Adaptation of the Interpersonal Competence Scale in the Arab Environment: A Comparative Study of Psychological Competence among Students of Kuwait University and Diyala University/Iraq

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Abstract

The Concept of the Interpersonal Competence Scale Plays a Crucial Role in Human Life, Enhancing the Ability to Face Life Challenges, Achieve Social Integration, and Attain Well-being. The Interpersonal Competence Scale(ICQ), Developed by Buhrmester, D. et al. (1988), Has Garnered Increasing Interest in Scientific Research, with Its Validity Being Examined Across Various Cultures. This Study Aims to Adapt an Arabic Version of the Scale and Assess Its Validity for a Sample of University Students in Two Arab Contexts, While Analyzing the Prevalence of Psychological Competence Levels Based on Certain Demographic Variables. The Study Sample Consisted of 570 Students, with Males Representing 42.1% and Females 57.9%. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Were Utilized, Along with the Calculation of Correlation Coefficients and Reliability Using Cronbach's Alpha. The Findings Indicated the Suitability of the Five-Domain Model, Supporting Its Applicability Across Cultures. Additionally, the Study Revealed Variability in Psychological Competence Levels Among the Sample, Ranging From 17.5% to 19.2%, Suggesting the Need for Further Investigation and Analysis.

Introduction

Human beings are inherently social creatures who tend to interact with their surrounding environment both its physical and conceptual aspects. This interaction has shaped, and continues to shape, the cultural heritage of humanity, as the human being is the primary agent in the dynamic, reciprocal relationship of influence and effect. Humans are cooperative beings with highly social inclinations (Tomasello, M., 2014). Undoubtedly, forming social relationships and belonging to a group are inherent features of human life from an early age (Aronson, E.; Aronson, J., 2018). The instinct for survival is considered the foundation of human social activity; it is a natural human tendency to form and develop personal relationships, establish social bonds, and maintain personal connections to fulfill the need for belonging, closeness, and communication with others (McConnell, 2018).

Communication begins with parents at birth and gradually extends to close individuals, forming the foundational models for later personal relationships (Sękowski & Klinkosz, 2016). During adolescence a critical transitional phase there is a growing need to achieve independence from parents, along with an increased desire for social interaction with peers. Accordingly, personal competence becomes a fundamental requirement at this stage (Kiuru, N. et al., 2020). Adolescents with high personal competence and family support during times of distress are

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better able to regulate their emotions and develop more effective stress-coping strategies, which contributes to greater well-being and psychological resilience (Bird, T., Tarsia, M., Schwannauer, M., 2018; Elsina, I., Martinsone, B., 2020).

Personal competence particularly the skills of communication and the ability to establish positive relationships is thus considered one of the most critical factors in achieving success in relationships with others (Britton, E. et al., 2017). This success forms the basis of the social nature of human life, where individuals interact and define their relationships, which may be positive such as offering help, empathy, and support or negative such as bullying, criticism, neglect, or aggression (Cabero-Almenara & Marín-Díaz, 2018).

The activities resulting from the pattern of interaction between humans and their environment, whether as influence or response, are termed interactive competence, encompassing both personal and social aspects. It is acquired, learned, and developed through information processing of life experiences starting from early childhood. The concept of competencies in general and personal competence in building interpersonal relationships in particular has been widely addressed in literature (Cavell, T.A., 1990; Warnes, E.D. et al., 2005). Rooted in Thorndike's studies from the 1920s, it is a multi-dimensional concept involving aspects such as initiating new relationships, self-disclosure, asserting individual rights, providing emotional support, and managing personal conflicts (Buhrmester, D. et al., 1988). It represents a long-term, dynamic process requiring continuous self-assessment (Coroiu, A. et al., 2015). It is not merely a soft skill (National Academies of Sciences, 2017), but rather a complex dimension of personality traits and effective performance (Tucholska, K., 2005).

Broadly defined, personal competence is the ability to successfully interact with others and plays a central role in all domains of human life. For instance, it significantly influences a person's development, cognitive growth, and well-being (Nowicka, P. et al., 2022; Antonucci, T. et al., 2019), romantic relationships (Frisbie et al., 2000), academic resilience and physical health (Frisby, B. et al., 2020), healthy development (Durlak, J.A. et al., 2010), career success (Riggio & Taylor, 2000), popularity, adjustment in high school and youth, and self-esteem (Buhrmester et al., 1988).

An increasing body of research indicates that individuals with strong personal competence enjoy better social relationships, higher well-being, greater academic resilience, more adaptive coping strategies, and better physical health compared to those lacking such competence (Frisby, B., 2020; Nowicka, P., 2022). There is a positive correlation between students' personal competence and emotional intelligence. Additionally, aspects of personal competence such as initiating social relationships, managing conflict, self-assertion, and offering emotional support are positively associated with cooperative, supportive, and initiative-based interpersonal relationships, as well as emotional intelligence (Klinkosz, W., Iskra, J., & Artymiak, M., 2021).

A study by Liuyue et al. (2023) found that adolescents with higher personal competence exhibit greater self-perceived well-being, better psychological resilience, and fewer depressive symptoms than their less competent peers. Developing adolescents' interpersonal competence can thus foster healthier growth and improved adaptability. Similarly, Luciano et al. (2015) noted that personal competence is closely linked with psychological constructs such as social intelligence, emotional intelligence, empathy, and social skills, making it critical for promoting well-being and mental health. However, it is important to acknowledge that personal competence is neither uniform nor static it varies across different contexts and stages of life.

Uwe (2006) examined the relationship between personal competence factors and the Big Five personality traits (McCrae & Costa), finding positive correlations between self-assertion and extraversion and conscientiousness, and negative correlations with neuroticism. Self-disclosure was positively correlated with openness to experience and negatively with neuroticism. Emotional support and conflict management were positively associated with extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness, and negatively with neuroticism.

Other studies have shown that low personal competence is a common feature in nearly all personality disorders. Impaired personal functioning is a key trait of these disorders, especially when coupled with stress and negative life events (Skodol et al., 2005; Cummings et al., 2013; Segrin, C., 2001). There is growing evidence suggesting that poor personal competence may serve as a visible marker for personality disorders (Kim, Y. et al., 1997). Furthermore, loneliness has been found to be a significant factor in reducing personal competence (Ditommaso et al., 2003). Low personal competence also predicts internet addiction (Kang, J., 2023), depression (Eberhart N.K., Hammen C.L., 2006), reduced social interaction with family (Bartle-Haring S., Sabatelli R.M., 1997), and elevated stress levels (Sahl J.C., Cohen L.H., Dasch K.B., 2009).

Researchers consider personal competence a vital driving force behind various social achievements, especially in fostering traits among students across all academic levels. It has received growing attention across cultures and in sectors such as education, health, professions, economics, society, and training. Consequently, schools and universities have increasingly emphasized enrichment programs to develop interpersonal skills, believing that the labor market demands individuals with personal competencies capable of thriving in diverse work environments. Personal competence is essential in cultivating these traits across all levels of education (Han, S. & Son, H., 2020; McConnell, 2018). It is also crucial in many professions that require interpersonal interaction, such as teachers, social workers, healthcare providers, psychologists, and others who engage with students, clients, patients, families, and other professionals. These professionals must show full support, respect for others, curiosity, compassion, empathy, and realistic trust (McConnell, 2018; Smółka, 2016).

According to DeLamater & Ward (2014), personal competencies are the key to human development. They represent a learned, ongoing interaction process that starts early in life within the family and continues with peers, friends, and teachers, and later with colleagues and others in the social environment. Since personal competence is learned and continuous, it undergoes a dynamic process of refinement and evolution, influenced by inherited intelligence, diverse cognitive abilities, and acquired skills through learning, ultimately aiming at optimal self-fulfillment, resilience, psychological well-being, and satisfaction with oneself and the world (DeLamater & Ward, 2014).

Undoubtedly, university life is one of the most influential stages in an individual's life. It offers a rich field for developing and refining personal competence, as it introduces students to diverse life experiences. Students must learn autonomy, navigate the university environment, establish relationships with peers and faculty, and make critical decisions about their personal and professional futures (Seal et al., 2015). These experiences bring them face-to-face with various stressors and challenges, requiring them to master effective functioning in a new social environment where personal competencies are essential for fulfilling needs like acceptance, respect, compassion, love, understanding, support, fairness, and trust.

Many students describe their early university experience as fraught with problems that lead to internal struggles and challenges. These issues often stem from difficulties in social situations,

especially in forming personal relationships and understanding themselves and others (Ledzińska, 2017). Students need personal relationships to connect and engage positively with others expressing personal emotions, caring about others' feelings, offering or receiving psychological support, sharing views and expectations, asserting needs, resolving conflicts, seeking guidance, learning new behaviors, engaging in self-reflection, and giving and receiving help (Guzmán-Simón et al., 2017).

From their academic work at the university, the researchers have observed significant variation in students' personal competence. Inhibiting factors include weak institutional support, limited participation opportunities, and social restrictions and traditions. Meanwhile, motivating factors include consistent support, opportunities to practice hobbies, encouragement of dialogue and expression, and participation in academic and social events. These all contribute to encouraging students to join enrichment courses across all life domains.

Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to use a comparative descriptive method to study personal competence among two different student groups. The aim is to understand the differences and similarities between them, which may lead to meaningful conclusions about the impact of personal competence on student behavior especially given that both societies share many commonalities in values, traditions, social norms, language, and cultural heritage.

Interpersonal Competence Scale (ICQ)

Buhrmester et al. (1988) developed a multidimensional theoretical framework for interpersonal competence. Within the context of individual differences theory, people differ in two primary ways: first, in the degree of interpersonal competence they display in everyday life situations, and second, in how effectively they handle interactive situations in daily contexts. Individuals may develop advanced levels of social and emotional intelligence, along with behavioral and semantic social skills. However, they differ in their ability to sustain interactions. Establishing social relationships is relatively easy, but managing those relationships and resolving interpersonal difficulties requires considerable skill. For example, initiating a romantic or marital relationship may not be difficult, but maintaining such a relationship and preserving its essence demands significantly more effort (Convey & Dengerink, 1984).

Buhrmester et al. (1988) developed a widely used measure of interpersonal competence, the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ), which consists of 40 items covering five dimensions: initiation of relationships, negative assertion, self-disclosure, emotional support, and conflict management. The questionnaire has been translated and used in various countries and is available in many languages, including Chinese (Wang, Y., Zou, H., & Qu, Z., 2006), German (Uwe, 2006), Polish (Górska, M., 2011), Italian (Giromini, L., 2016), Korean (Han, N. R., & Lee, D., 2010), Turkish (Baytemir, 2014), and Portuguese (Assunção, R., Ávila, M., & Matos, P., 2010).

Buhrmester et al. (1988) emphasized that these competencies are essential for navigating interpersonal situations. The first two dimensions initiation of relationships and negative assertion are associated with assertiveness and taking initiative. The remaining three self-disclosure, emotional support, and conflict management are particularly crucial for deepening and sustaining personal relationships. It is important to note that possessing interpersonal competencies alone is not sufficient; one must also have the knowledge to accurately interpret social contexts and behave appropriately (Buhrmester et al., 1988).

Interpersonal competence, as a multifaceted construct, reflects the extent to which socially and

emotionally intelligent individuals possess behavioral or social skills such as decoding non-verbal communication and demonstrating social expressiveness across various life situations. Different interpersonal contexts may require different social skills, and a person's competence may vary across the different stages of the same relationship. For instance, initiating a relationship is essential for finding a partner, but conflict management becomes more important in later stages for maintaining a stable marital relationship (Convey & Dengerink, 1984). Therefore, to fully understand the structure of interpersonal competence, it is necessary to identify its distinct domains before examining the specific skills responsible for effective performance within each domain (Buhrmester et al., 1988).

Buhrmester et al. (1988) identified five dimensions of interpersonal competence, which are measured using a 40-item self-report questionnaire. These dimensions are as follows:

1.   **Initiation of Relationships (IR):** This refers to the respondent's ability to initiate social interactions and form relationships with both familiar and unfamiliar individuals. It assesses one's capacity to establish and maintain social ties, adapt interactive behaviors to sustain relationships, and enhance social acceptance, popularity, and friend-making skills.

2.   **Negative Assertion (NA):** This dimension measures the respondent's ability to assert personal rights and express dissatisfaction (i.e., negative assertion), including the ability to say "no," express discontent with others' intrusions, and critique others' behaviors assertively. It also reflects self-confidence in expressing both positive and negative opinions, needs, and demands, and the effectiveness in achieving personal goals while resisting external pressures.

3.   **Self-Disclosure (SD):** This refers to the respondent's tendency to share personal information and disclose secrets to others. According to Argyle (1967), self-disclosure is essential in intimate relationships, enabling individuals to maintain honest, stable relationships and deepen them through sharing personal experiences.

4.   **Emotional Support (ES):** This dimension assesses the respondent's ability to provide emotional support to others, especially those with emotional ties, making them feel understood and supported in various life situations.

5.   **Conflict Management (CM):** This measures the respondent's ability to handle interpersonal conflicts positively. It involves recognizing conflict situations, employing constructive coping strategies in personal, social, academic, and professional contexts, and resolving disputes without aggression or blame. It reflects one's ability to face interpersonal challenges effectively and develop socially acceptable behavior in conflict situations, which is essential for maintaining satisfying relationships and a positive social image (Klinkosz, W., Iskra, J., & Artymiak, M., 2021).

Recently, the ICQ has attracted increasing attention, and its conceptual validity has been confirmed across various non-American cultures. Versions of the ICQ have been developed in German (Uwe, 2006), Chinese, Polish (Górska, 2011), French (Schlegel et al., 2013), and Italian. These adaptations consistently show high internal consistency and confirm the original factor structure. Studies using adult samples (ages 18–40) in Polish (Górska, 2011) and German (Uwe, 2006) contexts have yielded highly comparable results. Its validity has also been supported through various additional investigations, examining constructs such as emotional interaction, social integration, coping, and personal stress (Gasteiger-Klicpera & Klicpera, 1999; Gudleski & Shean, 2000).

Method

Participants

A representative sample was selected from the general student population at the University of Diyala (Iraq) and Kuwait University (Kuwait), distributed according to demographic variables (age, gender, academic level, and field of study). Data collection took place during the academic year 2024–2025, specifically between the months of December and February. The final sample consisted of 570 responses submitted via an online survey platform. There were no incomplete responses, as the system did not allow submission unless all questionnaire items were completed. The sample included 268 students from the University of Diyala (47.0%) and 302 students from Kuwait University (53.0%). Regarding gender, 240 participants were male (42.1%) and 330 female (57.9%). In terms of age distribution:

- 162 participants (28.4%) were aged 17–19
- 257 (45.1%) were aged 20–22
- 94 (16.5%) were aged 23–25
- 47 (8.2%) were aged 29 or older

This distribution is presented in Table 1.

Variable	Universities		Biological Sex		Age				
	Dyiala	Kuwait	Female	Male	17-19	20-22	23-25	26-28	**29 <**
N	268	302	330	240	162	257	94	10	**47**
%	47.0	53.0	57.9	42.1	28.4	45.1	16.5	1.8	**8.2**

Table 1: Distribution of the Research Sample According to Demographic Variables

Procedures

We used the convenience sampling method to collect data between December 5, 2024, and February 8, 2025. The sample included students from all departments of the College of Basic Education at the University of Diyala (Iraq) and Kuwait University. The researchers encouraged student participation through announcements on student web platforms and social media (WhatsApp), in addition to peer encouragement (i.e., snowball sampling). Participation was entirely voluntary, and students were informed that the study was conducted solely for academic research purposes, without requiring personal identification, and no financial incentives were provided.

Data were collected online via a WhatsApp-shared link to the following survey platform: https://forms.gle/PDZBKC3JJdWUXNoU9

Responses were closed on February 8, 2025. No responses were missing because the platform required participants to complete all items before submission. Ethical approvals for the research project were obtained from the Scientific Research Committees of both the University of Diyala and Kuwait University.

Research Instrument

The researchers translated and adapted the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ)

developed by Buhrmester et al. (1988), which consists of 40 items covering five dimensions:

1. *Initiating relationships with friends* (Items 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 36)

2. *Asserting displeasure with others' behavior* (Items 2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27, 32, 37)

3. *Self-disclosure* (Items 3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33, 38)

4. *Providing emotional support* (Items 4, 9, 14, 19, 24, 29, 34, 39)

5. *Conflict management* (Items 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40)

Participants were asked to read each item carefully and rate how challenging each behavior was for them in social contexts. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from: 1 = I am poor at this to 5 = I am extremely good at this. Higher scores indicate greater interpersonal competence.

The original English version of the scale was independently translated into Arabic by two bilingual researchers familiar with both languages and cultures. An initial Arabic draft was developed, avoiding any culturally inappropriate terminology. A third translator then back-translated the Arabic version into English. A fourth bilingual expert compared the original English version with the back-translated version to assess semantic equivalence. After confirming the accuracy of the translation, the scale was piloted on a sample of 15 students to ensure clarity and comprehensibility of the items and instructions. The feedback confirmed the appropriateness and clarity of the items, making the scale ready for application.

Data Analysis Plan

Sample Normal Distribution

A normality test was conducted on the item scores of the ICQ to determine whether the responses followed a normal distribution. This was assessed using Skewness and Kurtosis values. The results showed that all items fell within the acceptable range of ±1.50, indicating that the data were normally distributed, allowing for generalization of findings from the sample to the larger population (Muthén & Kaplan, 1985).

Table (2) shows the values of skewness and kurtosis for the scores of the personal competence scale consisting of 45 items.

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Skewness	-0.02	-0.24	0.55	-0.54	-1.03	-0.13	-0.61	-0.03	-1.15	**-0.88**
Kurtosis	-0.99	-0.79	-0.81	-0.47	0.41	-1.00	-0.46	-1.05	0.58	**-0.11**
Item	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	**20**
Skewness	-0.62	-0.10	-0.31	1.09	-0.91	-0.37	-0.77	-0.69	-0.47	**-0.65**
Kurtosis	-0.48	-0.76	-1.03	0.73	0.18	-0.67	-0.19	-0.42	-0.71	**-0.28**
Item	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	**30**
Skewness	0.03	-0.50	-0.55	-1.08	-1.13	-0.81	-0.64	-0.54	-1.05	**-0.77**

Kurtosis	-1.12	-0.61	-0.63	0.49	0.54	-0.11	-0.29	-0.69	0.40	**-0.13**
Item	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	**40**
Skewness	-0.74	-0.46	-0.66	-0.92	-0.61	-0.42	-0.18	-0.70	-1.15	**-0.85**
Kurtosis	-0.37	-0.65	-0.40	0.23	-0.38	-0.78	-0.98	-0.10	0.73	**-0.02**

Factorial Validation and Cross-Validation

Internal Validity

To assess internal validity, we examined correlation coefficients between each item and the total score of the ICQ, as well as the intercorrelations among the five subscales. First, we analyzed the data by calculating item-total correlations across the 45 items of the scale. Then, we assessed the correlations among the five subscales using Pearson's correlation coefficient.

The results revealed that item-total correlations ranged from 0.32 to 0.65 (ps < 0.001), indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency among scale items. The correlations among the five dimensions of the ICQ ranged from 0.44 to 0.78 (ps < 0.001), further confirming the internal coherence of the scale.

These findings support the factorial integrity of the ICQ and are consistent with previous validation studies, such as those conducted by Coroiu et al. (2015) and Giromini (2015).

		IR	NA	SD	ES	CM
IR	PRESENT STUDY	1	.673**	.445**	.668**	.521**
	Luciano Giromini 2015		**0.62**	**0.52**	**0.48**	**0.33**
NA	PRESENT STUDY		1	.548**	.604**	.563**
	Luciano Giromini 2015			**0.46**	**0.54**	**0.28**
SC	PRESENT STUDY			1	.516**	.787**
	Luciano Giromini 2015				**0.37**	**0.31**
ES	PRESENT STUDY				1	.553**
	Luciano Giromini 2015					**0.55**
CM	PRESENT STUDY					1
	Luciano Giromini 2015					

Table 3 For the Intercorrelation Values Between the ICQ Subscales

Construct Validity: Factor Analysis

To investigate the factorial structure of the scale, the researchers conducted Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using the Principal Component Method with Oblique Rotation, which is considered more realistic in representing inter-factor correlations and provides an accurate view of their strength (Byrne, 2005). The analysis was performed on data from 570 participants.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.938, indicating excellent suitability for factor analysis based on Kaiser's (1974) criteria. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a value of 8648.157 with df = 780 and p < .001, confirming that the correlations among variables were sufficiently large for EFA. The analysis confirmed the stability of the five-factor structure of the ICQ across its 40 items.

To test the theoretical model and assess its fit to the data, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS Version 22. Fit indices supported the adequacy of the model:

- Chi-square/df ratio (χ^2/df) = 3.62, p < .001

- Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) = 0.54

- Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index (PGFI) = 0.70

- Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.064

- Parsimony-Adjusted Normed Fit Index (PNFI) = 0.66

These indicators suggest an acceptable model fit and support the structural assumptions of the ICQ, consistent with structural equation modeling (Kline, 2011) and the theoretical five-factor model proposed by Buhrmester et al. (1988) (Bentler & Bonett, 1980).

Reliability: Internal Consistency Analyses

The internal consistency of the ICQ was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The overall alpha for the 40-item scale was 0.928, indicating excellent reliability. The alpha coefficients for the five subscales ranged from 0.68 to 0.84, demonstrating acceptable to high reliability. These results are comparable to those found in previous studies such as Buhrmester et al. (1988) and Coroiu et al. (2015).

See Table 4 for a comparison of internal consistency coefficients between the current study and previous validations (e.g., Buhrmester et al., 1988; Allgöwer, 1993).

Dimension	IR	NA	SD	ES	CM
Buhrmester.etal.1988	0.86	0.85	0.85	0.86	**0.82**
Adina Coroiu,2015	0.73	0.75	0.61	0.70	**0.62**
Present study	0.75	0.68	0.79	0.84	**0.81**

Table (4) Reliability Coefficients of the Personal Competence Scale With the Studies of Buhrmester Et Al. (1988) And Allgöwer (1993).

Results

Psychometric Properties for the Sample

Statistical analysis of the multidimensional Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ) for the total sample, as well as for sub-samples from the University of Diyala (Iraq) and Kuwait University, indicated that skewness values ranged from 0.04 to 0.62, and kurtosis values ranged from –0.004 to 0.32, both falling within the acceptable range for a normal distribution.

Regarding the mean scores for the interpersonal competence subscales:

• At the University of Diyala, means ranged from 27.6 to 32.1, with standard deviations between 5.1 and 6.3.

• At Kuwait University, means ranged from 27.6 to 32.9, with standard deviations between 5.0 and 6.2.

• For the entire sample, mean values ranged from 27.7 to 32.6, with standard deviations from 5.1 to 6.1.

These results suggest a high degree of consistency in the central tendency and variability indicators between students from both universities, reflecting comparable psychometric characteristics across the groups.

	IRAQ(n=268)				KUWET(n=302)				Entire sample=(N=570)			
	M	SD	Skew	Kurtosis	M	SD	Skew	Kurtosis	M	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
IR	27.6	5.6	-.34	-.004	28.1	6.2	-.26	.03	27.9	5.9	-.28	.03
AN	27.9	6.3	-.51	-.11	27.6	5.9	-.06	-.07	27.7	6.1	-.29	-.11
SD	28.7	5.1	-.16	-.19	29.3	5.0	.04	-.07	29.0	5.1	-.05	-.12
ES	32.1	5.7	-.54	-.32	32.9	5.3	-.60	-.03	32.6	5.5	-.58	-.17
CM	31.7	5.6	-.62	-.03	32.0	5.4	-.53	.09	31.9	5.5	-.57	.03

Table (5) Psychometric Properties of the Domains of the Personal Competence Scale That Comprised the Research Sample.

Measurement of the Prevalence of Interpersonal Competence Among University Students

To obtain a quantitative understanding of the prevalence of interpersonal competence, the study adopted the mean plus one standard deviation (M + SD) as the criterion for identifying students with high interpersonal competence on the multidimensional scale (Monika, Frania & Fernando, Luís de, 2022).

Based on this criterion:

• The prevalence of high interpersonal competence as a general construct was 17.5% among students from the University of Diyala (Iraq),

- 19.2% among students from Kuwait University,

- and 15.1% across the entire sample.

As for the five individual subscales of the ICQ:

- Prevalence rates at the University of Diyala ranged from 19.0% to 22.3%.

- At Kuwait University, prevalence rates ranged from 17.5% to 26.8%.

Variables	IRAQ(n=268)			KUWET(n=302)			Entire sample=(N=570)		
	M	SD	Pre. Rate	M	SD	Pre. Rate	M	SD	Pre. rate
IR	27.6	5.6	**19.0**	28.1	6.2	**18.2**	27.9	5.9	**16.8**
NA	28.7	5.1	**19.4**	29.3	5.0	**17.5**	29.0	5.1	**18.4**
SD	27.9	6.3	**19.7**	27.6	5.9	**20.1**	27.7	6.1	**17.7**
ES	32.1	5.7	**19.4**	32.9	5.3	**26.8**	32.6	5.6	**24.7**
CM	31.7	5.6	**22.3**	32.1	5.4	**25.5**	31.9	5.5	**24.0**
ICQ	148.3	24.1	**17.5**	150.2	22.3	**19.2**	149.3	23.2	**15.1**

Table 6 Presents A Detailed Overview of the Prevalence of High Interpersonal Competence Levels Among University Students According To the ICQ.

Measurement of Gender Differences in Interpersonal Competence

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of interpersonal competence between male and female students.

The results revealed statistically significant differences in favor of male students in the following areas:

- Initiating Relationships (IR) and Negative Assertion (NA) in both the University of Diyala and Kuwait University.

- A significant difference was also found in Providing Emotional Support in favor of males at Kuwait University.

- Regarding the overall interpersonal competence score, a statistically significant difference was observed in favor of male students at Kuwait University.

Variables	IRAQ(n=268)				KUWET(n=302)		
	sex	M	SD	T-TEST	M	SD	T-TEST
IR	male	29.75	5.0	4.20	31.1	5.4	3.49

	female	26.7	5.7	P<.00	27.7	6.2	P<.00
NA	male	29.6	4.7	1.97 P<.00	30.8	4.6	2.05 P<.00
	female	28.3	5.2		29.1	5.0	
SD	male	28.6	6.4	-1.59	32.1	4.2	-1.18
	female	27.6	6.3		33.1	5.5	
ES	male	31.3	5.2	-1.22	30.3	5.5	3.15 P<.00
	female	32.5	5.9		27.2	5.9	
CM	male	31.5	5.0	-.38	32.4	4.0	.40
	female	31.8	5.8		32.0	5.5	
ICQ	male	151.0	22.7	1.23	156.8	20.8	2.06 P<.00
	female	147.1	24.6		149.2	22.4	

Table 7 Presents the Detailed T-Test Results for Gender-Based Differences in Interpersonal Competence.

Measurement of Differences in Interpersonal Competence According to Academic Year

A study using ANOVA found that first-year students at the University of Diyala/Iraq had significantly better interpersonal competence than fourth-year students at Kuwait University. However, there were no significant differences observed among Kuwait University students. The study suggests that overall interpersonal competence is more favorable for first-year students at the University of Diyala.

Variables	IRAQ(n=268)		KUWET(n=302)	
	F	Sig	F	**Sig**
IIR	5.175	P<.05	.487	**.692**
NA	4.911	P<.05	.921	**.431**
SD	1.922	.126	2.887	**P<.05**
ES	2.618	P<.05	5.303	**P<.05**
CM	2.359	.072	2.092	**.101**
ICQ	3.601	P<.05	.619	**.603**

Table 8 Presents the Results of the One-Way ANOVA Comparing Interpersonal Competence Scores By Academic Year.

Measurement of Differences in Interpersonal Competence According to Age

A study at Kuwait University found significant differences in interpersonal competence among students aged 23-25 and 17-19 in the Negative Assertion and Providing Emotional Support factors, while no significant differences were found at the University of Diyala.

Variables	IRAQ(n=268)		KUWET(n=302)	
	F	Sig	F	**Sig**

IR	1.822	.125	.719	**.580**
N A	1.290	.274	2.466	**P<.05**
SD	.912	.458	1.424	**.226**
ES	1.037	.388	2.569	**P<.05**
CM	.443	.777	.629	**.642**
ICQ	.858	.490	.678	**.608**

Table 9 Presents the One-Way ANOVA Results Comparing Interpersonal Competence Scores Across Age Groups.

Discussion

Personal competence plays an important role in our daily lives, as it is essential for enhancing well-being, self-contentment, mental health, and social and emotional intelligence (Kim et al., 1997; Muralidharan et al., 2010; Bird, T.; Tarsia, M.; Schwannauer, M., 2018). Buhrmester et al. (1988) made a pioneering contribution to this field with the first version of the Personal Competence Questionnaire (PCQ), inspiring many researchers over the past three decades to study and analyze this concept. The scale has been experimentally validated in various countries across different cultures, which encouraged the researchers to adapt an Arabic version of the ICQ scale and verify its psychometric properties using two different samples of university students in Iraq and Kuwait.

The results from the correlation coefficients of the 40 items on the Personal Competence Scale (ICQ) and the correlation coefficients between the five factors of the scale demonstrated a good level of stability, which can be relied upon, especially when compared to previous studies. Furthermore, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) indicated an acceptable fit between the theoretical conceptual model of the scale and the data obtained from the research sample.

On the other hand, the results regarding the prevalence of high personal competence, based on the mean score plus one standard deviation (M + SD), revealed that 17.5% of students at University of Diyala, Iraq and 19.2% of students at Kuwait University fell into the category of high personal competence. This means that 82.5% of students at University of Diyala and 80.8% of students at Kuwait University had personal competence levels ranging from average to low. These results are concerning and do not meet expectations, indicating a significant weakness in the personal competence of students at both universities, which signals substantial personal challenges in life situations, coupled with insufficient personal skills to address and overcome them.

While university life is supposed to be one of the most transformative educational stages, marked by changes across various life dimensions, students often learn to be independent, form new friendships, and make decisions about their personal and professional lives away from their parents (Klinkosz, W., Iskra, J., & Artymiak, M., 2021).

The results also showed that male students generally outperform female students in terms of personal competence across all factors, which reflects the societal norms and traditions that govern the community, especially with regard to females. Furthermore, students in their first year at the University of Diyala exhibited higher levels of personal competence compared to those in later years, suggesting the absence of a significant role played by the university (in academic, cultural, social, human, and existential terms) in enhancing personal competence. This is further supported by the lack of significant age-based differences among students at University of Diyala, suggesting that the university experience may not be enriching enough to foster

personal growth and develop skills and talents over time. A similar situation appears to apply to Kuwait University.

The general conclusion of this research points to levels of personal competence that fall short of the expected outcomes. A decrease in personal competence indicates a lack of necessary skills, which negatively impacts an individual's social adjustment and psychological well-being (Kim C., et al., 2008). What distinguishes this scale is its ability to identify deficiencies in the five factors, which highlight areas of weakness in personal skills. Moreover, it acts as a mediator, playing an essential role in forming close social relationships, thereby increasing psychological and social functions, enhancing individual happiness, success, and adjustment, and ultimately promoting self-well-being (Larson, J., 2007).

While recognizing the theoretical perspective that personal competence is not a uniform and stable characteristic, as it varies from context to context and across different stages of the same relationship (Luciano Giromini, 2015), the prevalence levels of factors such as initiating relationships with others, negative assertion, self-disclosure, providing emotional support, and conflict management raise important questions about students' ability to interact successfully with others. This, in turn, has potential future implications for their mental and social health.

Given the lack of supportive policies for the educational process at various stages and the relative social instability, particularly in Iraq, alongside the absence of mutual social trust in society, especially within the university context, these factors significantly influence personal competence.

It is important to note some practical limitations of the current research. The sample was exclusively composed of university students. Although the pioneering study by Buhrmester et al. (1988) was also conducted with a student sample, it is essential to validate the scale with other samples from the broader community. Additionally, the research sample did not account for the proportional representation of students between the two countries or by gender, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to validate the scale with larger and more diverse samples.

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