



RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERCULTURAL WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AMONG YORUBA YOUTHS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA: TOWARDS PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

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People's willingness to communicate with others that are not from their cultural backgrounds, conceptualized as intercultural willingness to communicate (IWTC), is important for building peaceful societies and resolving conflicts. Consequently, factors influencing IWTC, especially among youths in Nigeria, deserve to be studied, but they often do not attract much attention among communication scholars. Therefore, this study assessed the predictive influence of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension on IWTC among Yoruba youths in southwest Nigeria. Furthermore, the study assessed the nature of relationships among ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension. The study was a survey in which 353 Yoruba youths (aged 16 – 35) participated. The Structural Equation Model analysis results showed that intercultural communication apprehension negatively predicted IWTC ($\beta = -.15$; $p = .02$), while ethnocentrism did not predict it ($\beta = -.15$; $p > .05$). Also, the results showed that a positive relationship exists between ethnocentrism and xenophobia ($r = .56$; $p < .001$), between ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension ($r = .55$; $p < .001$), and between xenophobia and intercultural communication apprehension ($r = .43$; $p < .001$).

Keywords: Intercultural willingness, communication, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, intercultural communication apprehension, Yoruba youths.

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INTRODUCTION

Empirical studies to improve the quality of intercultural communication among Nigerians are needed, and one such study is this study on young Nigerians' intercultural willingness to communicate. Understanding the factors influencing Nigerians' willingness to communicate in intercultural contexts is important because Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups whose members co-exist in its towns and cities, and oftentimes, there are media reports of inter-ethnic and inter-tribal rivalry, conflict, and crises (Attah, 2011, 2013; Ikpe, 2009; Olaniyan & Omotola, 2015; Onwuzuruigbo, 2010). Studies that investigated predictors of intercultural willingness to communicate seem to be mostly from the Global North, perhaps because of the influx of immigrants into their nations and the need to sustain peace among different nationals. Some of these studies are reviewed in this paper in order to draw the study's hypotheses and discuss the findings. The following paragraphs briefly discuss the study variables.

Intercultural willingness to communicate has been conceptualised as an individual's readiness to initiate and sustain communication with someone identified as being from a different cultural background, without being coerced to do so. The concept was drawn out of the concept of willingness to communicate, which is a general disposition to communicate with others (Kassing, 1997; McCroskey, 1992). The concept has been widely explored in different contexts and among different cultures. Xenophobia has been conceptualised as a multifaceted form of prejudice, directed at someone identified as a foreigner, an immigrant, or someone coming from another country. The prejudice can manifest in the affective or behavioural domains and could be generated in the natives by dislike, fear, or mistrust (Veer et al., 2011). Xenophobia has also been conceptualised as anti-immigrant prejudice, which is more prevalent in nations where the citizens have a strong sense of nationalism, having national identification symbols and notions; it is not prevalent in nations where the citizens are largely bound by the laws on the land and where the sense of nationalism is not strong (Pehrson & Brown, 2009). Xenophobia also manifests as anti-immigrant sentiments, as experienced in South Africa. The sentiments against foreigners may manifest as violent or non-violent behaviours against the foreigners (Gordon, 2016). Ariely (2017) posited that the more people recognise themselves as global citizens (global identification), the less xenophobic attitude they demonstrate. And the more globalised a nation is, the more globally-minded its citizens are.

Besides Intercultural Willingness to Communicate and Xenophobia, this study also has Ethnocentrism and Intercultural Communication Apprehension as its variables. Ethnocentrism has been conceptualised as a "view of things" only from one's group (referred to as ingroup) perspective, while despising views of people from other groups (referred to as outgroups). The conceptualisation of ethnocentrism stems from the fact that every human has a particular tradition, culture, and worldview that they are affiliated with (most often as



biological natives of such culture) and which they are proud of. Consequently, people, ideas, and products from other traditions, cultures, races, or groups are considered inferior. This sense of we are better than they (ethnocentric attitude) is in everyone, and it's not entirely negative, as it helps humans value themselves and cooperate with other members of our groups. However, when it is too much, it becomes negative, as it leads to discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes and behaviours towards others, who are considered outsiders (outgroups) and things that come from them (products, ideas, etc) (Aktan & Anjam, 2021; Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Neuliep et al., n.d.; Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997; Oboh & Oboh, 2020). Intercultural Communication anxiety has been conceptualised as the fear or anxiety that someone has when communicating with others from different cultural, ethnic or racial backgrounds, or imagining such communication contexts. Intercultural communication apprehension can breed maladjustment in relationships and also can influence the ease with which conflicts brew and are resolved among people from different cultural backgrounds (Abayadeera et al., 2018; Jay & Hwang, 2024; Ma & Hample, 2018; Trisasanti et al., 2020, 2021; Wrench et al., 2006).

Roach and Olaniran (2001) investigated the nature of the relationship between intercultural communication apprehension and IWTC among international teaching assistants in the US. Two hundred and one international students who were serving as graduate assistants at a university participated in the study. They were from different countries (though none were from Africa), and they had stayed in the US for more than three years. The results showed that the international teachers' intercultural communication apprehension had a negative relationship with their IWTC. In the same vein, in a study among students in a midwestern American university, Lin and Rancer (2003) found that there are established relationships between ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, and intercultural willingness to communicate. The results of the study showed that ethnocentrism has a positive association with intercultural communication apprehension, and it also revealed that ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension negatively predict intercultural willingness to communicate. Again in America, Wrench *et al.* (2006) conducted a study among some students on the interactions among some intercultural communication variables that relate to religious fundamentalism. The study's findings showed that ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension had a moderate positive relationship.

Lu and Hsu (2008) conducted a study to assess Chinese and American students' intercultural willingness to communicate in intercultural contexts. They had four groups of participants: American students schooling in America, American students schooling in China, Chinese students schooling in America, and Chinese students schooling in China. Among the four groups, intercultural communication apprehension was found to have a negative association with the students' intercultural willingness to communicate. Similarly, Neuliep (2012) also worked on the relationship between ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension among university students in the US. One hundred and seven undergraduates



participated in the study. The study found that there is a positive correlation between ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension. Furthermore, in a study that included whether or not intercultural willingness to communicate and ethnocentrism predict Americans' intention to help a stranger (someone who is from another culture), (Clark et al., 2015a) found that ethnocentrism has a negative association with intercultural willingness to communicate. The study participants were 281 university students.

In Iran, Fatemi, Khajavy and Choi (2016) studied the relationship between ethnocentrism and intercultural willingness to communicate among two groups of university students: the English major and the non-English major. The results of the study showed that ethnocentrism has a negative relationship with IWTC among the two sets of students. However, Jacobi and Jacobi (2018) conducted an experiment to see whether interaction between American and International students in an American school would improve their levels of ethnocentrism. The treatment was the interaction that the students had during the class session in a semester, which was a willing intercultural communication engagement. The results of the study showed that treatment neither improved nor reduced students' levels of ethnocentrism. It can be inferred from the study's findings that the level of the students' ethnocentrism and their levels of intercultural willingness to communicate had no significant relationship.

From the reviewed studies, it seems that the majority of studies on intercultural willingness to communicate, ethnocentrism, and intercultural communication apprehension are among the US population. Also, many of the study samples were university students. Further, the reviewed studies showed that ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension have a positive relationship, and they both have a negative relationship with intercultural willingness to communicate. The review continues with studies on the relationship between xenophobia and ethnocentrism.

Carrington and Short (1996) conducted a case study among children aged 9 – 11 in the UK to assess their understanding of collective identity. In the view of the authors, ethnocentrism and xenophobia are correlated aspects of national identities, and schools have to be empowered to challenge them to make the school children responsible global citizens. Similarly, Arts and Halman (2007) identified that in some literature on European nations, both xenophobia and ethnocentrism are identified as national sentiments. Also, Lee and Won (2019) from Asia share the view that xenophobia and ethnocentrism have a positive relationship. In the same vein, Vandeusen (2020) also found that ethnocentrism and xenophobia have a positive relationship in the US, after studying Americans' attitudes during the 2016 Presidential election.

Altıntaş *et al.* (2015) in developing a scale to measure consumer cosmopolitanism, stated that it is related to cosmopolitanism, which is the opposite of xenophobia. In the same vein, the authors stated that consumer cosmopolitanism is the opposite of consumer ethnocentrism.



From what the authors have said, one could deduce that indeed there is a positive relationship between ethnocentrism and xenophobia, even though it is not explicitly stated in the study. Cosmopolitanism in general entails being broad-minded to lovingly relate with foreigners without prejudice of any kind on the basis of their status as foreigners in one's land. Cosmopolitanism is the opposite of xenophobia, which entails having prejudiced attitudes towards foreigners because of their status. In the same vein, Örkény (2016) posited that xenophobia and ethnocentrism co-exist and are strong among Hungarians, especially after the collapse of the socialist state in 1989. This further suggests a positive relationship between xenophobia and ethnocentrism.

Jiang (2020) conducted an ethnography among students in a predominantly white-dominated university in the US. The ethnography aimed to understand how Chinese students survive and thrive in the school despite the obvious xenophobia, racism, and ethnocentrism of the white community. The study confirmed that xenophobia and ethnocentrism exist in the school and are related. Both of them are part of the variables that explain the segregation of Chinese students from other students (either black or white). Martín, Sebastián and Hernández (2021), writing on sports in European nations, asserted that even in sports, ethnocentrism and xenophobia co-exist as reflections of national identities.

From the review studies on the relationship between xenophobia and ethnocentrism, it seems that there are limited quantitative empirical studies to describe the relationship, and the relationship is positive.

The main goal of this study is to assess how ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension predict Yoruba youths' intercultural willingness to communicate. The study has five hypotheses. Three of the hypotheses are concerned with the nature of the relationship among ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension, while the remaining three hypotheses are concerned with the predictive influence of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension on IWTC. The hypotheses, as drawn from the reviewed literature, are

H₁: There will be a positive correlation between the levels of ethnocentrism and xenophobia among the Yoruba youths.

H₂: There will be a positive correlation between the levels of ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension among the Yoruba youths

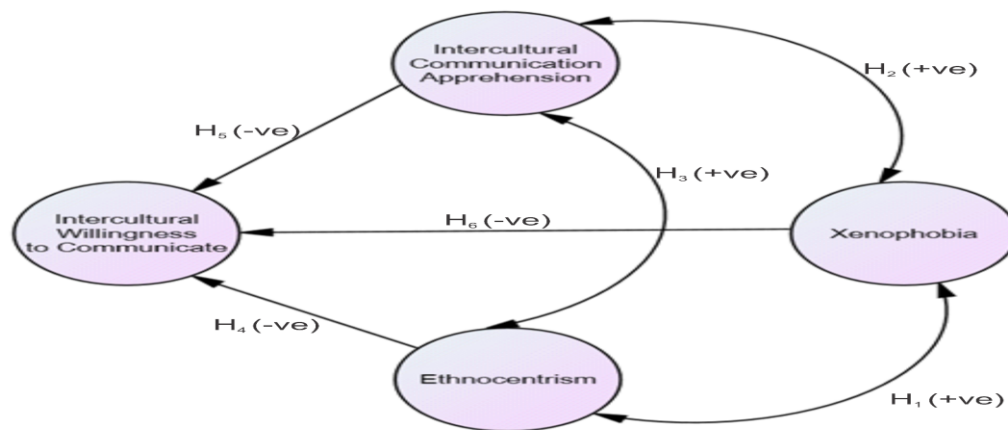
H₃: There will be a positive correlation between levels of xenophobia and intercultural communication apprehension among the Yoruba youths.

H₄: Ethnocentrism will negatively predict intercultural willingness to communicate.

H₅: Intercultural communication apprehension will negatively predict intercultural willingness to communicate

H₆: Xenophobia will negatively predict intercultural willingness to communicate.

Diagrammatic sketch of the study's hypotheses



METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were gathered among youths in Ede, a town in Osun State, southwest Nigeria, to test the study's hypotheses. Only youths who self-identified as being Yorubas, and are between the ages of 16 and 35 years, participated in the study. The population of the Yoruba youths in Ede town is not documented in the literature; however, they are the majority. The town and its neighbouring villages have two local government areas: Ede South and Ede North Local Government Areas. Only youths who are residents of the town participated in the study. Among the youths who are residents in the town, 353 were selected for this study via a convenience sampling method. The majority of the participants were between 16 and 25 years old (60.1%), while 39.9% were between 26 and 35 years old.

Similarly, more males (51.6%) than females (46.7%) participated in the study, with the majority of them (70.1%) having either a Senior Secondary School Certificate, National Diploma, or National Certificate in Education. Muslims among the participants were 121 (34.5%), while Christians were 228 (64.6%). The instrument used to collect data for the study was a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire has a section with items on the demographic characteristics of the participants and a section with items to measure their levels of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, intercultural communication apprehension (the study's independent variables), and intercultural willingness to communicate (the study's dependent variable).



All the scales' items were adapted from validated scales from the literature. Ethnocentrism was measured with items adapted from the Generalised Ethnocentrism (GENE) scale (Neuliep & McCroskey, 2009); xenophobia was measured by a scale (Pehrson & Brown, 2009); intercultural communication apprehension was measured by Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA) scale (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997); and intercultural willingness to communicate (IWTC) was measured by IWTC scale (Kassing, 1997). All the scales had acceptable Cronbach's Alpha values, which confirmed their reliability. GENE alpha was .83, Xenophobia alpha was .68; PRICA alpha was .85, and IWTC alpha was .66.

Seven items were adapted from the GENE scale to measure the participants' levels of ethnocentrism. The items include "Most cultures are backwards compared to my culture. My culture should be a role model for other cultures. I'm not interested in the values and customs of other cultures. I have little respect for the values and customs of other cultures. I do not cooperate with people who are different. I do not trust people who are different. And, I dislike interacting with people from different cultures." The participants' responses to the statements were measured with a Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree," with a value of 5, to "strongly disagree," with a value of 1. The higher the mean score of the participants' responses, the higher the levels of their ethnocentrism.

Three items were drawn from the scale used to measure the participants' levels of xenophobia. The items were "Immigrants increase crime rates in Nigeria. Immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in Nigeria. And, the government spends too much money assisting immigrants in this country." The participants' responses were rated by a Likert scale, which ranges from "strongly agree," with a value of 5, to "strongly disagree," with a value of 1. The higher the mean score of the participants' responses, the higher their levels of xenophobia.

Intercultural communication apprehension was measured with seven items, which were drawn from the PRICA scale. The items include, "I am tense and nervous while interacting with people from different ethnic/racial groups. Engaging in a group discussion with people from different ethnic/racial groups makes me tense. While participating in a conversation with a person from different ethnic/ racial groups, I feel very nervous. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations with a person from a different ethnic or racial group. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations with a person from a different ethnic/racial group. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when interacting with people from different. Communicating with people from different ethnic/racial groups makes me feel uncomfortable." The participants' responses were rated by a Likert scale, which ranges from "strongly agree," with a value of 5, to "strongly disagree," with a value of 1. The higher the mean score of participants' responses, the higher the levels of their intercultural communication apprehension.



The intercultural willingness to communicate scale that was adapted for this study has six items; however, only five items were useful for the study. The participants were asked to rate the likelihood of talking with another person of different intercultural status, such as: Talk with someone I perceive to be different (tradition) than me. Talk with someone from another country. Talk with someone from a culture I know very little about. Talk with someone of a different race than mine. Talk with someone from another culture. The participants' responses were rated on a Likert scale, which ranged from "very likely," with a value of 5 to "very unlikely," with a value of 1. The higher the mean score of participants' responses, the higher the levels of their intercultural willingness to communicate.

The data for this study were analysed with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 20. SPSS was used to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants and calculate the mean scores of their responses, while AMOS was used to run the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to assess the relationships among the variables of the study. High ethical standards were upheld in the conduct of the research: Participants' consent was sought, participation was voluntary, and the researcher ensured that no harm was inflicted on the participants and everyone involved in the study.

RESULT PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of Results

This study has six hypotheses. The first three hypotheses deal with the relationship among ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension, which were the independent variables. The other three hypotheses deal with the predictive relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, intercultural willingness to communicate. The mean scores of the participants' responses for each variable were: Ethnocentrism (Mean = 3.43; SD = .68); Xenophobia (Mean = 3.20; SD = .88); Intercultural communication apprehension (Mean = 2.97; SD = .86); and Intercultural willingness to communicate (Mean = 3.93; SD = .61).

The SEM results showed the relationships among the variables of the study. The model had a good fit; it met Hu and Bentler's (1999) criteria, which were Comparative Fit Index (CFI) $\geq .95$; Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) $\leq .08$, or Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) $\leq .06$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In meeting Hu and Bentler's requirement for a good fit, the study model had a Chi-Square (84) = 127.308; CFI = .969; RMSEA = .038; and SRMR = .0496. Having ensured that the study's SEM had a good fit, the following results were drawn:



One, H_1 was accepted because the result showed that there was a positive correlation between the levels of ethnocentrism and xenophobia among the Yoruba youths ($r = .56; p < .001$).

Two, hypothesis H_2 was accepted because the study result showed that there was a positive correlation between the levels of ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension among the Yoruba youths ($r = .55; p < .001$). Three, hypothesis H_3 was accepted because the results showed that there was a positive correlation between levels of xenophobia and intercultural communication apprehension among the Yoruba youths ($r = .43; p < .001$). Four, hypothesis H_4 was rejected because the study results showed that ethnocentrism did not significantly predict intercultural willingness to communicate ($\beta = -.15; p > .05$). Five, hypothesis H_5 was accepted because intercultural communication apprehension negatively predicted intercultural willingness to communicate ($\beta = -.15; p = .02$). And lastly, hypothesis H_6 was rejected because Xenophobia positively predicted intercultural willingness to communicate ($\beta = .43; p < .001$).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study has six hypotheses that test the relationships among intercultural willingness to communicate, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension. The findings of the study showed that as the participants' levels of ethnocentrism increase and decrease, there are corresponding increases and decreases in the levels of their xenophobia and in the levels of their intercultural communication apprehension. These findings agree with earlier studies, whose findings showed that there is a positive relationship between ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension (Lin & Rancer, 2003; Neuliep, 2012) and those whose findings showed that there is a positive relationship between ethnocentrism and xenophobia (Örkény, 2016; Vandeusen, 2020).

Further on ethnocentrism, this study's findings showed that whether the levels of participants' ethnocentrism rise or fall, their level of intercultural willingness to communicate remains the same. Again, the findings agree with some earlier findings that showed that ethnocentrism levels do not influence intercultural willingness to communicate (Jacobi & Jacobi, 2018), but they do not agree with findings of studies that showed that ethnocentrism had an influence on intercultural willingness to communicate (Clark et al., 2015b; Fatemi et al., 2016).

Furthermore, in this study, the findings showed that intercultural communication apprehension has a positive relationship with xenophobia; both of them increase and decrease together. There are no earlier studies to compare these findings with; however, since both of them have been proven to have a positive relationship with ethnocentrism, it is expected that they will have a positive relationship with each other. Also, in this study, the findings showed that intercultural communication apprehension negatively predicted intercultural willingness



to communicate. This finding came as expected, and it is supported by the findings of earlier studies (Lu & Hsu, 2008; Roach & Olaniran, 2001).

An unexpected finding of the study was that xenophobia positively predicted the participants' intercultural willingness to communicate. This finding was unexpected because the participants' xenophobia had a positive relationship with ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension, which are both negatively related to intercultural willingness to communicate. A possible explanation for the unexpected link between xenophobia and intercultural willingness to communicate could be the economy or poverty. This explanation was thought of because young Nigerians are often willing to associate with a culturally different person so long as there is a hope of making money through the relationship. Moreover, the way that xenophobia was measured in the study could also possibly explain the unexpected finding. In all, this study's findings could be further interrogated to establish whether or not a positive relationship exists between xenophobia and intercultural willingness to communicate.

The findings of this study have implications for scholarship and policy. The implication is that despite the difference between the Western world culture and the Yoruba culture, there are similarities in natives' responses in intercultural communication contexts. For instance, the study results showed that just as it was among the American youths, the level of intercultural willingness to communicate among the studied Yoruba youths is influenced by the levels of their intercultural communication apprehension. In the same vein, the nature of relationships between ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension was similar among the Western youths and the Yoruba youths, despite their cultural differences.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the predictive influence of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension on intercultural willingness to communicate among Yoruba youths in southwest Nigeria. Furthermore, it studied the nature of relationships among ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension. The study concluded that intercultural communication apprehension had a negative predictive influence on intercultural willingness to communicate, and ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and intercultural communication apprehension had positive associations among the youths in southwest Nigeria.

Competing Interest

The authors declare that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript



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