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CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE OF BULGARIAN ACADEMIC LECTURERS³³

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Abstract: *The paper analyses results from a survey which assesses the levels of cultural intelligence of 421 Bulgarian academic lecturers. The questionnaire is an adapted and translated version of Van Dyne's and Soon Ang's cultural intelligence scale (CQS). Results are based on descriptive statistics and correlational analysis to measure the relationship between the metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components, and the lecturers' teaching experience. The SPSS v. 25 was used to analyse the results. Findings show that there is no correlation between the teaching experience of Bulgarian academic lecturers and their cultural intelligence levels. The overall level of CQ among participating lecturers is very high. The paper concludes that cultural intelligence is an important factor in achieving high degree of internationalisation in Bulgarian universities (HEIs).*

Keywords: *cultural intelligence, academics, teaching experience, HEIs, correlation analysis*

JEL Codes: *M12, M14, M16*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has significantly driven the internationalization of academic and professional fields, leading to more professionals working globally and an uptick in hiring foreign professors at universities. This trend has been documented by Sousa et al. (2023) as increasing over the past decade, occasionally causing complications between visiting academics and host institutions. Furthermore, student mobility programs like Erasmus illustrate this trend but also introduce communication challenges between international students and faculty. This study aims to assess the intercultural competence and communication confidence of Bulgarian professors when interacting with students from diverse backgrounds, exploring any difficulties they face in these intercultural settings. Intelligence plays a vital role in human relationships and varies in forms such as social intelligence (SQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), and general mental ability (IQ). Influenced by cultural norms, globalization has prompted scholars like Ang & Van Dyne (2008) and Earley & Ang (2003) to develop the concept of cultural intelligence. This type of intelligence represents a person's ability to navigate and adapt effectively within diverse cultural settings. Cultural intelligence is increasingly recognized as important in cross-cultural psychology and social sciences.

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EXPOSITION

Problem statement

Cultural intelligence (CQ) builds upon emotional and social intelligence, which are essential for managing complex social interactions and emotional situations. Van Dyne et al. (2012) describe social intelligence (SQ) as the ability to understand and influence others, while emotional intelligence (EQ) involves managing one's emotions constructively.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is a framework designed to combine the essential skills needed for effective performance in diverse cultural settings (Ang et al., 2007). It has four dimensions - metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural. They represent an individual's ability to adapt successfully and interact within various cultural contexts.

The metacognitive CQ focuses on the higher-order cognitive processes that enable individuals to comprehend cultural norms. It involves reflecting on one's own cultural awareness during interactions. Here thoughtful and informed responses are expected. To develop one's metacognitive skills, we need to monitor and revise our mental models, as more information is gathered during our life experiences.

Cognitive CQ involves the acquisition of knowledge about the language, cultural heritage, customs, practices, and values of different cultures. It equips individuals with the factual foundation necessary for intercultural competence. This dimension encompasses a broad spectrum of cultural traits that influence culture-specific behavior.

Motivational CQ represents the desire to learn about and engage with diverse cultures. It is characterized by the intrinsic interest in managing intercultural encounters. The person who possesses this quality shows persistence and dedication in learning about different cultures. This way the individual knows how to create meaningful connections with people of different cultural origin.

The most observable dimensions is behavioral CQ. It is the ability to act appropriately when interacting with individuals from different cultures. Behavioural CQ involves the use of specific verbal and non-verbal cues, and adjusting one's reactions to align with the cultural context. This capability reduces the misunderstandings and enhances the cooperation across cultures. Together, the dimensions form a comprehensive approach to developing cultural fluency. Thus CQ can lead to more successful and harmonious intercultural relationships.

The development of CQ is largely influenced by factors like personality traits and international experiences, and its effectiveness can be assessed using tools like The Short Form Cultural Intelligence Scale (Neto et al., 2021). Ang and Van Dyne's research underscores CQ's role in predicting successful intercultural outcomes.

Recent research highlights the interest in assessing the cultural intelligence (CQ) of educational leaders through various studies. Al Dhaheri (2022) validated the CQ Scale in the UAE, finding high CQ levels among school leaders in Abu Dhabi, particularly due to the region's cultural diversity. Another study by Boštjančič, Johnson, & Belak (2018) explored the adaptability of the CQ Scale across cultures, adapting it for use in Slovenia with input from American and Slovenian academics. The third study, conducted in Portugal by Sousa et al. (2023), focused on the CQ of staff at a Portuguese engineering institution, highlighting a need for improvement in cognitive CQ through increased intercultural exposure and specific training programs.

These studies collectively suggest that intercultural experiences correlate positively with CQ, indicating that sustained exposure to diverse cultures can enhance cultural intelligence. This relationship underscores the potential benefits of globalization in enriching intercultural knowledge across communities.

Globalization significantly impacts national education systems, particularly through the process of academic internationalization in universities. This strategic initiative transforms teaching, research, and student life by embedding an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the core missions and operations of higher education institutions (HEIs). As highlighted by Jamil and Jaffar (2023), this transformation aims to enhance international collaborations and the quality of education and research. Moreover, it addresses equity, diversity, and inclusion to foster broader

social improvements. Effective internationalization requires universities to possess culturally intelligent faculty and staff capable of interacting with diverse cultural backgrounds (Sousa et al., 2023).

In Bulgaria, institutions have made the shift towards internationalization with the introduction of international programs like Fulbright and Erasmus. The process started in the late 1990s with increasing the number of academic exchanges. The "Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021-2030" is the most influential political initiative in this matter. Bulgarian government and the Ministry of Education and Science provide strategic funding for universities in the country. This strategy focuses on preparing students, academic lecturers, as well as the administrative personnel to thrive in a diverse, multilingual environment. It is mostly done through targeted training in ICT and language skills. Other competences are still not included.

In the context of these developments, a key component of Bulgaria's strategic approach to internationalization could involve assessing and developing the cultural intelligence of academic lecturers. This way policy makers in higher education can integrate international elements better into their roles, ultimately enriching the academic environment.

We suggest that academic internationalization in Bulgaria requires a detailed strategy, which should include evaluating and enhancing the cultural intelligence of university professors. Enhancing this attribute is a factor for successful integration of international perspectives into the teaching, research, and service activities of higher education institutions (Sousa, et al., 2023). Consequently, we propose that assessing cultural intelligence within Bulgaria's academic faculty has tangible benefits. Our current study collects data on the cross-cultural interactions of Bulgarian university professors, leading to the formulation of our primary hypothesis: Bulgarian university professors have well-developed cultural intelligence. We also propose a secondary hypothesis about a present correlation between the teaching experience of Bulgarian academic lecturers and their cultural intelligence.

Research method

The survey was conducted online using Google Forms from November 2023 to January of 2024, targeting educators in Bulgarian higher education institutions. A sample size of 421 respondents from a total of 20,882 instructors achieved a confidence level of 96.18% and a margin of error of 4.73%. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were utilized to analyze the data collected via a standardized questionnaire, which comprised 28 questions divided into three categories: familiarity with foreign cultures, cultural intelligence, and demographic information of the participants.

The bulk of the questions, twenty in total, were based on the Soon Ang Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), translated into Bulgarian, covering four components (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral). Respondents gauged all 20 components on a ranking scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Demographic questions focused on age, gender, teaching experience, education level, and scientific field. Data analysis employed tables to present distributions and used Kendall's tau-b and Spearman's correlation coefficients to assess the strength of correlations. The values range from weak ($0 < R < 0.3$) to very high ($0.9 < R < 1$), and were processed using IBM SPSS 25.

Discussion of results

The data reveal that Bulgarian teachers possess a strong metacognitive CQ, showing an acute awareness of others' cultural preferences and an ability to effectively predict and analyze intercultural interactions. Although the cognitive component of cultural intelligence showed the lowest scores among the aspects measured, they still registered above average, with scores ranging from 4.42 to 5.29. This suggests that Bulgarian professors have a substantial understanding of cultural similarities and differences, enabling them to organize knowledge contextually for successful intercultural interactions.

Table 1. Bulgarian academic lecturers' CQ levels – mean average values

Components	Average value
Metacognitive CQ	5,99
Cognitive CQ	4,76
Behavioral CQ	5,39
Motivational CQ	5,45
Total	5,3975

The motivational aspect of cultural intelligence also scored high, with most responses ranging between 4.59 and 6.15, and the highest frequency of responses at the upper limit of the scale, reflecting a strong motivation and appreciation for intercultural engagement. This is consistent with Bulgarian cultural values that emphasize the importance of adaptability and interaction in foreign settings (Minkov, 2011).

Behavioral CQ scores were notably high as well, with average values all above 5. This indicates that Bulgarian professors are adept at appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication in diverse cultural contexts, aligning well with the norms of various cultures.

Overall, these findings support the hypothesis that Bulgarian university professors possess well-developed cultural intelligence. Despite the initial assumption that greater teaching experience would correlate with higher cultural intelligence, the data, which included a significant proportion of respondents with over 16 years of experience, did not explicitly confirm this relationship.

Table 2. Teaching experience of respondents

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
up to 5 years	50	11,9
between 6 and 10 years	53	12,6
between 11 and 15 years	86	20,4
between 16 and 20 years	66	15,7
more than 20 years	166	39,4
Total	421	100,0

Kendall and Spearman's rank correlation was calculated between teaching experience and statements on the individual components of cultural intelligence. Based on the calculated correlation coefficients between the specified factors, it was found that all coefficients have a weak correlation dependence and have values tending to 0 (see Tables 11. to 14.).

Table 3. Correlations between teaching experience and Metacognitive CQ components

Correlation Coefficient	Metacognitive CQ components			
	MC1	MC2	MC3	MC4
Kendall's tau b	0,079	0,037	0,033	0,031
Spearman's rho	0,094	0,044	0,039	0,038

Table 4. Correlations between teaching experience and Cognitive CQ components

Correlation Coefficient	Cognitive CQ components					
	COG1	COG2	COG3	COG4	COG5	COG6
Kendall's tau b	0,113**	0,040	0,017	0,022	0,068	0,048
Spearman's rho	0,141**	0,051	0,022	0,028	0,085	0,060

Table 5. Correlations between teaching experience and Motivational CQ components

Correlation Coefficient	Motivational CQ components
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	MOT1	MOT2	MOT3	MOT4	MOT5
Kendall's tau b	0,004	-0,049	0,011	-0,009	-0,025
Spearman's rho	0,004	-0,059	0,014	-0,012	-0,030

Table 6. Correlations between teaching experience and Behavioral CQ components

Correlation Coefficient	Behavioral CQ components				
	BEH1	BEH2	BEH3	BEH4	BEH5
Kendall's tau b	0,052	0,072	0,053	0,067	0,087*
Spearman's rho	0,063	0,089	0,066	0,081	0,107*

The findings did not support our initial hypothesis that teaching experience correlates with the cultural intelligence of Bulgarian educators. The study yielded several key insights:

1. University professors exhibit high levels of cultural intelligence, demonstrating ease in cross-cultural communication, intrinsic motivation, and a genuine interest in engaging with different cultures effectively.

2. The high cultural intelligence among academic staff is consistent with similar findings from other countries (Gozzoli & Gazzaroli, 2018; Al Dhaheri, 2022; Sousa et al., 2023). This phenomenon may be attributed to the unique aspects of the global academic environment, socioeconomic disparities between academic lecturers and the general populace, and local cultural openness to diversity—areas that merit further research.

In summary, Bulgarian university professors display significant cultural adaptability and effectiveness in international settings, a trait likely influenced by cultural values that esteem adaptability and integration into diverse cultural settings (Minkov, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study highlight a significant yet often overlooked aspect of higher education institutions' internationalization: educators at Bulgarian universities display a natural inclination and enthusiasm for effective cross-cultural interactions, rooted in local cultural norms. The results indicate that professors generally face few challenges in navigating cultural differences successfully.

Consequently, we propose that the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) should become the essential tool for achieving the internationalization objectives of Bulgarian higher education institutions (HEIs). The CQS is also relevant to business settings, especially within multinational companies or teams from diverse backgrounds. Understanding both one's own cultural nuances and those of foreign colleagues is proven to help in creating effective collaborations. Cultural diversity has the potential to increase productivity, too. Other advantage of the CQ scale is that it can serve as a self-assessment tool for evaluating one's own cultural intelligence. Even the short-form version can help in identifying areas which need improvement.

Finally, educational institutions can implement the CQS to enhance cultural sensitivity across their organizations. This might involve participating in cultural sensitivity training or increasing interactions with diverse teams to better understand their cultural dynamics. Promoting cultural sensitivity could foster more inclusive and productive environment, thereby supporting the internationalization of HEIs'.

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