

Cultural intelligence as a Predictor of Acculturative stress and Psychological Well-being among College Students

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The present study examined the role of cultural intelligence in predicting acculturative stress and psychological well-being among college students. The sample consists of 219 Kashmiri college students (male = 52.10%, female = 47.90%; mean age = 23.30 years, SD = 1.70) who migrated to Bhopal (Central India) for receiving education and completed self reported measures of cultural intelligence, acculturative stress and psychological well-being. The findings of the study revealed that cultural intelligence is a significant predictor of acculturative stress and psychological well-being. Relevance of the present findings for student's cultural intelligence, acculturative stress, and psychological well-being has been implicated.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, Acculturative Stress, Psychological Well-being, Kashmiri Students.

Recently, cultural intelligence has emerged in literature and has attracted the attention of researchers. It is defined as "multifaceted competency consisting of cultural knowledge, the practice of mindfulness, and the repertoire of behavioral skills (Thomas & Inkson, 2004). Yet little is known about the relationship of cultural intelligence to acculturative stress and psychological well-being. The present study may expect the link between cultural intelligence, acculturative stress and psychological well-being.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Cultural intelligence is defined as "a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts" and therefore refers to "a form of situated intelligence where intelligently adaptive behaviors are culturally bound to the values and beliefs of a given society or culture" (Earley & Ang, 2003). Individuals having higher CQ can easily navigate and understand unfamiliar cultures, theoretically, they are expected to be more successful when working and living in countries other than their own. Despite promising evidence on its predictive ability on cross-cultural effectiveness (e.g., cross-cultural adjustment, job performance, intention to return

early), however, due to the newness of the CQ construct, the factors that could predict CQ construct are still limited in the literature.

Earley and Ang (2003) conceptualized a multifactor concept of CQ that includes mental (meta-cognitive and cognitive), motivational, and behavioral components. Meta-cognitive CQ reflects the processes individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge, including knowledge of and control over individual thinking process relating to the culture (Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006). While meta-cognitive CQ focuses on higher-order cognitive process, cognitive CQ reflects knowledge of the norms, practices and conventions in different cultures (Ang et al., 2007). This includes knowledge of the economic, legal, and social systems of different cultures and subcultures (Triandis, 2006) and knowledge of basic frameworks of cultural values. Motivational CQ reflects magnitude and direction of energy applied toward learning about and functioning in cross-cultural situations (Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006). Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, and Ng (2004) conceptualized motivational CQ as a specific form of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation in cross-cultural situations. Lastly, behavioral CQ is the capability to exhibit appropriate verbal

and nonverbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures (Ang et al., 2006). Those with high behavioral CQ exhibit situational appropriate behaviours based on their broad range of verbal and nonverbal capabilities, such as exhibiting culturally appropriate words, tone, gestures and facial expressions (Gudykunst et al., 1988, cited in Ang et al., 2007).

Despite the newness of the construct, empirical research on CQ is promising. Ang et al. (2007), found CQ significantly explaining the variance in performance and adjustment over and above effects of demographic characteristics and general cognitive ability among international executives and foreign professionals. Specifically, Ang et al. (2007) demonstrated that mental (meta-cognitive and cognitive) CQ significantly predicts cultural judgment and decision making and task performance; motivational CQ significantly predicts general adjustment in intercultural environments, while behavioural CQ related to task performance and general adjustment in intercultural environment. Templer, Tay, and Chandrasekar (2006) found that motivational CQ significantly predicts cross-cultural adjustment of foreign professionals, over and above pre-job assignments and interventions such as realistic job previews and preview of realistic living conditions.

Acculturative Stress

Most migrant students have experienced many stressors during the process of adapting to a new society. For example, students new to the culture, which is different from their native culture, may experience the severing of ties to family and friends in the culture of origin. This may result in feeling of loss and lead to a reduction in effective coping resources. Migrant students may also experience factors that are particular to the new environment, including discrimination, insecurity, language inadequacy, lack of social and financial resources, feeling of not belonging in the host society, and sense of anxious disorientation in response to the unfamiliar environment. Acculturating individuals may also feel pulled between tradition values, norms, and customs and those in the new society.

The previously mentioned types of experiences are encapsulated by the term “acculturative stress.” Acculturative stress occurs when individuals experience problems arising from the acculturation process (Williams & Berry, 1991). It can stem from incongruent cultural values and practices, language difficulties, and discrimination (Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994). Immigrants are most likely to experience this form of stress, but it is also seen in later generations, including later-generation college students (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). Second-generation youth may feel caught between the opposing values of their parents and peers or experience conflict between their own values and those of their less acculturated parents (Miranda, Bilot, Peluso, Berman, & Van Meek, 2006). The aspects of acculturative stress are salient to college students, which may relate less to language proficiency or unfamiliarity with prevailing cultural practices and more to cultural self-consciousness and the experience of conflicting value systems (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987).

Williams and Berry (1991) suggested that acculturative stress leads to negative emotional states such as anxiety and depression. General models of stress posit that perceiving a situation as being threatening or beyond one’s coping resources causes stress and leads to negative affect (Barlow, 2002; Cohen & Wills, 1985). So, when pressures to assimilate exists, lack of intercultural competence, or discrimination are perceived as exceeding one’s ability to cope, this should lead to a subjective perception of stress and to negative emotions. Several studies have supported an association between acculturative stress and negative affect. For example, acculturative stress has been linked to more depressive symptoms and sometimes to more anxiety symptoms (Parka, 2009).

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is the integration of the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of human functioning (Bensley, 1991; Magilvy, Congdon, Martinez, Davis, & Averill, 2000). Typically, due to ease in understanding, this concept has been regarded as satisfaction, happiness, and morale

(Breytspraak, 1984); and has been measured by means of an individuals' ability to cope with life stresses and strains or by an individuals' self-appraisal of balance and harmony in their lives (Magilvy, Congdon, Martinez, Davis, & Averill, 2000). Although, this concept is understood to vacillate throughout one's lifetime due to external and internal pressures it still remains broad and unclear and psychological well-being measures remain incomplete (Cuellar, Bastida & Braccio, 2004).

Psychological well-being and acculturation studies have found contradictory findings; therefore, emphasizing the heterogeneity of minority groups and the conceptual ambiguity in defining and measuring well-being (Gallagher-Thompson, Tazeau, Basilio, Hansen, Polich, Menendez, & Villa, 1997). Overall, studies emphasizing these variables have found positive, negative, and curvilinear relationships between psychological distress, mental health, well-being and acculturation (Miranda, Frevert, & Kern, 1998). Hypotheses about these relationships commonly indicate that persons who have recently migrated to their host culture have left their traditional supportive networks and did not have sufficient time to reconstruct these networks. Other hypothesis include a decrease in culturally supportive interpersonal networks with those who are more acculturated; while other views include increased psychological well-being for those persons who are able to combine acculturation and retention of traditional cultural elements. Nevertheless, studies looking at acculturation and psychological well-being seldom includes and measures mediating variables (e.g., gender differences, immigration experience, social mobility, stage of life cycle, spirituality and the historical period covering the life span) that may impact any of these variables (Chae, Brown, & Bolden, 2004).

Given that acculturation and psychological well-being are likely to be mediated by a variety of variables, their relationship appears to be complex and remains misunderstood. A single dimension of well-being does not exist in isolation from physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of well being, studying how acculturation impacts psychological well-being, although a more thorough view, is difficult.

Furthermore, research that has emphasized a more global view of well-being has not emphasized differences between and among the minority groups. More specifically, studies that have looked at acculturation among minority persons and how these variables impact these individual's psychological well-being, have found that its lacking among the students within the country context.

Present Study

Present study examines the relationship of cultural intelligence to acculturative stress and psychological well-being of migrant student population. This study focused on the Kashmiri students who migrated to Bhopal (central India) for the purpose of studying there . Since, there is a lack of empirical research on the relationship of cultural intelligence, acculturative stress and psychological well-being, the present study expects to explore the possible relationships between these factors among the student population. In view of the above the following hypothesis will be tested in the present study.

1. Cultural intelligence will significantly predict acculturative stress among Kashmiri students.
2. Cultural intelligence will significantly predict psychological well-being among Kashmiri students.

Method

Participants:

Participants of the present study included 219 Kashmiri students (114 males and 105 females) studying in different universities and colleges located in Bhopal city, Central India. The age of these participants ranged from 20 to 30 years (Mean = 23.30, SD = 1.70). The majority of the participants (49.30%) had less than one year of living experience in Bhopal while 35.60% were living in Bhopal from 1 to 2 years. The percentage of the participants living in Bhopal from 2 to 3 years was 15.10. As participants of the present study were students who migrated from Kashmir to Bhopal for study purpose, the majority (81.30%) of these participants were doing post graduate studies. Some were research students (6.40%) at different departments of the universities.

Measures:

Psychological General Well-Being Schedule (Dupuy, 1984): It measures affective and emotional states of the participants corresponding to sense of subjective well-being or distress. This measure consists of 22 self-administrated items measuring psychological and general well-being of respondents in six areas: anxiety, depressed mood, positive well-being, self control, general health, and vitality. For each item there are six optional responses that are scored on a scale of 0 to 5, according to the frequency of the affective experience. A value of 0 is given for the most negative option and 5 for most positive option. The score of all the domains can be summarized by providing a summary score, which ranges from 0 representing a worst possible level of well-being to a maximum of 110 points representing the best achievable well-being. Proposed cutoff scores representing three level of distress i.e., severe (0 to 60), moderate distress (61 to 72), and positive well-being (73 to 110). In this scale, high score indicates better quality of life. Taylor et al., (2003) has reported internal consistency for sample of African American women ($\alpha = 0.92$). In the present study, the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.94.

Social, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental Scale-Short Form (SAFE-SF; Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987): It assesses acculturative stress in social, attitudinal, familial, and environmental contexts. Respondents are asked to rate the extent to which they perceive 24 items to be stressful in their lives on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "0" (strongly disagree) to "4" (strongly agree). The overall score of an individual on this measure may range from 0 to 120; high score indicating high acculturative stress while low scores indicating low acculturative stress. Mena, Padilla, and Maldonado (1987) have reported internal consistency reliability for sample of adolescent ethnic minority youth ($\alpha = 0.89$). In the present study, the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.88.

Cultural Intelligence Scale (Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, & Ng, 2004): 20 item scale measures the four components of cultural intelligence i.e.,

meta-cognition, cognition, motivational, and behavioral components. Respondents are asked to rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "1" (strongly disagree) to "7" (strongly agree). The total score is derived by adding the scores of the items belonging to different areas and the mean scores are obtained. A high score on this scale indicates higher level of cultural intelligence. As reported by Ang, et al. (2006), the internal consistency reliability of the scales were 0.76 (meta-cognition), 0.84 (cognition), 0.76 (motivational), and 0.83 (behavioral). In the present sample, the internal consistency reliability (using Cronbach's alpha) was 0.83 (meta-cognition), 0.84 (cognition), 0.76 (motivational), and 0.84 (behavioral).

Procedure:

Initial meeting with the participants was done at different departments of colleges and universities in Bhopal. They were informed about the purpose of the study. Upon initial meeting, each participant was also explained the nature of the study. Participants were informed about the confidentiality regarding information collected from them. A time for data collection was set up that was conducive for the participants. Before administering the questionnaire, the purpose of the study was again explained to the participants. A good rapport was built with the participants for getting correct responses. Some necessary instruction and guidelines were provided to them for properly filling the questionnaire. After this, the questionnaires were provided to them and they were requested to fill-up the questionnaire as per the instructions given in the questionnaire. After completion of the questionnaire participants returned the questionnaire and they were thanked for their participation and cooperation.

Results

Simple linear regression analysis was applied to examine the amount of variance explained by cultural intelligence in various measures of acculturative stress and psychological well-being. Results of regression analysis presented in Table 1 revealed that 3% variance in acculturative stress scores was explained by the scores on cultural intelligence ($r^2 = .03$, $b = -.04$,

Table 1. Result of Simple Regression analysis predicting Acculturative stress and Psychological well-being from Cultural Intelligence

Criterion Variables	r^2	$F(1, 217)$	B	$SE-b$	t	95% CI
Acculturative stress	.03	6.43**	-.04	.02	-2.54**	-0.7 – -0.01
Psychological well-being						
Anxiety	.03	6.90**	.06	.02	2.63**	0.03–0.12
Depressed mood	.04	9.59**	.07	.02	3.10**	0.02 –0.11
Positive well-being	.03	6.61**	.06	.02	2.57**	0.01 –0.10
Self control	.04	8.15**	.07	.02	2.85**	0.02 –0.12
General health	.02	5.26**	.05	.02	2.29**	0.01 –0.10
Vitality	.07	16.78**	.08	.02	4.10**	0.04 –0.12
Overall Psychological well-being	.50	11.42**	.40	.12	3.78**	0.17–0.63

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

$t = -2.54$, $p < .01$). The obtained results clearly revealed that cultural intelligence was negatively related to acculturative stress. This shows that with increasing cultural intelligence acculturative stress decreases significantly.

With regards to the psychological well-being of participants, results of simple regression analyses revealed cultural intelligence as a significant predictor of anxiety ($r^2 = .03$, $b = .06$, $t = 2.63$, $p < .01$), and depressed mood ($r^2 = .04$, $b = .07$, $t = 3.10$, $p < .01$) explaining 3% and 4% variance respectively in these measures. On the measure of psychological well-being higher scores on anxiety and depressed mood indicate low anxiety and less depressed mood showing better psychological well-being. Results revealed cultural intelligence was positively related to anxiety and depressed mood, this means that with increasing cultural intelligence, anxiety and depressed mood increases significantly. Positive well-being and self control were also predicted by cultural intelligence as it explained 3% variance in the scores on positive well-being ($r^2 = .03$, $b = .06$, $t = 2.57$, $p < .01$) and 4% variance in self control ($r^2 = .04$, $b = .07$, $t = 2.85$, $p < .01$). Cultural intelligence was again found positively related to positive well-being and self control indicating that with increasing acculturative stress, positive well-being and self control aspect

of psychological well-being increases.

Similarly, cultural intelligence was found as a significant predictor of scores on general health explaining 2% variance ($r^2 = .02$, $b = .05$, $t = 2.29$, $p < .01$). Also, vitality was significantly predicted by cultural intelligence, as it explained 7% variance in the scores on vitality ($r^2 = .07$, $b = .08$, $t = 4.10$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, overall psychological well-being was found significantly and positively related to cultural intelligence as it accounted for 50% variance in the scores on overall psychological well-being ($r^2 = .50$, $b = .40$, $t = -3.78$, $p < .01$). This indicates that with increasing cultural intelligence overall psychological well-being of participants increased.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship of cultural intelligence, acculturative stress and psychological well-being of Kashmiri students who migrated to Bhopal, central India, for obtaining higher education. The culture of students, who migrate from Kashmir to Bhopal, is totally different in respect to geographical features, climate, values, customs, religion, language, food habits, behavior and life-style. Since, eco-cultural condition of Kashmir valley is very different from that of central India and the two places manifest a contrasting difference, it becomes quite difficult for Kashmiri students

to adapt themselves with the eco-cultural conditions of central India. Culture contact while living and studying in Bhopal is a new experience for most of the naive Kashmiri students, which creates a lot of stress among them.

In the present study, it was hypothesized that cultural intelligence is a significant predictor of acculturative stress and psychological well-being of participants. Result of simple regression analysis (Table 1) revealed negative and significant relationship of cultural intelligence to acculturative stress. This shows that with increasing cultural intelligence acculturative stress decreases significantly. Cultural intelligence was found as positively and significantly related with different dimensions of psychological wellbeing. This indicates that with increasing cultural intelligence different aspects of psychological well-being of the participants increased significantly. In fact, cultural intelligence provides insight about individual's capabilities to cope with intercultural situations as it makes individuals feel adjusted in situations characterized by cultural diversity.

The findings of the present study were affected by some methodological limitations that may affect the generalization of the results. The data of the present study was collected from Bhopal city only. Data gathered in this cultural context may therefore be unique, and it is entirely possible that a replication of this study in a different part of the country might yield different findings. Furthermore, the use of self-report measures, which are also affected by a participant's level of self-awareness, was another limitation of this study. Also, a sample size of the present study was relatively small and homogeneous, which limits generalization. The cross-sectional design used in the present study does not allow drawing conclusions regarding causality. Longitudinal research will be needed to support such conclusions.

Despite the above limitations, the present investigation contributes substantially and uniquely to research on acculturation and psychological well-being of students.

Findings from this study have broadened our understanding of the acculturation process and its role in health and psychological well-being of migrant students in the context of within country migration. The robustness of the findings indicates that students migrating to a different culture, even within a country like India, experience some acculturative stress which influences their psychological well-being. These findings have important implications for professionals in research, health care practice and education.

In a large and culturally diverse country like India, it is surprising that no attention has been given to within country migration of students and their acculturation. The present study has taken an important step in attempting to examine the relationship of cultural intelligence to acculturative stress and psychological well-being among Kashmiri students in Bhopal who belong to a different eco-cultural background. It is important that further research be conducted with students who migrate to study in other parts of the country. To develop a richer understanding of such groups, further research assessing the impact of acculturation and other variables like social support, models of acculturation (i.e., assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization), cultural intelligence is encouraged.

From an intervention point of view, current findings suggest that professionals who work with migrant students should be culturally competent and sensitive by becoming familiar with the students' cultural expectations and experiences. By doing so, professionals may be able to develop and implement culturally sensitive programs that not only identify at risk students, but also offer a positive academic and social environment that facilitates cross-cultural skills.

Furthermore, professionals can design programs that address acculturation issues from a more vigorous preventive and educational approach by incorporating the social context that is a reflection of the migrant students' lived

experiences. Assessment of support system of the students should be helpful before designing and implementing the intervention programmes. The role of friends and important others in the student's acculturation process should be determined and emphasized. In addition, programs that offer support for faculty to help students can also be beneficial in the student's acculturation process. The knowledge gained through this research may increase the cultural competence of health care professionals responsible for managing acculturative stress, particular for migrant students, enabling host culture to develop an appropriate, effective health promotion and mental distress prevention strategy.

The findings of the present study could also be utilized by the educators. As the number of migrant students in higher education classes increases, professors and host students face the need to examine their assumptions about the teaching and learning process. It has been found that holding collectivistic values can impact the students' acculturation experience. The experience that emerge from this kind of cultural value difference can have implications for teaching and learning. Therefore, it is important for the faculty as well as host students to be aware of the cross-cultural differences surrounding migrant students' academic adjustments. The cultural diversity that migrant students bring into the academic arena should be used as an opportunity for facilitating teaching and learning.

The findings from the current study have significant implications for future direction. This study provided a comprehensive assessment of within country student acculturation, covering issues related to acculturative stress, health, and psychological well-being. The study also advanced the knowledge of within country acculturation by testing numerous theoretical and empirically based hypotheses proposed by previous researchers. Thus, this study lays the groundwork for future research on within country acculturation of student population.

Present findings also suggest a need for developing culturally effective outreach and intervention programs for Kashmiri students. Further, research is needed to develop culture-centered and culture-specific health promotion strategies and to explore their effectiveness, as to better serve the other subgroups (i.e., traders, employees etc.) including migrant students of Kashmiri culture in order to improve their health and psychological well-being. In addition, more culturally specific questionnaires are needed to assess the psychological well-being among acculturative students. Further, validation of the measurements of cultural intelligence, acculturative stress and psychological well-being is also necessary. As most of the measures of the present study were developed in western countries, these measures lack their validity in the Indian cultural context. Further research should include questions regarding acculturation, cultural intelligence and psychological well-being incorporating elements of Indian cultural contexts in order to obtain a better assessment of variables in their area of research.

Finally, longitudinal studies may be another recommended research direction to study cultural intelligence, acculturation, and psychological well-being of acculturating students over time. Longitudinal studies can provide a broader picture of adaptation process. Migrant students' experiences can be explored more realistically from the beginning of their arrival. Also, characteristics of each phase of acculturation need to be examined in detail, which can be possible only through well designed longitudinal studies.

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