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Cultural Intelligence among Young Adults: Its Impact on Intercultural Communication and Sociocultural Adaptation

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine the impact of cultural intelligence (CQ) on intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) and sociocultural adaptation (SCA) among university students. It also investigates how individuals from different geographical regions differ with respect to these variables. A total of 224 students were purposively selected from different universities in the Bathinda district of Punjab, India. For collecting the data, the Cultural Intelligence Scale (Ang et al., 2007), the Intercultural Communication Apprehension Scale by Neuliep & McCroskey (1997), and the Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale-Revised (Wilson, 2012) were utilized. The statistical analysis was done on IBM SPSS V27. Results revealed a significant correlation between all the components of CQand ICA, and SCA is correlated to every dimension of CQ except meta-cognitive CQ. Moreover, on examining the impact, the motivational CQ impacts ICA, and both cognitive and motivational CQ impact sociocultural adaptation.Additionally the result revealed that there is a difference in cognitive CQ, a dimension of CQ and SCA among students from different geographical boundaries.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary youth of India, comprising around one-fifth of the total population (Census, 2011), are surpassing their place of origin and national and international boundaries in pursuit of the highest quality education and development opportunities. The global transformation is projected to lead to a multicultural society's rise and a multi-ethnic society's development (Zharkynbeona et al., 2025). Through immigration, youth are exposed to new cultures, customs, and lifestyles, positioning them as active contributors to future societal norms (Sikevich& Skvortsov, 2020). However, multilingual and culturally diverse settings often bring stressors that impact life satisfaction (Chen et al., 2014) and pose challenges for outsiders (Poyrazli& Grahame, 2007), leading to cultural shock, loneliness, and even dropout (Thompson, 2018). As global migration strengthens transnational ties, it fosters multilayered social identities (Freires et al., 2024), making cultural intelligence (CQ) essential for navigating identity in such environments.

CQ is defined as the ability to function efficiently in culturally diverse settings. According to Ang and Van Dyne, (2008), CQ comprises four key dimensions and plays a critical role in multicultural and international environments. The first dimension, **metacognitive CQ**, is an individual's conscious cultural awareness and executive processing during cross-cultural interactions. The second, **cognitive CQ**, involves an individual's awareness of cultural norms, practices, and conventions across various cultural settings. The third dimension, **motivational CQ,** is the ability to direct attention and energy toward learning about and adapting to culturally diverse environments (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). So, **behavioral CQ** refers to a person's ability to use accurate verbal and non-verbal actions when communicating with individuals from different cultures (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008).

CQ is important for young adults to develop social skills (Koc & Turan, 2018) and social identity (Guan & SO, 2022). The cultural landscape of the host place may come up with issues like cognitive load of juggling between multiple languages, the performance pressure, and the challenge of navigating cultural differences (Vakkai et al., 2020). This suggests the need for developing CQ that will facilitate to easily adapt to the new competitive environment in a multi-cultural environment (Karroubi et al., 2014). Intercultural communication, essential in such settings, is shaped more by differences in beliefs, ethnicities, and lifestyles than by nationality or geography (Durant & Shepherd, 2009). It is not solely constricted to verbal interaction but includes nonverbal gestures and behaviors (Durant & Shepherd, 2009). When an individual shows a positive attitude towards people with different cultures and develops a willingness to communicate, they ultimately gain competence in intercultural communication (Arasaratnam, 2006). This competence is shaped by intercultural experiences, which significantly impact communication effectiveness (Gibson & Zhong, 2005), and it is through repeated exposure that effective communicators emerge (Fall et al., 2013).

Communicative ambiguity with an individual from a different culture may leads to a specific form of anxiety, like Intercultural Communication Apprehension (ICA) (Neuliep &McCroskey, 1997). This specific anxiety leads to physiological arousal, hypervigilance, unsettling, or even a feeling of loss of control of oneself (Fall et al., 2013). An increase in communication apprehension results in less willingness of individuals to interact, eventually leading to contempt towards people from another culture and decreased tolerance (Lin et al., 2012). Studies show that CQ reduces anxiety and enhances communication effectiveness in cross-cultural interactions (Bucker et al., 2014; Presbitero, 2018). Ercelic et al. (2022) found a positive association between CQ and ICA, noting that higher anxiety decreases willingness to share information and adapt in new cultures (Tominaga et al., 2003). Additionally, Roach and Olaniran (2001) reported a negative relationship between ICA and life satisfaction and relationship quality.

Socio-cultural adaptation (SCA) is basically defined as a behavioural competency that is strongly influenced by the factors that encompass the ability of oneself to acquire required social skills and readiness to gain knowledge about that particular culture (Ward & Searle, 1991). It also includes factors which can be taken in a similar manner as a process of conditioning, such as duration of residing in a new culture, amount of interaction, language fluency, identification with the host nation, as well as the individual's cultural knowledge and strategies they will apply for acculturation (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Individuals with a high level of social adaptation were found to have better psychological well-being, academic success, and greater resilience to face stressful situations. The individual with low social adaptation showed depressive symptoms and difficulties in managing the responsibilities (Aseltine & Gore, 1993). Research has indicated the crucial role of CQ along with SCA for efficient performance in a new culture (Mokhothu& Callaghan, 2018; Rahman et al., 2022).

Research conducted by Hong et al. (2021) revealed that CQ significantly influences adaptation, with motivational and behavioral CQ being key predictors because individuals with high motivational CQ direct energy and persistence toward functioning in culturally diverse settings, while those with high behavioral CQ can flexibly adjust their verbal and nonverbal behavior to fit in cultural norms (Ang et al., 2015). CQ demonstrate strong explanatory power for cross-cultural adjustment (Guomundsdottir, 2015; Ward & Fischer, 2008). Studies show CQ reliably predicts international students' socio-cultural, psychological, and professional adaptation (Li & Middlemiss, 2022; Chen et al., 2014).

The Present Study

This study aims to explore how CQ impacts ICA and SCA among the university students in Bathinda, Punjab. The study focuses on how CQ influences

students' capacity for cultural sensitivity and adaptation. This study also examines how individuals from different geographical locations, such as the Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western parts of India, as well as international regionsfrom different geographical boundaries, differ concerning these variables.The findings suggest that the study enhanced awareness of cultural intelligence (CQ). Moreover, this study has practical importance and may increase awareness among students studying in other cross-cultural contexts. The findings may assist educational institutions in developing strategies to better support students in multicultural learning environments.

Methods

Participants

The research was conducted on university students of Bathinda district of Punjab, belonging to the age group of 18-29 years. A total of 224 subjects (113 males and 111 females) were selected for the study, belonging to different cultural backgrounds. The subjects were selected from different universities in Bathinda. The characteristics of participants are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Shows the Socio-Demographic Profile of the Subjects

Baseline characteristics	*N*	%
Age		
18 – 21	31	14
22 – 25	165	74
26 – 29	28	12
Gender		
Male	113	50
Female	111	50
University		
Central University of	191	85
Punjab	33	15
Guru Kashi University		
Area of living		
Rural	92	41
Urban	132	59
Culture		
North (Uttar Pradesh)	60	27
South (Kerala)	60	27
East (West Bengal)	60	27
International	44	19

Measures

- **The cultural intelligence scale (Ang et al., 2007):**This is one of the most popular instruments for assessing cultural intelligence (CQ). This 20-item self-report measure assesses four different aspects: behavioural, motivational, meta-cognitive, and cognitive. The Cultural Intelligence Scale's dimensions have reliability coefficients for Cronbach's Alpha that is above .70. Both structural validity and the depth of cross-cultural intelligence are measured by the CQS, which is a highly favourable indicator of the model's quality.
- **Intercultural communication apprehension scale (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997)**:This scale was developed by Neuliep and McCroskey in 1997 to determine whether there was communication apprehension among individuals. The scale consists of 14 items. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.941. The scale appears to possess content, construct and predictive validity.
- **Socio-cultural adaptation scale-revised (Wilson, 2013):** This scale has 21 items, and participants are asked to respond to all the questions. The five subscales are: interpersonal communication, language proficiency, academic/work performance, personal interests, community involvement, and ecological adaptation. Wilson (2012) reported that the Cronbach's alpha for the 21-item scale was 0.92, which indicates that the scale's overall reliability is excellent. The scale possesses Construct, predictive, and incremental validity.

Sampling Technique

The sample was collected using multistage random sampling technique. The study area was Bathinda, Punjab which comprises of seven universities. Out ofthese seven universities, three (3)

universities were randomly selected based on the inclusion criteria (excluding the medical and technical universities). From these three, two universities were further randomly selected for the present studynamely Central University of Punjab and Guru Kashi University for rich cultural diversities.

Procedure

Before the collection of data, permission from competent authorities of the Universities was taken. A tentative time schedule was developed for the collection of data. Proper rapport was established with the subjects and then they were requested to fill up the consent form. Participants who agreed to participate were only included in the study. Participants who had any major physical and mental health issues were excluded from the study. Data was collected from the subject through group administration. After data collection statistical analyses were done using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 27.0.1. The bivariate correlation was done to examine the relationship between the variables. After that the components of CQ which were significantly correlated with ICA and SCA was made as a predictor to examine the impact of CQ on ICA and SCA in model 1 and 2 respectively.

Results

Table 2: Bivariate Correlation among the studied variables

Main Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Meta-cognitive CQ	-					
Cognitive CQ	.311**	-				
Motivational CQ	.374**	.300**	-			
Behavioural CQ	.355**	.258**	.442**	-		
ICA	.234**	.186**	.444**	.194**	-	
SCA	.112	.304**	.321**	.180**	.313**	-

**. p<0.01, *. p< 0.05

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between CQ dimension (meta-cognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural), ICA, and SCA. The results were presented in Table 2. ICA was positively correlated meta-cognitive CQ (r=.234, p<.01), cognitive CQ (r=.186, p<0.01), motivational CQ (r=.444, p<.01), and behavioural CQ (r=.194, p<0.01). SCA was positively correlated with cognitive CQ (r=.3.0, p<.01), motivational CQ (r=.321, p<.01) and behavioural CQ (r=.180, p<0.01). However, no significant difference was found between SCA and meta-cognitive CQ (r=.112, p>0.05). Moreover, a significant correlation was found between ICA and SCA (r=.313, p<.01

Table 3: Summary of the results of the regression of cultural intelligence (CQ) on intercultural communication apprehension and socio-cultural adaptation

	Model 1							**Model 2**						
Variables		**Intercultural Communication Apprehension**							**Socio-cultural Adaptation**					
	B	SD	Lower bond	Upper bond	Beta	t-value	p-value	B	SD	Lower bond	Upper bond	Beta	t-value	p-value
Meta-cognitive CQ	.140	.127	-.111	.390	.075	1.099	.273	-.257	.254	-.758	.243	-.071	-1.014	.312
Cognitive CQ	.049	.070	-.090	.187	.045	.691	.490	.500	.140	.224	.777	.240	3.565	.000
Motivational CQ	.649	.110	.432	.867	.414	5.881	.000	.800	.220	.366	.366	.264	3.632	.000
Behavioural CQ	-.035	.087	-.206	.137	-.027	-.396	.692	.066	.174	-.277	-.277	.027	.380	.704

The regression analysis generated two models, as illustrated in Table 3. **Model 1**, which contained CQ as a predictor and ICA as an outcome variable, showed the motivational CQ prediction as statistically significant, *F (4,219) = 14.076, p = .000,* and accounted for about 20.5% of the variance of ICA *(B=.649, t=5.881, p=.000)*
Model 2 examines the impact of CQ on SCA. The results showed a significant impact of cognitive and motivational dimensions of CQ on SCA. It was found that 15.4% in SCA can be accounted for by the CQ, *F (4,219) = 9.999, p =.000.* On examining the cognitive dimension of CQ, the results showed that the cognitive dimension of CQ *(B=.500, t=3.565, p=.000)* predicts SCA. Further, on examining the motivational dimension of CQ, the results showed that the motivational CQ *(B=.800, t=3.632, p=.000)* predicts SCA.

Table 4: The Mean, SD, and the F values of Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Communication Apprehension and Sociocultural Adaptation of different communities

Main Variables	Communities	N	Mean ± SD	F, P
Meta-cognitive CQ	North (Uttar Pradesh)	60	21.5167 ± 4.46642	.326, .807
	South (Kerala)	60	21.8167 ± 3.61959	
	East (West Bengal)	60	21.7000 ± 3.81478	
	International	44	21.0909 ± 3.56872	
	Total	224	21.5625 ± 3.88808	
Cognitive CQ	North (Uttar Pradesh)	60	26.6333 ± 7.07578	2.693, .047<0.05
	South (Kerala)	60	23.7500 ± 6.02432	
	East (West Bengal)	60	26.7833 ± 6.32480	
	International	44	26.1591 ± 7.27833	
	Total	224	25.8080 ± 6.72681	
Motivational CQ	North (Uttar Pradesh)	60	27.6000 ± 4.44248	.402, .752
	South (Kerala)	60	27.7000 ± 4.00127	
	East (West Bengal)	60	27.6500 ± 4.79345	
	International	44	26.7955 ± 5.50086	
	Total	224	27.4821 ± 4.63557	
Behavioural CQ	North (Uttar Pradesh)	60	24.7500 ± 5.84438	.433, .730
	South (Kerala)	60	25.2333 ± 5.14655	
	East (West Bengal)	60	24.0500 ± 6.17657	
	International	44	24.8636 ± 6.04476	
	Total	224	24.7143 ± 5.77753	
Intercultural Communication Apprehension	North (Uttar Pradesh)	60	10.8167 ± 6.50552	1.656, .177
	South (Kerala)	60	11.3000 ± 6.54139	
	East (West Bengal)	60	13.5667 ± 8.878	
	International	44	12.0682 ± 6.51795	
	Total	224	11.9286 ± 7.26156	
Sociocultural Adaptation	North (Uttar Pradesh)	60	72.9833 ± 12.94381	3.908, .010<0.05
	South (Kerala)	60	65.4667 ± 14.61537	
	East (West Bengal)	60	70.3333 ± 13.68367	
	International	44	73.2955 ± 13.88085	
	Total	224	70.3214 ± 14.05448	

Table 4 presents the results of an ANOVA conducted to compare communities from the northern region (Uttar Pradesh), southern region (Kerala), eastern region (West Bengal), and international student groups in CQ, ICA, and SCA. Students from different communities differ significantly in the cognitive dimension of CQ (F = 2.693, p=.047). Students from East (West Bengal) were found to have high cognitive CQ compared to other communities. In contrast, international students were found to have high SCA

(F = 3.908, p=.01). Therefore, sociocultural adaptation showed a significant difference with respect to the community.There was no difference in intercultural communication apprehension. The sociocultural adaptation showed a significant difference with respect to the community.

Discussion

This study revealed a correlation between the all the dimensions of CQ, namely, metacognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ, with ICA. It also demonstrated the correlation between cognitive, motivational and behavioural dimensions of CQ and sociocultural adaptation (SCA). Furthermore, among the CQ dimensions, only motivational CQ was found to have a significant impact on ICA, while both cognitive and motivational CQ significantly influenced SCA. Additionally, regional differences were observed in cognitive CQ and SCA among individuals.

The present study found that motivational CQ predicts ICA. In a cross-cultural setting, people with high motivational CQ use their attention and energy as they are intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 1985).Research has found that multicultural teams with higher motivationalCQ have better communication and cooperation (Ng et al., 2009)within the team. This suggests that students' desire in learning and interact with individuals from different cultures (Sulaiman & Lone, 2023) may have an impact on the ICA that they might be facing. Tampler et al. (2005) found that motivational CQ has a positive correlation with intercultural harmony, which helps to develop harmony among members. The uncertainty reduction theory by Berger and Calabrese, (1975) suggests that when people encounter a new environment, they become motivated to communicate, gather information, and establish a relationship to reduce the anxiety of social interaction. So, having motivational CQ may reduce this uncertainty and increase intercultural awareness, impacting the ICA.

The study also reveals that the cognitive and motivational dimension of CQ has a considerable impact on SCA. Cognitive CQ has the capacity to know the similarities and differences between cultures (Brislin et al., 2006), as well as the sociolinguistic and interpersonal systems of different cultures and subcultures (Triandis, 1994). Individuals with higher cognitive CQ are more likely to identify projected social images and will be knowledgeable about the norms, practices, and conventions that prevail in a particular culture (Sajampun, 2016). Ang et al. (2007), through their study, established that those with higher cognitive CQ are better able to communicate with people from different cultures, and likewise, they appreciate the system by bringing a specific pattern of social interactions.These interactions make an individual inclined towards that culture, leading to SCA.Additionally, motivational CQ helps to concentrate on cross-cultural settings (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and encourages one to use their understanding to deal with unfamiliar cultural settings (Lin et al., 2012; Templer et al., 2005).This ability to remain engaged and proactive in various settings plays a pivotal role in successful cultural adjustment. In line with this, the findings ofAng et al. (2015) support the present study, which indicated that motivational CQ improves the adaptation level (Ward & Fisher, 2008). The interplay of both cognitive CQ and motivational CQ brings social composure, conformity, and experiences to oneself that help them to have a better SCA (Sajampun, 2016).

Further, this study also reveals a significant difference in zonal division with respect to Cognitive CQ and SCA among students.The current study found the West Bengal region showing more cognitive CQ than the rest, as this region has a history of being a colonial hub that introduced the residents to the blend of its own culture with other Western cultures, too, which imbues cultural norms, conventions, and others' knowledge.The international student showed a greater mean than the rest of the zonal division in SCA. This can arise due to the eastern vs. western cultural differences (Valenti et al., 2022) and acculturation strategies (Ng et al., 2013).Hence, cultural division creates a difference and shows the evolution of and supportive reasons for cultural adaptation.

Conclusion

Statistical analysis of the results showed a significant impact of the motivational dimension of CQ on ICA, but no impact was found with other dimensions of CQ on intercultural communication. Moreover, the cognitive and motivational dimensions of CQ had a significant impact on SCA. However, the impact of metacognitive and behavioural dimensions of CQ on SCA was not found. Moreover, the results also showed that students from different communities differ significantly with respect to their cognitive dimension of CQ and SCA.

Limitations, Suggestions and Implication

The present research has certain limitations that should be acknowledged while interpreting the results. First, the research was limited to 224 University students from the Bathinda district of Punjab which restricts the venerability of the findings. Moreover, student from other cultural background were not included. Additionally, the study did not examine the influence of sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, area, residence religion and family type. Therefore, future research should focus on larger sample size in more culturally diverse sample and

consider the role of sociodemographic factors on CQ, ICA, and SCA.

The results have significant implications for the Indian educational policy makers. In past years, India has witnessed a substantial growth in the number of international student enrolment and increment in the interstate migration among students. Therefore, understanding their psychological adaptableness in Indian culture and interstate cultures will definitely facilitate to frame better policies. The finding will also assist the institutes to understand the dimensions of CQ which are very necessary to be developed among students. The results of the study have supported a need for formulating the curriculum that focus on improving the CQ, reducing ICA, betterment of sociocultural adaptation and enhancing self-esteem of university students.

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