Teachers for the Knowledge Society

How do teachers perceive their cultural intelligence?

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Abstract

The first-year students' attitudes related to teaching are necessary teleological landmarks for choosing this career. This study has two. The main objectives of this study were to determine the level of cultural intelligence of teachers and to examine which variables could be considered as predictors of cultural intelligence. The study involved 107 elementary school teachers (86.9% female and 13.1% male) from four towns in Serbia. The results show that teachers demonstrate a high level of cultural intelligence and that significant predictors of teachers' cultural intelligence are enjoyment of intercultural communication, experiencing multicultural classes as a challenge, openness to cultural learning and contacts with people from other cultures. The implications of these results for teachers' education are presented.

Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Dr. Zafer Bekirogullari of Y.B.

Keywords: cultural intelligence; teachers; teachers' education; intercultural learning; intercultural competence

1. Introduction

Various forms of intelligence have recently become the subject of numerous theoretical debates and empirical research. In addition to emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence has been increasingly stressed. The basic goal of the advocates of cultural intelligence is to improve understanding of intercultural interactions (Earley, 2002) and explain individual differences in efficiency in contexts characterised by cultural diversity (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Earley & Ang, 2003). The theoretical foundation for the introduction of the cultural intelligence construct into professional discussion is the Sternberg theory of intelligence (Sternberg, 1985) which stresses the multidimensionality of intelligence and its action in real-life contexts (Ang &Van Dyne, 2008).

At the most general level, cultural intelligence is defined as the ability to adapt to new cultural contexts (Earley, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003) or as the ability to function successfully in interaction with people from different cultures (Ang et al., 2007, Thomas & Inkson 2003). According to Earley and Ang (2003), cultural intelligence is a multidimensional construct comprising metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioural dimensions. *The metacognitive aspect* of cultural intelligence reflects mental processes that individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. Relevant capabilities include planning, monitoring and revising mental models of cultural norms. People with a highly developed metacognitive aspect of cultural intelligence are aware of others' cultural preferences, question cultural assumptions and adjust their mental models during and after interactions. *The cognitive aspect* of cultural intelligence reflects knowledge of the norms, practices and conventions in different cultures acquired from education and personal experience. This includes knowledge of the economic, legal and social systems of different cultures and knowledge of basic frameworks of cultural values. Those with a high

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cognitive aspect of cultural intelligence understand similarities and differences across cultures. *The motivational aspect* of cultural intelligence reflects the capability to direct attention and energy toward learning about and functioning in situations characterised by cultural differences. Individuals with high motivational aspects of cultural intelligence, direct attention and energy toward cross-cultural situations based on intrinsic interest and confidence in their cross-cultural effectiveness. *The behavioural aspect* of cultural intelligence reflects the capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures. Those with high behavioural aspects of cultural intelligence exhibit situationally appropriate behaviours based on their broad range of verbal and nonverbal capabilities, such as exhibiting culturally appropriate words, tone, gestures and facial expressions.

The achievement of successful intercultural interaction as the result of cultural intelligence may have the following outcomes: a) good adaptability of a person (manifested in feelings of pleasure and well-being), b) developing and maintaining good relations with members of other cultures and c) success in achieving the interaction goals (Thomas et al., 2008). In addition, Thomas and associates emphasise that the essence of cultural intelligence does not lie in adaptation alone - equally important are the abilities of a person to select and/or change their cultural context (Thomas, 2006, Thomas et al., 2008).

The construct of cultural intelligence first attracted the attention of experts who were searching for the best way of selecting individuals to work abroad or in multinational teams, as well as for a valid conceptualisation of intercultural training (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004). Management and organisation psychology are the fields in which cultural intelligence has been most studied and applied (Earley & Peterson, 2004; Gelfand, Imai, & Fehr, 2008, Livermore, 2010; Thomas & Inkson, 2003), but the potential application of this concept is much broader and exists in all areas in which there is a need to understand the specifics of intercultural interactions and their regulation (Gelfand, Imai, & Fehr, 2008, Thomas et al. 2008). Due to the cultural mixture of contemporary classrooms, cultural intelligence has become gradually more significant in the educational context.

2. Purpose of Study and Method

The increasing diversity of the cotemporary classroom virtually guarantees that almost all teachers either work or will work with students of differing cultural backgrounds. Moreover, teachers should prepare their students to live and work in a society and world that is culturally diverse and global (Petrović & Zlatković, 2009). As a result, teachers need to be culturally intelligent in order to have a better understanding of their students and to teach them more effectively. Given this, the main objectives of this study were to determine the level of cultural intelligence of teachers and examine which variables could be considered as predictors of cultural intelligence. These objectives were pursued using regression analysis, where the index of cultural intelligence represented a criterion variable, and a series of 8 variables had the status of predictor variables.

Cultural intelligence index. The Cultural intelligence index was obtained through the Cultural Intelligence Scale (Ang et al., 2007). This scale contains 20 five-point Likert items organised in four sub-scales: metaconition, cognition, motivation and behaviour. The 20 statements include "I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds', "I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviours in other cultures", "I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me" and "I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations". The factor structure of the scale corresponds to the four dimensional model of cultural intelligence and the scale has satisfactory reliability (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Ward et al., 2009). In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.85.

Cultural intelligence predictors. We have chosen the following 8 variables for potential cultural intelligence predictors – contacts with other cultures, communication in a foreign language, reading of foreign literature, watching TV travel shows, the importance of knowing other cultures, experiencing multicultural classes as a challenge, enjoyment of intercultural communication, and openness to cultural learning. We believe these variables can influence the level of development and the level of expression of cultural intelligence. The information on predictor variables was obtained based on the Inventory of Cultural Intelligence Predictors (ICIP), constructed for the needs of this research.

The study involved 107 elementary school teachers (86.9% female and 13.1% male) from four towns in Serbia. 68.2% of the teachers work in culturally heterogeneous classes.

3. Findings

The findings show that teachers demonstrate a high average level of cultural intelligence (see Chart 1). The results on the Cultural Intelligence Scale ranged from 36 to 89 (the possible range was from 20 to 100). The average value of the cultural intelligence index was M=67.79, and SD = 9.21. With the majority of the teachers, there was a high (66.4%) or very high (22.4%) level of cultural intelligence. A small number of interviewed teachers have a moderate level of cultural intelligence (10.3%), while only one teacher reports a low level of cultural intelligence (0.9%). These results are encouraging given the fact that many Serbian teachers work in culturally heterogeneous classes and that teachers need to be culturally intelligent in order to understand students with various cultural and ethnic backgrounds and teach them effectively.
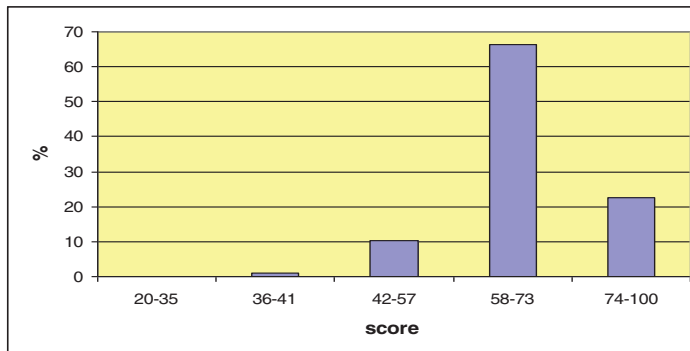

Chart 1: Level of cultural intelligence

The descriptive analysis of the data shows the following characteristics of the cultural intelligence predictors:

1. Contact with people from other cultures. 45.8% of the teachers rarely had contacts with members of other cultures and 54.2% of the teachers have often contacted members of other cultures.
2. Communication in foreign language. 66.4% of the teachers speak at least one foreign language, while 33.6% of the teachers cannot communicate in a foreign language.
3. Reading of foreign literature. A majority of the teachers report that they do not read foreign literature (49.5% of the teacher never read foreign literature, 30.8% of the teachers very rarely read foreign literature and 14% of the teachers rarely). Very few of teachers report reading foreign literature as often (4.7%) and very often (0.9%).
4. Watching travel shows. 1.9% of the teachers never watch travel shows. 10.3% of the teachers very rarely watch and 15.9% rarely watch them. 47.7% of the teachers often watch and 24.3% very often watch such shows.
5. Importance of knowing other cultures. Teachers predominantly believe that knowledge about other cultures is important (62.6% of the teachers emphasise that knowledge of other culture is important and 31.8% that it is very important). Only 5.6% of the teachers think that knowledge about other culture is moderately important. None of the questioned teachers believe that knowing other cultures is unimportant.
6. Multicultural composition of the class as challenge. 61.7% of the teachers think that teaching in a multicultural classroom is a challenge. On the other hand, 34.4% of the teachers are ambivalent as to how stimulating teaching in culturally heterogeneous classes is, while only one teacher (0.9%) believes that teaching in multicultural classes is not challenging.
7. Openness for intercultural learning. The majority of teachers (70.7%) are open to intercultural learning and believe that they can learn a lot from students with a different cultural background. 13.1% of the teachers are not interested in this form of intercultural learning. The teachers with an undifferentiated attitude (26.2%) to the possibility of intercultural learning are twice as frequently represented as the uninterested teachers.
8. Enjoyment of intercultural communication. More than ¾ of the teachers (75.7%) say that they enjoy communicating with representatives of other cultures. 17.8% of the teachers are not able to assess whether

they enjoy intercultural communication or not, while 6.5% do not like to interact with members of other cultures.

The connection of the selected 8 variables with cultural intelligence was established through the method of regressive analysis. The obtained coefficient of multiple correlation was R = 0.55, which means that 30% of the overall variability on the cultural intelligence variable can be explained with the selected predictor variables (R^2 = 0.30). The following variables proved to be significant predictors of teachers' cultural intelligence - contacts with people from other cultures, enjoyment of intercultural communication, openness to cultural learning and experiencing multicultural classes as a challenge. More detailed results on the relative importance of separate predictors are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Predictors of cultural intelligence – regression analyses

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations	
	B	Beta			Zero-order	Partial
(Constant)	45.77		6.02	0.01		
Contact with people from other cultures	**-2.051**	**-.206**	**-2.28**	**0.05**	**-0.23**	**-0.19**
Communication in foreign language	1.903	.098	1.01	0.31	0.20	0.12
Reading of foreign literature	1.580	.159	1.60	0.11	0.18	0.16
TV travel shows	1.095	.116	1.26	0.21	0.22	0.13
Importance of knowing other cultures	-1.859	-.112	-1.18	0.24	0.02	-0.12
Multicultural composition of the class as challenge	**2.905**	**.240**	**2.61**	**0.01**	**0.30**	**0.26**
Openness for intercultural learning	**1.622**	**.185**	**2.08**	**0.05**	**0.28**	**0.21**
Enjoyment of intercultural communication	**2.582**	**.262**	**2.87**	**0.01**	**0.36**	**0.28**

Our results suggest that enjoyment of intercultural communication is the most important predictor of cultural intelligence. The correlation with cultural intelligence was 0.36 and, also very important, the partial correlation was not significantly lower, showing that this relation is not the result of the impact of other predictor variables. The teachers who enjoy intercultural communication have higher scores on the Cultural intelligence scale (M=69.89), compared both to the teachers who do not like to interact with members of other cultures (M=65.57) and the teachers who are not able to assess whether they enjoy intercultural communication or not (M=59.63). Treating the multicultural composition of the class as challenge is the second important predictor of cultural intelligence. A considerably higher level of cultural intelligence is shown by teachers who think that teaching in a multicultural classroom is a challenge (M=69.92) than by teachers who believe that teaching multicultural classes is not challenging (M=63) or by ambivalent teachers (M=64.37). Openness for intercultural learning is the third important predictor of cultural intelligence. The teachers who believe that they can learn a lot from students with a different cultural background have higher scores on the Cultural intelligence scale than the teachers with an undifferentiated attitude (M=66.35) and the teachers not interested in this form of intercultural learning (M=63.64). A somewhat less important predictor of cultural intelligence is contact with people from other cultures. According to the results, the teachers who have had more frequent contacts with members of other cultures achieve a lower score on the Cultural Intelligence Scale (M=66.79) than teachers with frequent contacts (M=68.96). At first glance, this result is rather paradoxical. However, it indicates that the frequency of contacts with members of other cultures is not itself a sufficient developmental factor for cultural intelligence. In order to develop a cultural intelligence it is necessary for the contacts with members of other cultures to be meaningful.

The information that 4 out of 8 variables proved to be poor predictors of cultural intelligence requires additional consideration. The results of the study highlight that mediating exposure to other cultures through cultural means, such as learning foreign languages, reading of foreign literature and watching television programmes will not lead to higher levels of cultural intelligence. There is a tendency for teachers who show such interests to have higher scores on the Cultural intelligence scale, but these differences are not statistically significant. Moreover, the importance of knowing other cultures is a poor predictor of cultural intelligence because most teachers believe that knowledge of other cultures is important.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Teachers' cultural intelligence or lack of it can be very influential within the educational setting. Findings obtained in this study indicate that the majority of Serbian teachers demonstrate a high level of cultural intelligence. This is a very promising result, given the fact that many Serbian teachers work in culturally heterogeneous classes and that they are expected to be able to meet the needs of students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, the results show that the teachers who enjoy intercultural communication, who perceive the multiculturalism of the class as a stimulus and those who are open to intercultural learning achieve a higher score on the Cultural Intelligence Scale.

These results have implications for teacher training. Curricula for teacher training should incorporate and promote factors such as openness to intercultural interaction and intercultural learning, readiness to recognise and utilise multiculturalism and cultural diversity as a learning resource (Petrović, 2006), mutual respect and mindfulness in order to increase future teacher's cultural intelligence.

On the other hand, the results of this study indicate that contact with people from other cultures is not a sufficient precondition for instigating and developing cultural intelligence. The best way to develop cultural intelligence is through engaging in activities involving intimate cross-cultural interaction. For example, such types of activities should be provided through education and employment in different cultures (Crowne, 2008), study visits, international teachers exchange programmes (Petrović & Zlatković, 2009) and etc.

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