provides content with the necessary context often missing on TikTok. Authentic cultural practices and everyday life presented in short videos can be complemented by extended captions, photos, and Stories on the same profile.

This integration allows students to experience not just an isolated entertaining clip, but a multilayered understanding of culture, a cornerstone of intercultural competence. A balanced audience demographic ensures that the content reflects a broader range of social and cultural perspectives (Ewen, n.d.).

Integrating Reels into the Meta ecosystem allows educators to create safe and focused learning communities. Short videos can serve as an effective means of quickly engaging with a topic, after which discussion, critical analysis, and in-depth learning can be transferred to tools within the same ecosystem, such as Facebook Groups or private messages. This enables the concept of blended learning, where the highly engaging format combines with the opportunities for moderated discussion (Saminathan, 2022).

The short video format carries risks associated with the creation of low-quality content and the potential for cyberbullying. However, as part of an established social network with advanced moderation tools and the ability to create closed educational groups, Reels helps mitigate these risks. The controlled use of a platform where the short format (Reels) serves as a "hook" and Stories and private messages serve as channels for critical reflection facilitates safer and more productive intercultural exchange (Saminathan, 2022).

Thus, Instagram Reels is an optimal tool for developing students' intercultural competence, as it combines the highly appealing short video format with rich context and the ability to integrate with established social and educational ecosystems.

Instagram Reels and The Features of Its Recommendation Algorithms

Instagram Reels are short videos up to three minutes long, designed to engage with their audience in a dynamic and visually rich interaction. Unlike traditional posts and Stories, Reels are designed from the ground up as a tool for reaching beyond just their followers: they are promoted in a separate tab, in the "Explore" feed, and in recommended sections, giving creators the potential to reach a significantly wider audience (Instagram, 2020). Thus, this format functions not only as a means of self-expression but also as a global platform for cultural exchange.

A key element of Reels is recommendation algorithm, which determines which videos will be shown to a specific user. The algorithm is based on a system of signals that includes both user activity and content characteristics. Among the most significant metrics are: likes, comments, saves, shares, and reposts; video duration and completeness (for example, whether a user watches a video to the end); and the use of trending sounds and effects. Reposts and saves are more important than simple likes, as they indicate the perceived value and relevance of the content (Menon, 2022).

Particular attention is paid to the originality of the video. Instagram deprioritises re-uploaded content, especially if it contains watermarks from third-party apps like TikTok. Preference is given to videos created specifically for the platform and pos-

sessing high visual and audio quality. The algorithm seeks to predict the likelihood that a user will watch the video to the end, engage in activity such as liking, saving, or sharing, or visit the audio page for further use (Wadsley, 2025).

The Reels distribution process is staged. After publishing, the system conducts an initial analysis of quality and originality, then tests the video on a limited audience. If engagement and attention retention rates are high, the algorithm expands the reach, distributing the video to a wider user base. Otherwise, the reach is gradually reduced. Thus, the sustained attention of the audience and early response to content determine its subsequent "life" in the algorithmic ecosystem (Wadsley, 2025).

It should be noted that the effectiveness of Reels largely depends on the creator's ability to capture the viewer's attention in the first few seconds. The short format encourages the creation of dynamic and concentrated content, increasing the likelihood of full viewing and engagement. At the same time, competition for attention is extremely high, and even high-quality content can be lost in the information flow without sufficient initial engagement (Yan, 2023).

Thus, Instagram Reels' algorithms create a unique model for distributing cultural content based on a combination of user preferences, originality, and the video's ability to hold attention. On the one hand, this opens up opportunities for the global exchange of cultural practices, but on the other, it creates limitations related to algorithmic selection and the platform's priorities.

The Impact of Instagram Reels on The Development of Intercultural Competence

According to the authors, the Instagram Reels format serves not only as a means of entertainment but also as a significant channel for cultural exchange, exerting a complex influence on the development of intercultural competence. This impact is ambivalent: Reels can foster openness to cultural diversity and empathy, but at the same time, they can also foster superficial or stereotypical perceptions of other cultures.

In terms of positive impact, Reels provide quick and accessible contact with a variety of cultural practices. Users can observe elements of everyday life, national cuisine, traditional holidays, music, dance, and humour as they are presented by cultural representatives. Unlike formalised sources of knowledge, this format allows one to see a culture from the inside, through everyday experience, which contributes to the development of cultural awareness and the reduction of the distance between "us" and "them". Viral trends – dance challenges, memes, culinary experiments – create a common symbolic language that unites representatives of different cultures in a single communicative space. This enhances empathy, promotes the development of flexible communication skills, and stimulates interest in language learning, as much of the content is accompanied by slang, ironic allusions, and cross-linguistic code-switching.

However, the use of Reels is also associated with a number of limitations that can negatively impact the development of MCs. Brevity and a focus on entertainment often lead to a reduction in cultural content: culture is presented as isolated "exotic" elements, which can perpetuate superficial stereotypes. Algorithmic mechanisms that adapt to user interests reinforce the "echo chamber" effect, limiting cultural diversity and pushing users to interact primarily with content that aligns with existing preferences. Furthermore, differences in humour, symbols, and nonverbal cues can become a source of misunderstandings and conflicts in intercultural communication. Another problematic aspect is the commodification of culture: traditions and practices are transformed into commodities designed for likes and reposts, which diminishes their depth and can distort the authentic cultural context (Mears, 2023).

Thus, Instagram Reels create a paradoxical environment: on the one hand, they accelerate the process of intercultural learning and expand access to a diversity of cultural practices, but on the other, they create the risk of perpetuating stereotypes and simplified images of culture. The impact of Reels on the development of intercultural competence is largely determined by the level of critical perception by users and their willingness to go beyond the algorithmically defined information space.

Experimental Design

To examine the impact of Instagram Reels on the development of intercultural competence, an experiment involved 50 students of different ages and academic backgrounds at Toraighyrov University (39 students) (Pavlodar, Kazakhstan) and Astana It University (11 students) (Astana, Kazakhstan). We divided the subjects into experimental and control groups, with 25 students in each. The researchers randomly divided the participants into five groups of ten, these groups were then divided into experimental and control groups of five students each.

Table 1

The Distribution of Groups

Region	Experimental group	Control group
Balkans Region	5 students	5 students
Southeast Asia.	5 students	5 students
North Africa.	5 students	5 students
Sub-Saharan Africa.	5 students	5 students
Central Asia.	5 students	5 students

Source. Own research.

Each experimental group will receive video content curated by region, which allowed a comparison of differences in the perception and interpretation of cultural codes.

On the other hand, the control group will receive content primarily from the **"**home region." By **"**home region", we mean the post-Soviet space. It is worth noting that the experiment is taking place at Central Asian universities. Therefore, for Group 5, which will receive content from Central Asia, we selected first-year international students from outside of Central Asia.

For ten consecutive days, each group received a daily selection of ten Reels that combined humorous and educational content. In total, each participant engaged with 100 videos. Students had to watch videos, read video descriptions, and review comments.

The choice of experimental parameters – ten days in length and ten videos per day – draws on both theoretical and practical considerations supported by international research. The design builds on the principle of distributed practice, a concept that researchers in the psychology of memory and learning have studied extensively. Researchers demonstrate that people retain information more effectively when they encounter it across spaced intervals rather than within a single concentrated session. For instance, Taking time: Auditory statistical learning benefits from distributed exposure (de Waard et al., 2025) shows that distributed sessions lead to stronger learning outcomes compared to massed practice. This "spacing effect" makes a ten-day period suitable for gradual shifts in perception and interpretation of cultural codes.

Another important factor is the idea of "small daily doses" of media, confirmed by contemporary studies on the impact of short digital content on emotions and attitudes. For example, Can a Video a Day Keep Stress Away? A Test of Media Prescriptions (Nabi et al 2022) demonstrates that even one short video per day for five days can significantly affect students' stress perception and emotional state. Regular yet moderate exposure therefore not only shapes emotional responses but also builds a foundation for sustained interest in new content.

The decision to use ten videos per day reflects a balance between cognitive load and variety of stimuli. A smaller set of materials (three to five videos) may fail to generate a noticeable cultural learning effect, especially if some content does not capture attention. Conversely, an excessive volume may cause fatigue, reduce concentration, and lead to superficial engagement. Ten daily videos serve as an optimal compromise, providing sufficient cultural richness without overloading participants.

The ten-day duration also aligns with practical constraints of educational and experimental settings. On the one hand, it offers enough time to register initial changes in attitudes and perception. On the other, it sustains motivation without creating undue strain. International studies confirm that even short-term exposure produces measurable results. For example, the review Short-term exposure to nature and benefits to cognitive performance (Mason et al., 2022) highlights that sessions as brief as ten to thirty minutes already yield cognitive benefits. In this context, a ten-day period with daily exposure to ten videos appears theoretically sound and practically feasible.

The authors considered this volume sufficient to trigger measurable shifts in the cognitive and affective dimensions of intercultural competence.

Video selections for the experimental group followed two main criteria. Firstly, a clearly identifiable regional cultural context (including linguistic markers, traditions, everyday practices, visual imagery, music, and humour). Secondly, a balance of entertainment and educational elements, ensuring both emotional engagement and cognitive activation.

The language barrier presented a challenge in the process of selecting suitable content. Although social media platforms now provide relatively advanced translation tools, the study relied exclusively on materials produced in English.

Table 2

Instagram Accounts Participating in the Experiment

Instagram account	Region
The Balkans (@the_balkans)	Balkan region
Random Balkan Guy (@randombalkanguy)	
The Balkan Vibes (@thebalkanvibes)	
Balkan Stories (@balkan.stories)	
Milos Nedeljkov (@balkandad)	
Southeast Asia Heritage and History (@seaheritagehistory)	Southeast Asia
Seasia Stats (@seasia.stats)	
Sup Muk Gok (@supmukgok)	
Jayne Rajendran (@jaynejetplane)	
Noah Yap (@onlynoah)	
North African Student Association (@nasauoft)	North Africa
Travel Morocco (@travel_moroccan)	
Official NA tiktok Page | North African (@north_african_tiktoks)	
A. J. HAMAM (@ayahjoya)	
AL MAGHRIB (@moorskingdom)	
Amplify Africa Inc. (@amplifyafrica)	Sub-Saharan Africa
Arua Kevin Chiedu (@kevinblak_comedy)	
Machi | Afro/African Creator (@afromachi)	
Charity Ekezie (@itssucrepea)	
Africa (@africa)	
Sayat Nokerban (@sayatnokerban)	Central Asia
QALAM GLOBAL (@qalam.global.eng)	
hi (@nonpoliticalhotgirl)	
(@centralasianshi)	
Saddam (@tukatimurid)	

Source. Own research.

After the exposure period, the study will assess the level of intercultural competence through a combination of questionnaires and qualitative methods such as focus

group discussions. This approach will help identify changes in attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge, as well as compare results across groups depending on the regional source of content.

Diagnostic Tools

Contemporary research on intercultural competence has developed a wide range of instruments. However, since this study is narrower in scope and operates under specific experimental conditions, the authors designed a tailored diagnostic tool. We developed a questionnaire that included 24 closed-ended questions and 5 open-ended questions (Appendix A).

To assess the internal consistency of the developed questionnaire, we used Cronbach's alpha coefficient. For dichotomous data ("Yes/No"), this indicator is equivalent to the Kuder-Richardson formula. An acceptable level of reliability for research scales is typically set at a threshold of 0.70.

The analysis included the primary diagnostic responses of fifty respondents (experimental and control groups). A preliminary reliability analysis of the 24 questions of dichotomous questionnaire revealed an appropriate level of internal consistency -0.76. This value exceeds the minimum acceptable threshold (0.70) and indicates that the scale items are interrelated and measure a single latent construct. The stability of the results was further verified by comparing the pilot group data with the final experimental baseline, demonstrating that the analytical procedures remained robust across different stages of the research. Questions with low correlations with the total score (e.g., Q7 and Q21) were identified as potential candidates for revision in further research.

In addition, we have used the "Integrative Intercultural Competence Questionnaire" by Oleg Khuhlaev (Khuhlaev et al., 2021). This specific method was selected because it has been previously validated in diverse educational settings, proving its reliability for assessing psychological resilience and ethnocentrism. The questionnaire is designed to examine the ability to effectively communicate with people from different cultures and in different cultural environments. This specific method was selected because it has been previously validated in diverse educational settings, proving its reliability for assessing psychological resilience and ethnocentrism. The methodology contains four scales:

- Intercultural stability (individual personality traits that allow a person to be resilient to stressful situations of intercultural communication);
- Intercultural interest (desire to communicate with people from other cultures, interest in culture and cultural differences);
- Absence of ethnocentrism (attitude to respect and accept cultural diversity)
- Management of intercultural interaction (possession of a wide range of communication skills important in intercultural communication).

The questionnaire is based on the integration of 52 constructs from 14 intercultural competence measurement methods (Appendix B). The reliability data of the scales, mean values and standard deviations are presented in Table 3 and indicate good reliability indicators of the method.

Table 3

Intercorrelations and Descriptive Statistics of Scales

Scales	n	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4
Intercultural stability	1021	3.24	0.74	0.77	1	0.29	0.55	0.31
Intercultural interest	1017	4.05	0.72	0.71	0.29	1	0.43	0.49
Absence of ethnocentrism	1001	3.13	0.64	0.71	0.55	0.43	1	0.34
Management of intercultural interaction	1008	3.83	0.59	0.70	0.31	0.49	0.34	1

Source. Based on Khuhlaev (Khuhlaev et al., 2021) research.

To sum up, the Integrative Questionnaire of Intercultural Competence is a comprehensive methodology that integrates a number of indicators of intercultural competence.

Experimental Procedure

The experiment was conducted in several stages, ensuring a systematic approach and consistent recording of changes in the participants' intercultural competence.

Stage 1. Introductory Meeting and Briefing. Initial Assessment

Before the study, all students participated in an introductory meeting in a blended (online and offline) mode, during which the goals and objectives of the experiment, as well as the rules of participation, were explained. Participants were informed of their rights, that the experiment was conducted on a voluntary basis, and that it complied with research ethics regulations.

Particular attention was paid to the need to carefully view the provided video content and honestly complete the assessment materials. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the video content, students were encouraged to review the comments on the videos. In addition, during the first stage, students completed an initial survey using the developed assessment tool. The survey was conducted online. To minimise external influences, students were not informed of the specific parameters that would be measured, but the importance of their subjective experience of perceiving the materials was emphasised.

Stage 2. Exposure Period

For ten days, each group of students received ten Reels daily, selected according to regional criteria. The materials were sent via a secure communication channel (WhatsApp messenger), ensuring a consistent and timely flow of content. To ensure compliance with the experimental conditions, students confirmed viewing the materials by checking an online form.

Stage 3. Recording Changes

At the end of the exposure period, participants completed surveys using the presented diagnostic tool. The survey was administered individually online, ensuring anonymity and minimising the likelihood of socially desirable responses.

Stage 4. Group Discussions

Focus groups were held for in-depth analysis within each experimental group. During the discussions, not only verbal responses were recorded, but also the characteristics of emotional reactions, as well as the students' ability to justify their opinions regarding the perception of cultural content. This data was considered as additional qualitative material, allowing for the interpretation of the quantitative survey results.

Stage 5. Data Comparison and Processing

After data collection was complete, statistical processing of the questionnaires data was planned: calculating mean values for subscales, identifying intergroup differences, and analysing correlations between the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components of intercultural competence. Focus group data was used to qualitatively supplement the statistical results, identify typical patterns of perception, and refine interpretations.

Thus, the experimental procedure allowed for a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, providing a comprehensive approach to studying the impact of Instagram Reels on the development of students' intercultural competence.

Data Analysis Methods

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to process the experimental results, allowing us to identify both statistically significant changes and more subtle aspects of students' perception of cultural content.

Quantitative Analysis

In the "Intercultural Competence Integration Questionnaire", the obtained scores were summed. The questionnaire results were as follows: 18–50 points represent a low level, 50–80 points represent a medium level, and 80–90 points represent a high level.

The author's questionnaire data was converted into numerical form: each positive response ("Yes") was assigned a score of 1, allowing for the calculation of individual and group indicators.

In the first stage of the analysis, to ensure maximum statistical transparency and enable accurate cross-scale comparison, all raw scores from the different instruments were normalised into a standardised 0–1 scale. The data was then analysed using exploratory visual methods. Raincloud Plots were generated in JASP to concurrently display individual data points, boxplots, and probability density distributions. To maintain methodological rigour and visually capture the true position of the scores, the Y-axis limits for all figures were strictly fixed from the theoretical minimum of 0 to the theoretical maximum of 1.

Qualitative analysis

Responses to open-ended survey questions and data obtained during focus groups was subjected to content analysis. Specifically, the following were taken into account:

- depth of descriptions of cultural characteristics;
- use of terms and examples related to the region being studied;
- presence or absence of stereotypical notions;
- emotional content of statements.

The frequency of mentions of certain topics (traditions, language, music, humour, politics, economics, etc.) was also recorded, allowing us to identify which aspects of cultural content were most actively remembered and absorbed.

Comparative and interpretive analysis

Comparison of quantitative and qualitative data allowed us to reconstruct a general picture of how students perceived the content. For example, higher scores in the survey were reflected in detailed responses to open-ended questions, while positive attitudes were confirmed by emotionally charged reactions during group discussions. Thus, the use of a mixed methodology enabled a multivariate analysis of the data obtained and allowed us to document both overt and covert changes in the attitudes and perceptions of the experiment participants.

Expected Results of the Experiment

It is expected that systematic viewing of video content reflecting the cultural characteristics of various regions will lead to positive changes in students' perceptions and attitudes toward representatives of these cultures. Specifically, the following can be expected:

- Increased interest in the cultures of the studied regions. Students who regularly interact with the content will be more likely to express interest in additional information about the daily life, traditions, and social practices of the selected region.
- Reduction in cultural distance. After the exposure, participants will perceive representatives of the region as less alien and more approachable, which may be reflected in positive wording in responses to open-ended questions and during group discussions.
- Increased specific knowledge. Questions and discussions are expected to contain more facts about the geography, history, social, and cultural life of the regions. The level of detail will vary depending on the initial student engagement and the quality of the content provided.
- Differentiation of results by group. It can be predicted that differences between groups will be related to the degree of "attractiveness" of the content for students. For example, regions presented through humorous or visually rich materials may elicit a greater response than regions where the emphasis was on the educational component.
- Formation of shared associative images. Even with differences in the depth of information assimilation, students are expected to develop strong associations related to the culture of the studied region (national cuisine, music, gestures, communication features). This will indicate that the visual format of Reels facilitates the rapid consolidation of cultural symbols.

Thus, it is expected that the experiment will confirm the ability of short videos to serve as a tool for expanding understanding of other cultures. However, the nature of the changes is expected to be heterogeneous and largely depend on the specifics of the cultural content and how students perceive it.

Limitations of the Study

Despite a carefully designed experimental design, this study has several limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results.

- Small sample size. The experiment was conducted with only 25 students, limiting the generalisability of the findings to a wider population. To improve statistical reliability and external validity, a larger sample size will be necessary.
- Short-term nature of the exposure. The exposure lasted ten days, which may be insufficient for lasting changes in perceptions and attitudes toward other cultures. The effect recorded immediately after the study's completion may be temporary.

- Algorithmic specificity of the platform. Despite manual content selection, students may have simultaneously received similar videos through their own Instagram feeds. This reduces control over the "purity" of the experimental effect and may influence the results.
- Peculiarities of Reels' perception. The short and entertaining nature of the videos itself imposes limitations: culture is often presented fragmentarily, which can form superficial associations and stereotypes. In this study, this limitation is inevitable, as it is related to the nature of the platform itself.
- Subjectivity of self-reports. The diagnostic apparatus relies on questionnaires and student self-assessment. There is a risk of socially desirable responses, when participants formulate their positions in a way they consider correct or expected.
- Uneven attractiveness of regions. Different cultural regions have different degrees of "exoticism" or emotional appeal to students. This may impact engagement and interest regardless of content quality, distorting the results of intergroup comparisons.

Therefore, while the experiment allows us to identify certain trends and patterns, its results should be considered preliminary and require further testing in broader and more diverse settings.

Discussion And Results

The results of the conducted experiment demonstrate that targeted viewing of Instagram Reels containing cultural elements from different world regions has a noticeable impact on students' perception of other cultures and their readiness for intercultural interaction. Despite the relatively small sample size (50 participants) and the short-term nature of exposure (10 days), the collected data reveal consistent trends that allow for meaningful analysis of cultural perception dynamics.

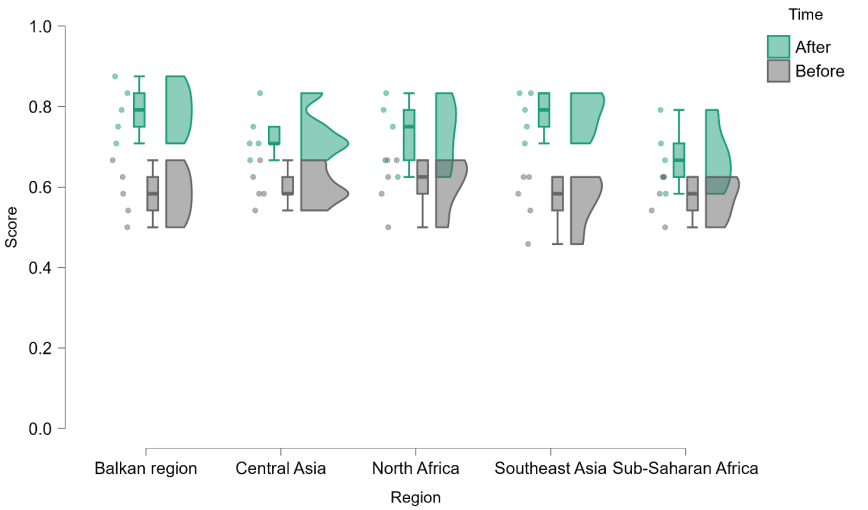
Quantitative Results

The authors conducted the developed questionnaire survey twice, before and after the exposure period, with total scores ranging from 0 to 24.

Figure 1 illustrates the comparative analysis of average questionnaire scores within the experimental groups across five geographical regions before and after the intervention. The data indicates a consistent upward trend in all observed regions, suggesting that the experimental method had a positive impact on the subjects' performance.

Figure 1

Average Questionnaire Scores of Experimental Groups



Source. Own research.

The most substantial improvement was observed in the Balkan region and Southeast Asia, where scores rose to 19.0 and 18.9 respectively. Notably, the Balkan region started from a baseline of 14.0, achieving a significant growth of 5.0 points.

In Central Asia and North Africa, the results were identical, with scores increasing from 14.5 to 17.6. While Sub-Saharan Africa showed the lowest final score (16.3), it still demonstrated a clear progression from its initial level of 13.9.

The overall average score across all experimental groups showed a marked increase, shifting the results from the lower-middle range of the scale (approx. 14.0) towards the higher end (above 17.5).

On average, the scores increased from 14.12 to 17.88, resulting in a mean growth of 3.76 points.

Table 4

Average Questionnaire Scores of Experimental Groups (0–24 Scale)

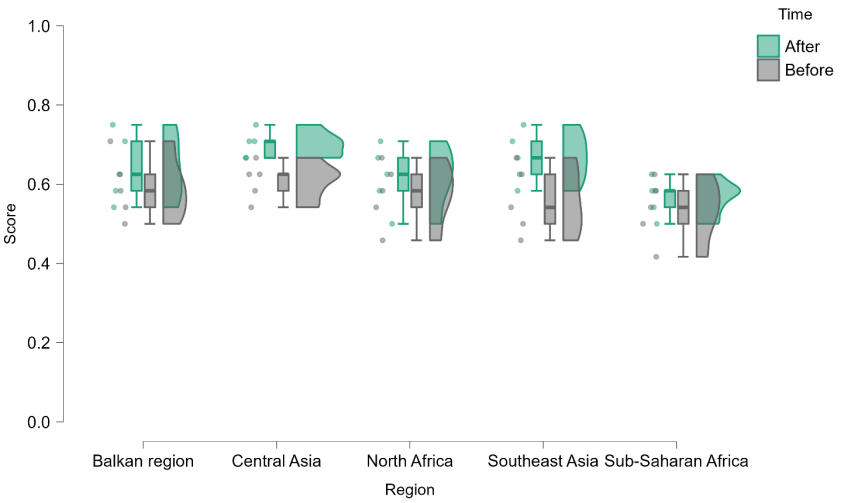
Group (region)	Average score "before"	Average score "after"	Increase (Δ)
Balkan region	14,0	19,0	+5,0
Southeast Asia	13,7	18,9	+5,2
North Africa	14,5	17,6	+3,1
Sub-Saharan Africa	13,9	16,3	+2,4
Central Asia	14,5	17,6	+3,1
Average	14,12	17,88	3,76

Source. Own research.

Figure 2 presents the results of the control groups across the same five regions. While a slight increase in scores is observable, the dynamics in the control group differ fundamentally from those in the experimental group.

Figure 2

Average Questionnaire Scores of Control Groups (0–24 Scale)



Source. Own research.

Table 5 provides the statistical results for the control groups, which serves as a baseline for evaluating the effectiveness of the experimental intervention. The contrast between these results and those of the experimental group (Table 4) is critical for validating the research hypothesis.

Table 5

Average Questionnaire Scores of Control Groups (0–24 Scale)

Group (region)	Average score "before"	Average score "after"	Increase (Δ)
Balkan region	14,2	15,4	+1,2
Southeast Asia	13,4	16,0	+2,6
North Africa	13,8	14,8	+1,0
Sub-Saharan Africa	12,8	13,6	+0,8
Central Asia	14,6	16,8	+2,0
Average	13,76	15,32	1,52

Source. Own research.

Taking into the account experimental group, the (Table 4) shows that groups exposed to Reels from Southeast Asia and the Balkans demonstrated the most significant positive changes. These regions elicited the strongest emotional and cognitive

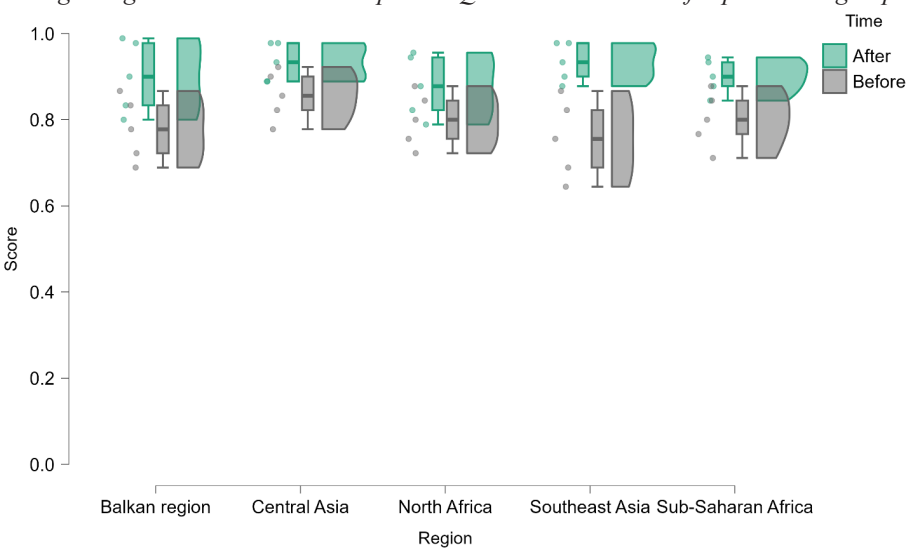
responses. By contrast, the groups viewing African content demonstrated smaller improvements, which may reflect either greater cultural distance or lower engagement with the presented materials.

The control group showed a slight increase in scores, likely due to the testing effect and natural maturation. However, the experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant improvement, which suggests that the experimental intervention directly influenced the observed changes.

In addition, the authors conducted the Integrative Intercultural Competence Questionnaire twice, before and after the exposure period, with total scores ranging from 18 to 90.

Figure 3

Average Integrative Intercultural Competence Questionnaire Scores of Experimental groups



Source. Own research.

As shown in Figure 3, all experimental groups exhibited a notable increase in their intercultural competence scores. The most significant growth was recorded in Southeast Asia, where the average score rose by 16 points (from 68 to 84).

Table 6

Average Integrative Intercultural Competence Questionnaire Scores of Experimental Groups (18–90 scale)

Group (region)	Average score "before"	Average score "after"	Increase (Δ)
Balkan region	70	81	+11
Southeast Asia	68	84	+16
North Africa	72	79	+7

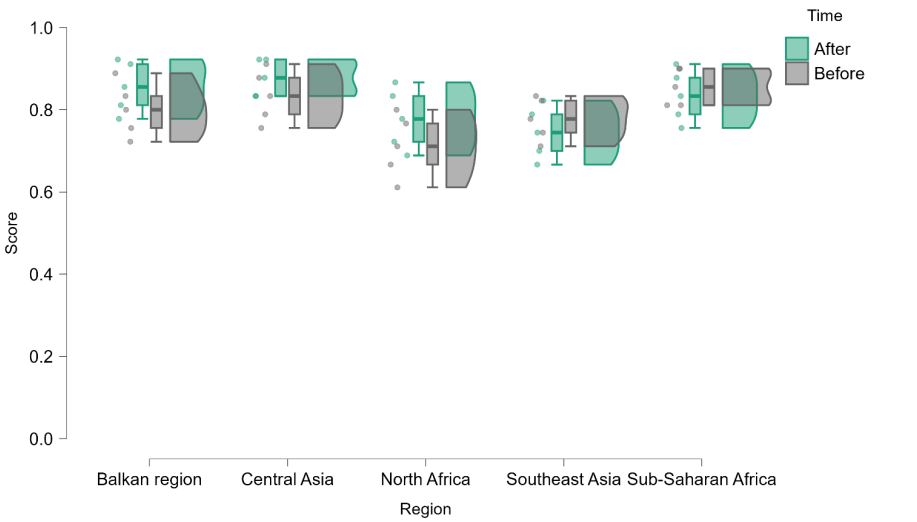
Group (region)	Average score "before"	Average score "after"	Increase (Δ)
Sub-Saharan Africa	72	81	+9
Central Asia	77	84	+7
Average	71,8	81,8	10

Source. Own research.

In contrast, the control group results (Figure 4) show stagnant or even regressive dynamics. In Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, scores actually decreased by 3 and 2 points, respectively.

Figure 4

Average Integrative Intercultural Competence Questionnaire Scores of Experimental Groups



Source. Own research.

Table 7

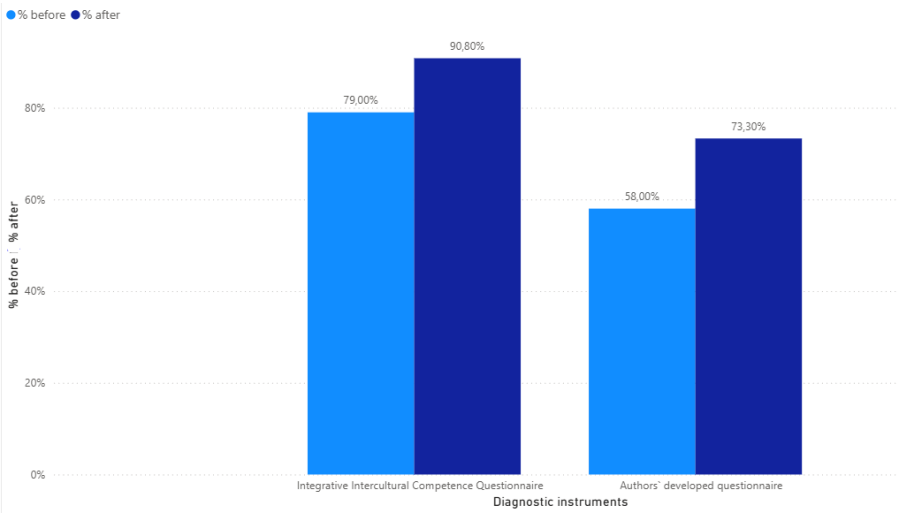
Average Integrative Intercultural Competence Questionnaire Scores of Experimental Groups (18–90 scale)

Group (region)	Average score "before"	Average score "after"	Increase (Δ)
Balkan region	72	77	+5
Southeast Asia	70	67	-3
North Africa	64	70	+6
Sub-Saharan Africa	77	75	-2
Central Asia	75	79	+4
Average	71,6	73,6	2

Source. Own research.

Figure 5

Overall Results Before and After the Experiment (%)



Source. Own research.

Experimental group: all groups showed positive dynamics after the experiment. The greatest increase was observed among students studying Southeast Asian culture (+16 points). The average increase in scores across all regions was approximately +10 points. The smallest increase was observed in the North African and Central Asian groups (+7 points).

Control group: the changes in the control group were less pronounced and not always positive. Some groups showed a decrease in scores: Southeast Asia (-3 points), Sub-Saharan Africa (-2 points). The greatest positive increase was observed in North Africa (+6 points). The average change in scores for the control group was approximately +2 points.

Qualitative Results

The analysis of open-ended responses and group discussions revealed differences in both the depth and the nature of cultural perception.

Table 8

Most frequently mentioned cultural elements in students' responses (experimental group)

Region	Main categories of references	Nature of perception
Balkan region	Music, humour, the relations in the region, tourism	Comparisons with own culture
Southeast Asia	Cuisine, languages, trends, fashion	High engagement, curiosity, emotional response

Region	Main categories of references	Nature of perception
North Africa	Traditions, history, architecture, religion	Positive perception, but fragmented images
Sub-Saharan Africa	Dance, ethnic music, visual images	Stereotype-driven associations, superficial understanding
Central Asia	Contemporary cultural trends, humour, everyday life, cuisine	Recognition effect, moderate engagement

Source. Own research.

These findings confirm that visually rich and humorous content elicited the strongest involvement. However, without additional explanatory context, students tended to interpret complex elements of cultural heritage in a superficial way.

- Emotional Engagement. A particularly important finding concerns the role of emotional engagement. Students recalled and discussed humorous and visually dynamic content more often, which suggests that emotional intensity enhances educational potential. Nevertheless, in the absence of contextualisation, such content carries the risk of reinforcing simplified associations and stereotypes.
- Limitations and Interpretation**.** Although the experiment revealed positive dynamics, the results require cautious interpretation:
  - The smaller gains observed in the African groups may be due to the specificity of the content or to greater cultural distance.
  - Reliance on self-reported questionnaires introduces the possibility of socially desirable responses.
  - The short-term exposure (10 days) limits conclusions regarding long-term attitudinal changes.

Thus, the observed effects should be regarded as preliminary and requiring verification through larger-scale and longer-term studies.

Verification of Expected Results

The experimental study sought to evaluate the impact of short-form video content on students' intercultural perceptions. Based on the statistical and qualitative data presented in the previous sections, the verification of the initial expectations is as follows:

- Increased interest in the cultures of the studied regions. The significant increase in average questionnaire scores in the experimental groups (e.g., from 14.12 to 17.88) and the substantial rise in the Integrative Intercultural Competence scores (average $\Delta = 10$) indicate both a heightened interest and a better grasp of specific cultural facts (Confirmed).
- Reduction in cultural distance. The distinct separation between the "Before" and "After" density curves in the experimental groups suggests a notable shift in student attitudes. In contrast, the control groups demonstrated heavily overlapping probability density

distributions and mixed individual point paths between the stages. This clear difference in distribution patterns suggests that the reduction in the perceived "alienness" of the studied regions was associated with the experimental exposure (Confirmed).

- Increased specific knowledge. The experimental results confirm the third expectation, as the significant rise in scores across all regions – averaging a 10–point increase in Table 6 – demonstrates a measurable expansion of students' factual knowledge. This trend proves that the visual format of Reels effectively facilitates the rapid consolidation of cultural symbols, successfully transforming the research method into a robust tool for enhancing global awareness and professional skills. (Confirmed).
- Differentiation of results by group. As predicted, the results were heterogeneous. For instance, the Balkan region and Southeast Asia showed the highest growth in scores (up to +16 points in competence), whereas Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa showed more modest, though still positive, gains. This confirms that the "attractiveness" and specifics of the cultural content (visual richness, themes) played a decisive role in the degree of student engagement (Partially Confirmed).
- Formation of shared associative images. While the quantitative scores indicate rapid consolidation of cultural symbols, the variance in regional results suggests that the "Reels" format is highly effective but depends on the initial engagement levels. The consistent growth across diverse geographical contexts validates the use of short videos as a tool for rapid cultural symbol consolidation (Partially Confirmed).

Final Conclusions of the Discussion

Based on the conducted analysis, we can identify several key patterns. Firstly, systematic exposure to short video content can stimulate increased interest in foreign cultures and foster more positive attitudes toward other communities.

Secondly, the depth of perception depends on content characteristics: emotionally charged and visually engaging videos enhance involvement but do not necessarily ensure deeper cognitive processing.

Thirdly, Reels gain value that is more educational when educators contextualise the content, add explanations, and encourage classroom discussion.

Overall, the experiment confirms the potential of Instagram Reels as a tool for fostering intercultural competence. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends heavily on content selection, pedagogical integration, and guidance provided by educators.

Conclusions

This study has explored the potential of Instagram Reels as a tool for fostering intercultural competence among university students. Both theoretical analysis and the practical implementation of the experiment show that using digital media content for educational

purposes opens new opportunities to enhance intercultural communication and cultural awareness. The experiment, in which students received curated sets of short videos from different world regions over a ten-day period, demonstrated that even relatively short-term but systematic exposure can stimulate interest in other cultures, reduce stereotypical perceptions, and encourage more tolerant attitudes towards cultural diversity. Participants showed positive dynamics in knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of cultural differences, thereby confirming the effectiveness of this approach.

A particularly significant finding lies in the fact that the Reels format combines brevity, emotional intensity, and strong visual appeal, making it an accessible and engaging tool for student involvement. The results suggest that this format achieves an optimal balance between cognitive demand and learner engagement.

Therefore, the integration of Reels into educational practice holds considerable potential for advancing intercultural competence. Future research should extend the duration of exposure, include a wider range of age groups, and incorporate comparative analysis with other media formats. The findings can inform the design of educational programmes aimed at the internationalisation of education and the development of globally oriented thinking among students.

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Appendix A

Closed-ended questions

I know the behavioural norms accepted in region [X].

I can name at least three cultural features of region [X] (e.g. food, festivals, and traditions).

I can recognise patterns of non-verbal communication characteristic of region [X].

I understand that the behaviour of people from region [X] may have a different meaning than in my culture.

I can describe the main cultural differences between my culture and region [X].

I can easily identify cultural elements typical of region [X] (clothing, music, symbols, etc.).

I feel comfortable imagining myself in a communication situation with people from region [X].

I am interested in learning about the daily life of people from region [X].

I feel confident when thinking about interacting with people from region [X].

I try to understand the reasons behind the behaviour of people from region [X].

I enjoy observing how people from region [X] express their emotions.

I feel empathy when I learn about the challenges faced by people from region [X].

I can adjust my communication style (gestures, tone, pace of speech) when talking with people from region [X].

I am willing to adapt my behaviour to be understood by someone from region [X].

I can discuss cultural topics related to region [X] without discomfort.

In new communication, situations with people from region [X], I can behave respectfully and attentively.

I can use non-verbal means (gestures, facial expressions) to facilitate understanding with someone from region [X].

I try to consider how people from region [X] may perceive my behaviour.

I would like to communicate more often with people from region [X].

I am interested in studying the culture of region [X] (through videos, books, travel).

I choose entertainment content related to region [X].

I use social media to learn more about life in region [X].

I would take a course on the culture of region [X] if someone offered it to me.

I believe that my attitude towards people from region [X] can change in a positive direction.

Open-ended questions

Describe the character of a representative of region [X] in two or three sentences.

What interesting facts do you know about the cultures of peoples in region [X]?

Briefly describe the geography of region [X].

What political systems are typical of region [X]?

Describe the economy of countries in region [X].

Appendix B

Integrative Intercultural Competence Questionnaire

Please answer a few questions about your interactions with people of other cultures. These could be foreigners, people of other nationalities, and/or ethnic groups. We encounter people of other cultures not only when we travel abroad; in our multinational country, everyone has the opportunity to interact with them every day.

Please rate your agreement with each statement: Completely agree; Somewhat agree; Somewhat agree, somewhat disagree; Somewhat disagree; Completely disagree.

1. I know that I can work effectively with people of different cultures.

2. I enjoy communicating with people of other cultures.

3. I will not communicate with a person of another culture if they act based on their own cultural norms.

4. In intercultural communication, I try to take into account the opinions of both sides before making a decision.

5. During the communication with people of another culture, my nerves are on edge.

6. If I have an important meeting planned with a person of another culture, I try to imagine what cultural differences there might be between us.

7. I enjoy meeting people of other cultures.

8. I will not communicate with a person of another culture if their traditions are alien to me.

9. I test the accuracy of my understanding of another culture during intercultural communication.

10. After communicating with people of another culture, I feel completely overwhelmed.

11. There are cultures for which I feel contempt. 12. I enjoy communicating with people from cultures that differ significantly from mine.

13. I trust only people from my own culture.

14. I adjust my perceptions of another culture through interactions with its speakers.

15. I don't expect anything good from intercultural communication.

16. There are cultures that are almost entirely made up of bad people.

17. I can overcome difficulties that arise when communicating with people from other cultures.

18. After communicating with someone from another culture, I feel guilty.

Key:

Question number	**Completely agree**	**Somewhat agree**	**Somewhat agree, somewhat disagree**	**Somewhat disagree**	**Completely disagree**
1,2,4,6,7,9,12,14,17	5 points	4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point
3,5,8,10,11,13,15,16,18	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points