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## Opportunities for an Intercultural Approach to Organizational Communication in Higher Education

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**Abstract.** The article analyses the opportunities for an intercultural approach to organizational communication in higher education in a context marked by academic mobility, cultural diversity in university communities, and the transformation of internationalization into an integrated element at the strategic and operational levels. Organizational communication is approached as a strategic mechanism for institutional cohesion, participatory management, and academic performance, which, in the absence of an intercultural perspective, can generate dysfunctions, latent conflicts, and barriers to professional collaboration. From a theoretical perspective, the study draws on Geert Hofstede's contributions regarding cultural dimensions, Edgar Schein's model of organizational culture levels, and Milton J. Bennett's approaches to intercultural communication. These scientific models highlight how values, communication styles, and power relations influence interactions between university actors belonging to different cultures. The methodological perspective is based on a comparative analysis of institutional communication practices in universities located in distinct cultural spaces, complemented by an interpretation of university strategic documents and internationalization policies. The results highlight the fact that an intercultural approach to organizational communication promotes the improvement of decision-making processes and the development of organizational identity in multicultural contexts. In conclusion, the article argues that integrating intercultural skills into university communication strategies is a factor in enhancing academic management in preventing cultural conflicts and increasing the competitiveness of higher education institutions at the international level.

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**Keywords:** organizational communication; intercultural approach; higher education; university organizational culture; internationalization; intercultural competencies

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, higher education has been profoundly influenced by globalization processes, the expansion of internationalization policies, and increased academic mobility. Contemporary universities increasingly function as transnational and intercultural spaces, where teachers, students, and administrative staff interact across cultural, linguistic, and institutional boundaries. These dynamics generate new challenges for university governance and organizational cohesion, giving communication a strategic role in the functioning of higher education institutions (Knight, 2012; Deardorff, 2009).

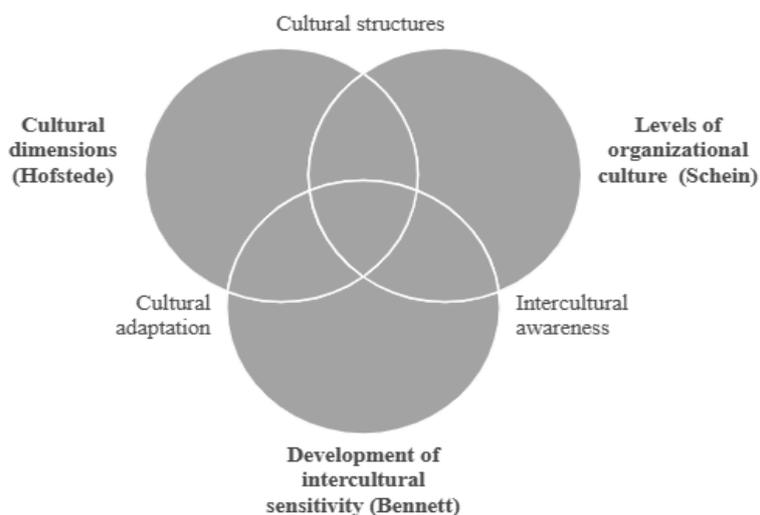
An intercultural approach to organizational communication is becoming essential in a context where the internationalization of universities is a programmatic objective and an integrated process at the strategic and operational levels. The absence of communication mechanisms that are sensitive to cultural diversity can affect managerial efficiency and the quality of professional cooperation, limiting the ability of institutions to respond to the demands of a cross-border and competitive academic environment (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

Based on these premises, in the following content we will analyse the opportunities offered by the intercultural approach to organizational communication in higher education, with an emphasis on its role as a mechanism for participatory management and institutional performance support. By exploring the relationship between cultural diversity and internal communication processes, the study highlights the need to develop inclusive organizational practices capable of leveraging cultural pluralism as a resource for institutional cohesion and sustainable development in a cross-border university context.

## 2. Materials

From a theoretical perspective, the analysis of organizational communication in intercultural university contexts is based on the three general conceptual landmarks of organizational culture: the cultural dimensions formulated by Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, G., Hofstede G. J., & Minkov, 2010), the model of organizational culture

levels developed by Edgar Schein (Schein, 2010), and the paradigm of intercultural sensitivity development proposed by Milton J. Bennett (Bennett, 1993).



**Figure 1. Convergence of organizational culture models in an intercultural context**

These theoretical models of organizational culture are relevant in intercultural university contexts because of their ability to explain how cultural diversity influences communication practices, hierarchical relationships, and decision-making processes within higher education institutions.

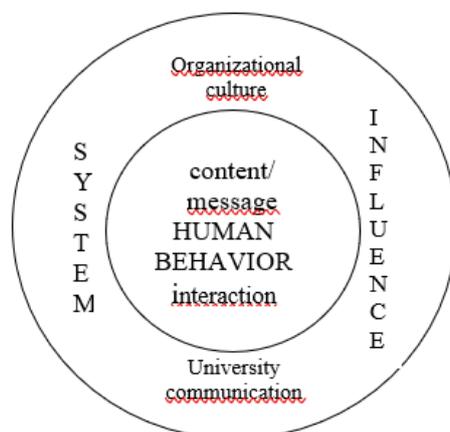
Organizational communication in the context of higher education is approached as a complex, culturally mediated social process that influences decision-making, professional relationships, and the institutional climate. Differences in values, norms, and communication styles can generate a variety of opportunities for innovation and organizational learning, given the risks associated with misunderstanding, symbolic fragmentation, and the emergence of latent conflicts (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Schein, 2010).

The cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede (power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, long-term orientation, and indulgence) are relevant variables for analyzing opportunities for an intercultural approach to organizational communication in higher education, with culture representing, in the author's opinion, "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of a group or category of people from others" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, 6). Universities that integrate students and faculty from cultures with different levels of power distance exhibit distinct

communication styles: from formalized and hierarchical communication to interactions based on dialogue and symbolic negotiation. In cultures with a high level of power distance, communication tends to be vertical and formalised, and individual initiative is reduced, while in cultures with low power distance, symmetrical dialogue and negotiation of meanings predominate (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, pp. 61–64). Applied to the academic environment, this model explains the differences between managerial and academic styles, as well as the difficulties of adaptation faced by actors coming from different educational systems. Through this example, Hofstede's model allows us to interpret communication tensions as expressions of different value structures, rather than simple institutional dysfunctions.

Schein's model of organizational culture complements this perspective by analyzing the internal structure of institutional culture. According to the author, "basic assumptions are beliefs taken for granted, so internalized that they become invisible to members of the organization" (Schein, 2010, 27). In universities, these assumptions may concern conceptions of authority, academic merit, the role of the professor, or the status of the student. Intercultural communication becomes problematic when these assumptions differ significantly between institutional groups, generating divergent interpretations of the same messages and administrative practices.

Schein's model of organizational culture levels highlights the fact that, in intercultural universities, communication is mediated by formal rules and educational policies and by internalized cultural assumptions about the role of the teacher, the status of the student, and the meaning of academic authority (Romano, Săzer, 1987). Institutional artifacts (administrative language, academic rituals, hierarchical structures) can be interpreted differently by university actors depending on their cultural reference systems. In the absence of an awareness of the deep level of values and assumptions, these differences can generate communication ambiguities and latent conflicts.



**Figure 2. Applications of the organizational culture levels model (Schein) in the analysis of university communication**

Highlighting the systemic relationship between organizational culture, university communication, and human behavior in Figure 1 through concentric representation emphasizes the stratified and dynamic nature of organizational culture, as well as the interdependence between its levels. In this sense, "the organization is a rational instrument, built according to the goals of those who conceive and lead it. It generates relationships of cooperation, exchange, as well as conflicts between social actors" (Neculau, Boncu, 1999, p. 230). The outer circle is associated with organizational culture, which functions as a reference system and general normative framework. This level corresponds to the fundamental assumptions in Schein's model and includes implicit conceptions about the role of education, the nature of knowledge, the legitimacy of academic authority, and the relationship between competence and power. These assumptions exert a constant influence on all communication and educational processes within the organization. The inner circle represents the space of university communication, which mediates the relationship between organizational culture and the behavior of educational actors. This level includes the content and message of teaching communication, as well as the teacher-student interaction processes, which are often defined by the charisma of the teacher (Borozan & Munteanu, 2025, p. 81). This level corresponds to artifacts and declared values, being the place where institutional principles become visible through academic language, communication styles, forms of interaction, and explicit rules of teaching activity. Human behavior is placed at the center of the figure, as the core of university communication practices (Sadovei, 2017). This is the concrete result of the interaction between the messages conveyed, the institutional cultural

frameworks, and the individual experiences of university actors. Human behavior reflects how organizational culture is internalized, interpreted, and reproduced through action. The bidirectional arrows indicate the constant circulation of influences between levels, suggesting that the communication process is one of continuous negotiation of meanings (Bromberg, 1994). In this way, through this representation, the figure highlights the fact that the communication practice of the university course must be understood as a systemic process, situated at the intersection between the deep cultural structures of the organization and the visible manifestations of didactic communication, providing a coherent interpretative framework for analyzing the opportunities for intercultural approaches to organizational communication in higher education (Sadovei & Cojocaru-Boroza, Țarnă, 2014).

Milton J. Bennett's contribution provides an interpretative framework geared towards the development of intercultural competence. The model of intercultural sensitivity development describes the transition from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, highlighting the stages through which individuals come to perceive cultural difference as a cognitive and relational resource (Bennett, 1993, pp. 22–26). Bennett states that "cultural difference is not an attribute of the other, but a result of how we organize our experience" (Bennett, 1993, p. 25). This idea is essential for higher education, where intercultural interaction is frequent and institutionally structured through academic mobility, international programs, and cross-border partnerships (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

By correlating these theoretical models, we understand that intercultural communication represents a "space for symbolic negotiation" between distinct professional and cultural identities and thus needs to be designed accordingly. Integrating this perspective into university management contributes to preventing latent conflicts, increasing institutional cohesion, and strengthening academic performance in an educational environment characterized by diversity and transnational mobility (Peretti, 1996).

### **3. Methods**

In order to explore the opportunities for an intercultural approach to organizational communication in higher education, the hermeneutic (interpretative) analysis method was used, which is suitable for investigating culturally mediated communication processes. This method allowed for the examination of the meanings

attributed to university communication practices in intercultural contexts, in which teaching and learning activities within university courses are mediated by cultural values, organizational norms, and institutionalized assumptions.

Considerations regarding the approach to didactic communication as an instrumental one do not exclude the relational element, reflected in "the deepest meaning of communication, defined by the relationship based on the sharing of meanings" (Iacob, 1993, p. 181). In the absence of the relational framework, which guides and fixes meaning in the understanding of information, the very "state of communication is nullified. Thus, a sentence formulated in an unknown language exists as information, but in the absence of knowledge of the language, and therefore of understanding, it communicates nothing, just like a gesture belonging to a culture different from one's own" (Iacob, 1993, p. 181).

University teaching, as reported in Edgar Schein's model of organizational culture levels, was analyzed through the three levels of culture: artifacts, stated values, and basic assumptions. The selected criteria reflect this structure, being distributed coherently across each level in order to capture the complexity of teaching communication in intercultural university contexts.

At the level of artifacts, where the visible and observable forms of organizational communication manifest themselves, criteria were included that can be directly identified in the conduct of the university course. Thus, the academic language used was selected as an essential indicator of how teaching communication is adapted to differences in students' linguistic competence and discursive style. Also, academic rituals, such as class attendance and ways of giving feedback, were analyzed as institutionalized practices that send symbolic messages about academic discipline, responsibility, and the teacher-student relationship.

At the level of declared values, the analysis focused on criteria that reflect the principles and guidelines explicitly assumed by higher education institutions in relation to the educational process. In this regard, the role of academic autonomy was included to highlight the extent to which student accountability and autonomous learning are promoted within the course. At the same time, the importance of active participation was selected as an indicator of values related to dialogue, involvement, and academic collaboration, manifested through the level of verbal participation, the initiative to ask questions or express opinions, even in contexts where teaching takes the form of one-way communication (lecture).

At the level of fundamental assumptions, the criteria were oriented towards the basic, often implicit dimensions that structure university communication practices. The

nature of knowledge was analysed in order to capture how it is conceived – as a fixed, transmissible reality, or as an open process of construction and interpretation. In the same vein, the status of the professor was included as an expression of assumptions about the role of academic authority, and the relationship between authority and competence allowed for an investigation of how the legitimacy of the professor is constructed and recognized in intercultural teaching communication (Deardorff, 2009).

By distributing the criteria across the three levels of organizational culture, the analysis of the communicative practice of the university course provided a coherent interpretative framework for identifying opportunities for intercultural approaches to organizational communication in higher education.

The specific example was taken from the practice of teacher exchange through academic mobility programs carried out between the Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University in Chişinău and the State University of Comrat. This comparative context is relevant because the two institutions are characterized by distinct cultural profiles of their student populations. The Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University is predominantly attended by students from the central region of the Republic of Moldova, with a relatively homogeneous cultural background, while the State University of Comrat is notable for its multi-ethnic student body, reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity specific to the region.

The experience of teacher mobility between these two universities provides a relevant framework for analyzing the communicative practices of university courses in intercultural contexts. Differences in language competence, discursive styles, reporting to academic authority, and student participation levels highlight how the same teaching practices can be interpreted and valued differently depending on the institutional cultural context. In this sense, academic mobility was not only a mechanism for transferring expertise, but rather served as an opportunity to reflect on the adaptation of organizational communication to cultural diversity in higher education.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

In order to identify students' perceptions of the characteristics of teaching communication and organizational culture manifested in an intercultural context, a questionnaire was administered to students participating in the university course,

which included 14 items classified according to the criteria listed above at the level of artifacts, declared values, and fundamental assumptions. The questionnaire allowed for the collection of relevant data on the students' educational experience in the university course and provided the empirical basis for analyzing the intercultural dimensions of teaching communication through the following items:

*Criterion 1. Academic language used*

1. The academic language used in the course is adapted to the different levels of linguistic competence of the students.
2. The teacher's style of discourse facilitates understanding of the content for students from different cultural backgrounds.

*Criterion 2. Academic rituals*

3. Rules regarding course attendance are clearly communicated and consistently enforced.
4. The manner in which feedback is provided is perceived as respectful and appropriate to the cultural diversity of students.

*Criterion 3. The role of academic autonomy*

5. Students are free to express their perspectives and choose their own strategies for approaching academic tasks.
6. Teaching activities provide real opportunities for autonomy.

*Criterion 4. Importance of active participation*

7. Students are encouraged to ask questions and express their opinions during class.
8. Student initiative is appreciated and integrated into the teaching-learning process.

*Criterion 5. Nature of knowledge*

9. Multiple perspectives on the content taught are encouraged.
10. The teaching process promotes in-depth understanding, not just the reproduction of information.

*Criterion 6. Status of the teacher*

11. The teacher is perceived as a facilitator of learning, not just as the sole source of knowledge.
12. The teacher is open to cultural diversity and students' opinions.

*Criterion 7. The relationship between authority and competence*

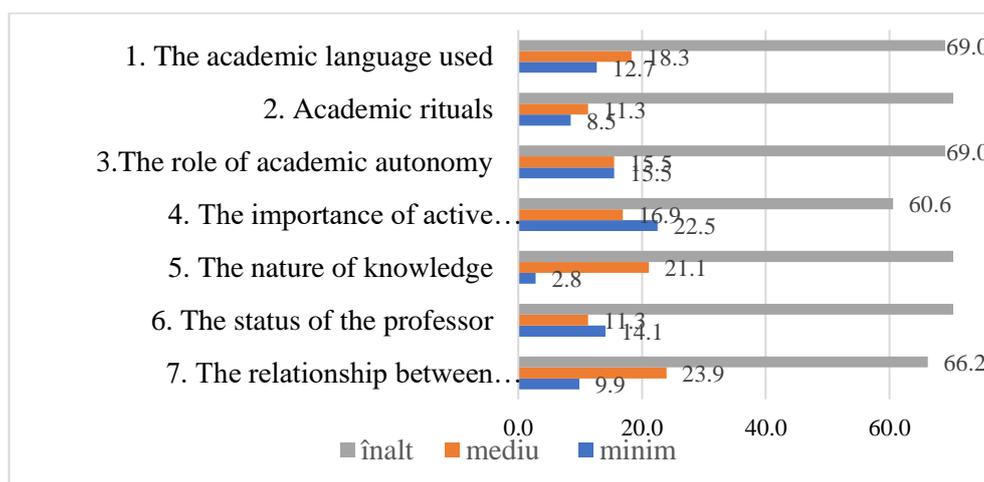
13. The teacher's authority is based on professional and pedagogical competence.

14. The exercise of academic authority promotes dialogue and cooperation.

The results obtained from calculating the average scores of the items corresponding to each analysis criterion, defined within the communication practice of the university course, are presented below. The data were aggregated by criteria, in accordance with the structure of the research instrument, in order to highlight how the different dimensions of organizational communication are perceived in distinct university contexts.

The following graphs illustrate the level of manifestation of each criterion, allowing for a comparative analysis of the academic language used, academic rituals, academic autonomy, active participation, conception of knowledge, teacher status, and the relationship between authority and competence. The scores are interpreted from the perspective of the organizational culture levels model, highlighting the relationships between visible artifacts, stated values, and fundamental assumptions of institutional culture on a three-level scale: low, medium, and high.

The results are presented in a comparative manner, reflecting how students assessed the teaching strategies of teachers on academic mobility at the Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University in Chişinău and the State University of Comrat.



**Figure 3. Perceptions of students at Comrat State University regarding the teaching communication skills of professors at the Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University in Chişinău**

The results presented in Figure 3 highlight the perceptions of students at Comrat State University regarding the communication practices of teaching staff at Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University in Chişinău who are participating in academic mobility programs. These perceptions are structured on three levels of assessment (low, medium, and high) corresponding to each criterion analyzed.

The data analysis indicates a clear predominance of high ratings for most criteria, suggesting a positive assessment of teaching communication in an intercultural context. Thus, the academic language used receives a high percentage of high ratings (69.0%), indicating that the teaching discourse of teachers in mobility is perceived as accessible and adapted to the differences in linguistic competence and discursive style of students in the multi-ethnic environment of the University of Comrat. The low level of minimum ratings confirms the effectiveness of strategies for terminological clarification and contextualised explanation of content.

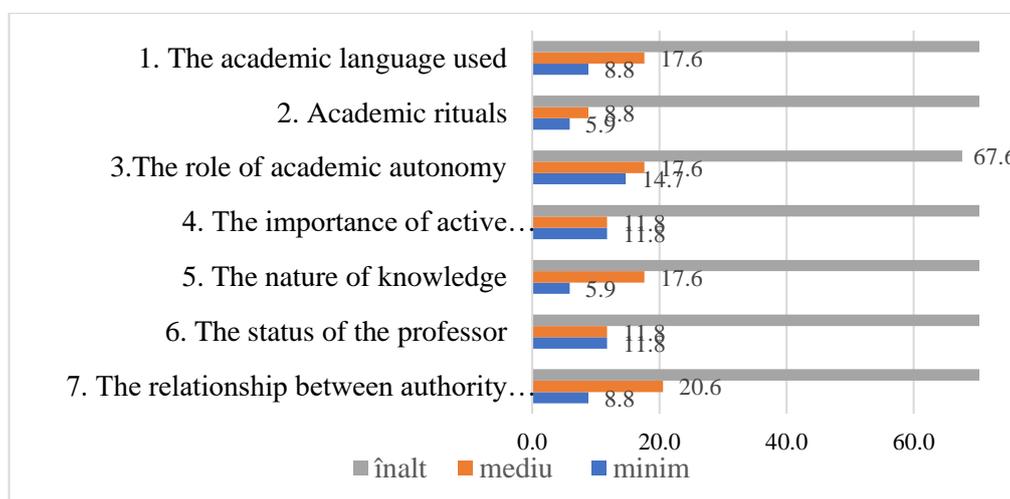
Similarly, academic rituals (class attendance, feedback) are predominantly rated highly (69.0%), reflecting the clarity of academic rules and the consistency of institutional practices promoted by teachers on mobility. This result indicates a good adaptation of academic norms to the expectations of students from a different cultural context.

The role of academic autonomy is mostly appreciated at a high level (69.0%), suggesting that teachers in mobility manage to promote student accountability and autonomous learning, even in an educational environment characterized by cultural diversity. However, the presence of a moderate percentage of the average level indicates the existence of individual differences in the reception of this principle.

In the case of the importance of active participation, although the high level remains dominant (60.6%), there is an increase in the proportion of average ratings (22.5%), suggesting that stimulating verbal participation and student initiative is a sensitive area in intercultural contexts, where reporting to academic authority can influence the degree of involvement. For the criterion of the nature of knowledge, the distribution of responses indicates a significant proportion of the average level (21.1%), along with a relatively low minimum level (2.8%). This result suggests that there are differences in how students see knowledge—either as an open process of construction and interpretation or as a set of stable information—reflecting diverse cultural assumptions about the role of university education. The status of teachers is predominantly rated highly (66.2%), indicating recognition of the professional and pedagogical competence of teachers in mobility. At the same time, the presence of average and low ratings suggests differences in students' expectations regarding the

role of teachers, particularly in relation to academic authority. Finally, the relationship between authority and competence is highly rated at 66.2%, but with a relatively higher proportion of average ratings (23.9%). This indicates a nuanced perception of how academic authority is exercised and legitimized, with students being sensitive to the balance between rigor and accessibility in teaching communication.

The comparative analysis highlights the differences and similarities between the two university contexts in relation to the criteria investigated, providing a relevant perspective on how organizational communication is perceived and valued in distinct cultural environments.



**Figure 4. Perceptions of students at the Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University in Chişinău regarding the teaching communication skills of professors at the State University in Comrat**

The comparative analysis of the results highlights how students from the two universities evaluate the teaching communication of teachers on mobility, revealing both convergences and significant differences determined by the cultural and institutional context. In both university contexts, there is a predominance of high levels of appreciation for most of the criteria analyzed, which confirms the overall effectiveness of the communication practices of teachers on mobility. However, the distribution of scores indicates distinct nuances depending on the university environment in which the evaluation takes place.

In the case of students at Comrat State University (Figure 3), the high level of appreciation is consistently high for the academic language used, academic rituals,

and the role of academic autonomy (approximately 69%), suggesting that teachers at UPS "Ion Creangă" are able to effectively adapt their teaching discourse and academic norms to a multiethnic and multilingual environment. This trend reflects a positive receptivity to the clarity of communication and the organizational structure of the course. In contrast, students at the State Pedagogical University "Ion Creangă" in Chişinău (Figure 4), who evaluate teachers at the State University in Comrat, show a similarly high appreciation, but with a more visible share of the average level for certain criteria, especially the nature of knowledge and the relationship between authority and competence. For example, for the authority-competence relationship, the average level reaches 20.6%, which indicates a more nuanced perception of how academic authority is exercised.

A relevant difference can be observed in terms of the importance of active participation. UPSC students tend to evaluate this criterion more cautiously, with a more balanced distribution between high and medium levels, compared to students in Comrat, where the high level remains dominant. This finding suggests the existence of different expectations regarding verbal involvement and student initiative, influenced by educational traditions and cultural attitudes towards academic dialogue.

Regarding the status of the teacher, both groups of students give predominantly high ratings, but UPSC students seem more sensitive to the teacher's accessibility, which explains the more pronounced presence of the medium level in their assessments. This difference reflects distinct cultural assumptions about the role of the teacher—either as a formal authority or as a facilitator of learning.

Overall, the comparative analysis highlights that academic mobility generates real opportunities for the transfer of good communication practices, but also situations of intercultural adjustment. The differences identified between the evaluations of students from the two universities confirm the hypothesis that perceptions of teaching communication are shaped by the cultural and organizational context, in accordance with Edgar Schein's model of organizational culture levels.

Overall, the results confirm that the communication practices of UPS "Ion Creangă" teachers are perceived favorably by students at Comrat State University, highlighting the opportunities offered by an intercultural approach to organizational communication in higher education. At the same time, the differences identified between the levels of appreciation underscore the need for continuous adaptation of teaching communication to the cultural diversity of the university environment.

The perspective of intercultural communication developed by Milton J. Bennett complements this analysis by focusing on how university actors interpret cultural difference in teaching situations. According to the model of intercultural sensitivity development, the meanings attributed to communication practices in university courses vary depending on individuals' positioning on the ethnocentrism–ethnorelativism continuum. Thus, behaviors such as directive teaching style, critical feedback, or requests for active participation can be perceived either as symbolic threats or as learning opportunities, depending on the level of intercultural competence.

From a hermeneutic perspective, the university course becomes a space for mutual interpretation, in which teachers and students constantly negotiate the meanings of didactic communication. Communication is not reduced to the transmission of information, but functions as a process of mediation between cultural identities, institutional roles, and academic expectations. In this context, teaching effectiveness is conditioned by the disciplinary competence of the teacher and the ability to recognize and interpret cultural differences as communicational resources.

Therefore, the interpretative analysis of the communicative practice of the university course highlights the fact that teaching in intercultural contexts requires a reconceptualization of didactic communication as a reflexive, contextual, and relational process. The conscious integration of this perspective contributes to the prevention of symbolic conflicts, the increase of academic inclusion, and the strengthening of organizational cohesion in higher education.

as a process of constructing and negotiating meanings within academic practices. The hermeneutic method applied involves interpreting communicative practices within the university course. From this perspective, the analysis aims to identify the symbolic meanings attributed to acts of communication, highlighting the relationship between levels of organizational culture, intercultural competence, and the effectiveness of institutional communication.

## **5. Conclusions**

The study aimed to analyze the opportunities for an intercultural approach to organizational communication in higher education, from the perspective of communication practices in university courses, in distinct institutional and cultural contexts. The theoretical and applied approach was based on Edgar Schein's model of organizational culture levels, supplemented by contributions on cultural dimensions (Hofstede) and the development of intercultural competence (Bennett), providing a coherent interpretative framework for understanding the complexity of university communication.

The results of the interpretative analysis and empirical investigation indicate that the communication practices of teachers in academic mobility are generally evaluated positively by students, regardless of the university context. The predominance of high levels of appreciation for most criteria confirms the ability of teachers to adapt academic language, academic rituals, and interaction strategies to the cultural diversity of the university environment.

The comparative analysis also revealed slight differences in students' perceptions, which can be explained by the cultural and organizational characteristics of the two institutions analyzed. In the multi-ethnic context of Comrat State University, the adaptation of academic language and the clarity of institutional norms were appreciated as factors facilitating intercultural communication. In contrast, in the relatively homogeneous environment of the Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University in Chişinău, more nuanced assessments of active participation, the nature of knowledge, and the relationship between authority and competence reflect different academic expectations and a distinct approach to the role of the teacher.

By relating the criteria to the three levels of organizational culture, the study demonstrated that visible communicative artifacts (academic language, academic rituals) are closely correlated with stated values (academic autonomy, active participation) and fundamental assumptions (the nature of knowledge, the status of the professor, the legitimacy of authority). This interdependence confirms that the effectiveness of organizational communication in universities cannot be analyzed in isolation, but must be understood as a systemic process, situated at the intersection of culture, institutional structure, and human behavior.

Overall, the conclusions support the idea that an intercultural approach to organizational communication represents a strategic opportunity for higher education, contributing to increased academic inclusion, optimized teaching

processes, and strengthened institutional cohesion. Academic mobility is thus confirmed not only as a mechanism for knowledge transfer, but also as a tool for reflection and cultural-organizational development, with a direct impact on the quality of education.

Looking ahead, the results obtained can inform future research directions aimed at deepening the intercultural dimensions of organizational communication with a view to developing university policies that are more sensitive to cultural diversity.

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