

COMPARISON OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY BETWEEN RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Intercultural competency influences the quality of international relations as cultural and global perceptions impact individual and collective attitudes and levels of participation. Research addressing differences and causes of varying levels of intercultural competency could ultimately provide insight, understanding, and progress towards enhancing global awareness. The purpose of this study was to compare American undergraduate university students' intercultural competency to that of Russian undergraduate university students. This study was theoretically based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), developed by Bennett (1986). The DMIS described six stages of intercultural competency: (a) Denial or Unaware; (b) Polarization or Defense; (c) Minimization; (d) Acceptance; (e) Adaptation; and (f) Integration. The research subjects for this study included 26 persons, 18 to 30 years old, who were enrolled in the North-Eastern State University, Magadan (NESU), and 26 persons, 18 to 30 years old, who were enrolled in Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU). This study assessed intercultural competency with the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer & Bennett, 1998, 2001, 2010). Based on the DMIS, the IDI consisted of fifty, Likert-type items that can be answered in 20 to 30 minutes. All students completed the IDI on-line in their first language. The investigators used the group mean scores to evaluate whether any significant indicators of differences or similarities were observed in intercultural competency. Results

indicated statistically significant differences in orientation to cultural differences between Russian and American undergraduate university students.

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INTRODUCTION

This research focused on the comparison of intercultural competency between American and Russian undergraduate university students who were concentrating in academic fields of Education and Pedagogy. The purpose of this study was to compare the American undergraduate students' intercultural competency to that of Russian undergraduate university students. The analysis of the intercultural competency of Russian students acted as a comparison variable in the continued research of intercultural competency in the classroom among American undergraduate university students.

In the United States, all citizens and residents may be called “American,” and population diversity is often described in terms of race, ethnicity, and/or language. The population is increasingly diverse racially, ethnically and culturally. According to the 2010 census, one out of every four Americans is a person of color: 72% White, 13% Black, 5% Asian, 1% Indigenous, 9% Mixed or Other (United States Census, 2010). In 2007, 4 out of 10 American students in public schools were from ethnic minority families (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007a). Furthermore, 90% teachers who work with these students were white (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007b). During the next 15 years, according to school analysts, there will be an even more diverse student population (Hernandez et al., 2008). There is a need for school professionals who can adequately recognize and meet the needs of this increasingly

diverse student population (Sleeter, 2001). Teacher preparation programs are recognizing the need to incorporate intercultural competency as a critical component (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Russia illustrates the differences between *nations* — ethnic, cultural, geographic bodies — and sovereign *countries*. The sovereign *country*, the Russian Federation, contains 160 different ethnic groups, including discrete *nations*: ethnic Russians, Yakuts, Chechens and Ossetians, ethnic Ukrainians, Russian Jews, and Muslim Tatars. According to the 2010 census, the Russian population was composed of 81% ethnic Russian people, 4% Tatars (generally Muslim), 1.5% Ukrainians (generally Orthodox), 1% Bashkir (generally Muslim), 1% Chuvash (generally Orthodox Christian with some pagan traditions), 1% Chechens (generally Muslim), and 1% Armenians (generally Apostolic Christian) (Sputnik International News, 2011). Each nation speaks its own language, practices its own religion, and follows its unique traditions. Yet, they are citizens of the Russian Federation, whose politics and cultures are dominated by ethnic Russians.

Russia's Far East region includes descendants of several indigenous people groups that contribute to a diverse population (Cultural Survival, 2014). The Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East (RAIPON) unites a total population of approximately 250,000 people from 41 indigenous groups, including Aleut, Kamchadal, Koryak, Nivkhy, Saami, Chelkancy, Chuvancy, Chukchi, Evenk, and Even. The traditional occupations of hunting and fishing continue to provide sustenance to isolated groups throughout the region, as well as for native residents of the City of Magadan.

Table 1 compares the population statistics between Magadan, Russia and Mankato, USA. A significant proportion of both cities (as well as the entire countries) includes children between

Denial, one's own culture is the only real one, consideration of other cultures is avoided by isolation from them. In Defense, one's own culture is the only good one. And in Minimization, elements of one's own culture are seen as universal; there are only surface differences between cultures and deep down, all are the same.

The last three stages, *Acceptance*, *Adaption*, and *Integration*, are ways of actively seeking cultural differences, by accepting its importance or by adapting one's perspective to take it into account or integrating the whole concept into their identity. In Acceptance, other cultures are seen as equally complex but are different constructions of reality. In Adaption, the individual has the conscious *ability* to shift perspectives in and out of another culture. Finally, in Integration, one's experience of *self* is expanded to include the perspectives of another culture.

The stages of the DMIS were operationalized in a measurement instrument, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer & Bennett, 1998, 2001, 2010). The IDI consisted of fifty, Likert-type items that can be answered in 20 to 30 minutes. More information about the IDI is included later in this article.

DEFINITIONS

This field of inquiry involves vocabulary that may seem interwoven and confusing, especially when interpreted across several languages in research in multiple cultural settings. Therefore, several specific definitions were used during the research reported here.

Culture: Patterns in the organization of the conduct of everyday life among groups of people (Pollock, 2008). Culture is composed of beliefs, values, standards, behavior, etc. that are transmitted between generations. In the United States, culture might also be described in terms of self-identity and self-concept, for example religious community, language group, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Intercultural competency: The ability of a person to easily maneuver in and out of cultures and situations that are different from the everyday situations in which the person usually finds him/herself. This conceptual construct is about “*inter*” cultural, or between cultures. A person is flexible and adaptable to a variety of cultural contexts which allows them to shift their perspectives and behaviors based on their cultural environment. May also be known as “cross-cultural.”

Multicultural: This adjective describes something that refers to, relates to, or is designed for “*multiple*” cultures, or many cultures.

Perceived Orientation: How a person sees or perceives or believes themselves to behave and react to different cultural contexts. This refers to a score on the IDI (Hammer & Bennett, 1998, 2001, 2010) that reflects where an individual places themselves along the DMIS intercultural development continuum (Bennett, 1986). The Perceived Orientation can be Denial, Polarization (or Defense / Reversal?), Minimization, Acceptance, or Adaptation. Integration?

Developmental Orientation: How a person actually acts and behaves in real cultural diverse situations. This refers to a score on the IDI (Hammer & Bennett, 1998, 2001, 2010) that reflects the perspective an individual is most likely to use in situations where cultural differences and commonalities need to be bridged. The Developmental Orientation can be Denial, Polarization (or Defense / Reversal?), Minimization, Acceptance, or Adaptation. Integration?

Research subject means a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Because all the research subjects for this study were university students majoring in education and pedagogy, investigators assumed that they were of similar ages, generational characteristics, and interests. Therefore, the hypothesis of the study was that the intercultural competency measured by the IDI for students in Mankato would be similar to that of students in Magadan. Specific research questions were:

1. What is the orientation toward cultural differences among Russian and American undergraduate university students at the beginning of their academic studies?
2. What are the differences in intercultural competency between American and Russian undergraduate university students?
3. What contributes to the differences in intercultural competency between American and Russian undergraduate university students?

METHODOLOGY

Research Subjects

The research subjects for this study included 26 persons, 18 to 30 years old, who were enrolled in the North-Eastern State University, Magadan (NESU), and 26 persons, 18 to 30 years old, who were enrolled in Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU). All students were concentrating in academic programs related to Education and Pedagogy during January 2013.

Students in Russia were part of a research study implemented by Russian faculty members at NESU. Students in the United States were part of an undergraduate class and selected for a research study implemented by an American faculty member and an undergraduate research assistant at MSU.

Instrument

In order for intercultural competency to be assessed, quantitative and qualitative data was collected using the IDI (Hammer, 1998, 2001, 2010). This survey was created to measure the cognitive states that are described by the DMIS and to help measure individual and group cultural competency. The IDI calculates the Developmental and Perceived Orientations on a scale of intercultural sensitivity that ranges from Denial, to Defense, to Minimization, then Acceptance, and Adaptation. For the IDI, Hammer used only 5 of the 6 DMIS stages because adaptation and integration, when tested, rendered the same results

All students completed the IDI on-line. Students in Russia completed the IDI in their first language, usually Russian. Students in the US completed the IDI in their first language, usually English.

Quantitative data was collected through 50 questions on the IDI. Figure 2 presents examples of items and the orientation stages which those items illustrate.

Orientation to Other Cultures		Sample Item
1	Denial (55-70)	Society would be better off if culturally different groups kept to themselves.
2	Defense (70-85)	People from other cultures are not as open-minded as people from my own culture.
3	Minimization (85-115)	People are the same despite outward differences in appearance.
4	Acceptance (115-130)	It is appropriate that people from other cultures do not necessarily have the same values and goals as people from my culture.
5	Adaptation (130-145)	When I come in contact with people from a different culture, I find I change my behavior to adapt to theirs.

Figure 2: Sample items from the Intercultural Development Inventory. Hammer & Bennett (2001 and 2010).

The qualitative data was collected through the answers to these questions. Responses to these questions provide a cultural grounding for relating IDI scores to the actual life experiences of the individual.

1. What is your background with culture (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, geography, language, religious differences, etc.)?
2. What is most challenging for you in working with other cultures (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, geography, language, religious differences, etc.)?
3. What are key goals, responsibilities or tasks in which cultural differences need to be successfully navigated?
4. Give examples of situations you were involved with or observed where differences needed to be addressed and the situation ended negatively? Ended positively?

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the Perceived Orientation and Developmental Orientation scores of the two groups of students (Russian and American). These statistics included the minimum score, the maximum score, the mean score, and the standard deviation.

To compare the means of MSU and NESU students, an independent samples t-test was run. First, to determine which t-test should be used; Levene's Test for Equality of Variances is run. If the p -value is less than 0.05, then the test where equal variance is not assumed should be used, otherwise the test where equal variance is assumed should be used. Both PO and DO scores had p -values greater than 0.05 for Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. Thus, equal variances assumed models were used.

Once the proper t-test was determined, the hypothesis of equal means would be rejected if the p -value is less than 0.05. Because the samples sizes for MSU and NESU were both relatively small and the observations for MSU students deviated far from a

normal distribution, the Mann-Whitney U Test (a nonparametric equivalent to the independent samples t test) was run.

Qualitative Data

In order to assess qualitative data, two researchers coded student statements about culture. These ratings included three categories of coding: Resolved, resolution, and unresolved. Resolved indicated a strong sense of belonging within one's own community and a strong awareness of other cultures. Resolution showed lack of involvement in core aspects of one's own cultural community and lack of awareness of other cultures. And unresolved was used for persons that had no sense of attachment or belonging to their own culture and were completely lacking awareness of other cultures.

These are some example responses that were coded from the IDI survey. These categories explain the characteristics associated with cultural development and orientation.

Knowledge, skills, or attitudes	Sample Statements	Coded
Knowledge of <i>cultural self-awareness</i>	"I believe the main task [in working with people from other cultures] is to understand the same thing the same way."	Unresolved
Knowledge of <i>cultural worldview frameworks</i>	"In Kazakhstan it is frowned upon to sit on the ground. While I was there I received many nasty looks while sitting down in parks and one lady even came up and yelled at me."	Resolved
Skills <i>Empathy</i>	"What their norms are ...what is okay to say and ...not to say... "	Resolution
Skills in <i>verbal and nonverbal communication</i>	"[Challenges include] nonverbal perception of information in the course of interpersonal communication."	Resolved
Attitudes <i>Curiosity</i>	"I went to school that was mostly all white students, but we had some diversity... I was never personally involved with any situations."	Unresolved
Attitudes <i>Openness</i>	"...in elementary school... kids made fun of the Asian students because of how they looked and acted. It was eventually resolved by us growing older and accepting that people were different."	Resolution

Figure 3: Sample responses coded from the Intercultural Development Inventory.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

The first research question was: What is the orientation toward cultural differences among Russian and American undergraduate university students at the beginning of their academic studies?

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics on the IDI for Undergraduate Students

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
NESU, Magadan, Russian Federation					
Perceived Orientation	26	100.69	123.98	114.2088	5.10810
Developmental Orientation	26	42.41	105.33	73.6942	14.45696
MSU, Mankato, MN, United States					
Perceived Orientation	26	106.35	127.16	118.3462	5.26624
Developmental Orientation	26	59.39	112.04	88.7619	14.47422

Among 26 Russian students, the Perceived Orientation ranged from 100.69 to 123.98, with a mean of 114.208. The minimum score was in Minimization; the maximum score was in Acceptance. The mean score places the group in Minimization. The Developmental Orientation of the Russian students ranged from 42.21 (termed Denial) to 105.33 (in Minimization). The mean score 73.69 suggests that NESU students were in the stage called Defense.

Among 26 American students, the Perceived Orientation ranged from 106.35 to 127.16, with a mean of 118.3462. The minimum score was in Minimization; the maximum score was in Acceptance. The mean score placed the group in Acceptance. The Developmental Orientation of the American students ranged from 42.21 (termed Denial) to 105.33 (in Minimization). The mean score 88.76 suggested that American students were in the stage called Minimization.

Thus, the average Russian student in this study group perceived themselves as being in minimization in their intercultural competency, but their actual Developmental Orientation towards cultural differences was defense. On the other hand, the average MSU student in this study group perceived themselves as being in acceptance in their intercultural competency, but their actual Developmental Orientation towards cultural differences was in minimization.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: What are the differences in intercultural competency between American and Russian undergraduate university students?

To compare the means of MSU and NESU students, an independent samples t-test was run. According to the data, both the mean PO and DO scores were statistically significantly different for the two schools, MSU and NESU. In particular, MSU students had statistically significantly higher mean PO and DO scores than NESU ($p > .05$).

Table 3: Independent samples test, equal variances assumed

IDI Measure	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Err	95% Conf Interval of Diff	
								Lower	Upper
Perceived Orientation	.077	.783	-2.875	50	.006	-4.137	1.44	-7.027	-1.247
Developmental Orientation	.135	.715	-3.756	50	.000	-15.067	4.01	-23.126	-7.009

Research Question 3

The third research question was: What contributes to the differences in intercultural competency between American and Russian undergraduate university students? The researchers

wondered how and why the education system in Magadan region caused the students to give these responses. So they developed these research questions:

1. What are the principles about intercultural competency that are important to the people in Magadan? (for example, “tolerance” or “freedom”)
2. How do these principles explain the profile report about the undergraduate university students in Magadan?
3. What are the teaching and learning strategies that encourage or discourage intercultural competency among students in primary schools, secondary schools, and university?
4. How do these strategies explain the profile report about the students in Magadan?

The differences in intercultural competency between American and Russian university students may be the result of education or due to social norms.

In Mankato, MN, multicultural education has been emphasized throughout primary and secondary schooling, so university students have been impacted by these teachings even before they arrive at higher education. MSU has emphasized multicultural education for more than 30 years. Enrollment at MSU includes approximately 10% students of color and international students. Furthermore, at MSU, students are required to take at least two courses in cultural diversity.

It may also be attributed to national goals and policy such as demographic quotas and intercultural attitudes. The US, from its beginnings, has been a nation of immigrants. Current local immigration trends can be a factor in the amount of exposure students have with cultures other than their own. And community development can also play a role in the social norms associated with working with people from diverse backgrounds.

CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted in this project suggests these conclusions:

1. The average orientation toward cultural differences among Russian and American undergraduate university students at the beginning of their academic studies is Minimization.
2. American undergraduate university students at MSU scored statistically significantly higher than Russian undergraduate university students at NESU on measures of intercultural competency as measured by the IDI.
3. The differences in intercultural competency between American and Russian undergraduate university students may be a result of education, local and state policy, and social norms and attitudes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building intercultural competency for individuals and for groups will be no easy task. This will involve increased cultural self-awareness; deeper understanding of the experiences, values, perceptions, and behaviors of people from diverse cultural communities; and expanded capability to shift cultural perspective and adapt behavior to bridge across cultural differences (Hammer, 2012). Research projects in the future may include examining how continuing developments in multicultural education curriculum influence cultural orientation of undergraduate students. Questions to be studied may include:

1. How will continuing developments in multicultural education curriculum in the primary, secondary, and college levels influence the intercultural competency of future university students?
2. How would the intercultural competency of university students from both America and Russia change after an intervention takes place between the pre and post IDI assessment?

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