

Cultural Intelligence as a predictor of Psychological Well Being among students pursuing a professional career

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ABSTRACT

Background: Well-being pertains to the positive mental state of an individual which enables him to function effectively. It brings about a variety of positive outcomes both at the personal and professional level. Psychological well-being is believed to vary as major life changes occur. Therefore, there is a constant search for the factors that improve one's well-being. Cultural Intelligence is one such specific ability that enhances one's well-being and facilitates better adaptability to an intercultural environment. The current study thus, aims to predict well-being among college students (in a culturally diverse environment) from cultural intelligence.

Methodology: Data using standardized tests was collected from 200 students (M= 110, F= 90) students using purposive sampling technique. Age range for the sample was 21-32 years (Mean age = 24 years). Regression analysis was carried out separately for both the genders to unearth gender differences.

Results: The result reveals that while in males, Cognitive Cultural Intelligence emerged as a strong and positive predictor of well-being, in females Motivational and Behavioural Cultural Intelligence had a significant role to play. The obtained results are discussed in light of theoretical rationale and empirical evidence.

Conclusions: Further studies in diverse populations are needed to determine and confirm the findings of this study.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, Well-being, Intercultural Environment

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INTRODUCTION

Psychological Well-Being maybe defined as the positive mental state of an individual enabling him to function effectively at personal and interpersonal level [1-2]. It leads to variety of positive outcomes among college students like enhanced functioning [3], better adaptability [4], self-esteem [5] and better satisfaction [6]. Therefore, higher focus is placed on increasing the levels Psychological Well-Beings, so as to bring about effective functioning of students and not mere academic excellence. Not only do the positive outcomes increase with better Well-Being, but also it acts as a buffer against the negative cognitions of depression and suicide ideations. There has been evidence for negative relationship between Psychological Well-Being and depression, anxiety among college students [7]. Hence, there is huge focus on increasing Psychological Well-Being among students and promoting factors that develop the same. One among the various factors that affect well-being among students is intercultural environment. There have been mixed results as to the role of intercultural environment on Psychological Well-Being.

Intercultural environment and cross cultural interactions are seen in the light of increasing one's well-being by enhancing our arena of functioning, as well as widening the horizon for experiential learning. On the other hand, it may have an adverse effect on students, who are already struggling with adjustment related issues and coping with the novel environment. The key question researched by Van Dyne, Ang and Livermore [8] was, 'why some but not all individuals are able to effectively adapt to culturally diverse environment'. They aimed to find out the cause that enables some individuals to easily adapt to diverse

cultural environments, whereas others find it difficult, thereby affecting their functioning and psychological well-being.

Cultural Intelligence and Well Being

The concept of cultural intelligence was proposed by Earley and Ang [9] and it focuses on how an individual can successfully thrive and adapt to an environment, which is characterized by cultural diversity. The concept was developed in order to study the diverse work force and their consequent adaptive behaviours in today's global work front. Unlike traditional approaches to intelligence, contemporary approaches emphasize on the various facets that are essential to determine a person's performance across variety of situations, with Cultural Intelligence being specific to culturally diverse environment. When individuals relocate from their own cultural land to an unknown culture, acculturation follows, and it brings along physical and psychological changes. In the process, adaptation is the desired outcome as it will enhance not only the physical, but also the psychological health of the person involved in such a change, primarily affecting their well-being. Cultural Intelligence thus, is a particular skill that enables people to effectively function in intercultural settings [8]. It comprises of four sub dimensions, Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence, Cognitive Cultural Intelligence, Motivational Cultural Intelligence and Behavioural Cultural Intelligence. First three are more of covert components of Cultural Intelligence where the Behavioural is the overt component of Cultural Intelligence.

Cultural Intelligence has been studied in various samples for its relationship with well-being. Higher Cultural Intelligence leads to better adjustment of individuals to that particular environment, thereby bringing about positive outcomes like those of enhanced psychological well-being. Studies provide evidence that Cultural Intelligence is positively related to wellbeing especially among college students studying in a culturally diverse environment [10-11]. In another study by Harrison and Brower [12], Cultural Intelligence was found to be positively related to combating stress in students, in an intercultural environment; more specifically those, who study outside their home culture. Cultural Intelligence leads to better adaptability to a multicultural environment, which itself increases one's psychological well-being. Researchers in their study concluded that better adaptation to one's environment is related to academic as well as non-academic outcomes, including class participation, school enjoyment, life satisfaction, and sense of meaning and purpose, etc. Thus, it is observed to increase positive mental states for individuals and combat the negative cognitions that may arise due to environmental demands and pressures [13]. Well-being in particular, is thought to change from culture to culture [14]. Hence, for higher psychological well-being in a multicultural environment, higher Cultural Intelligence is called for.

The study was conducted with the objective of predicting Well Being from Cultural Intelligence in college students and to elucidate gender differences in the prediction of well-being.

The study hypothesis was –

H1: Cultural Intelligence will significantly and positively predict Well-Being among college students (for both the genders).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study was conducted on 200 (Males = 110, Females = 90) students using purposive sampling technique. Only those students who belonged to state other than Punjab were selected for the study. Age range for the sample was 21-32 years ($M_{age} = 24$ years). Data was collected from students who were pursuing higher degree professional courses in Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, and IIM-Amritsar.

Psychological Tools:

The following psychological tools were used to collect data:

1. **Cultural Intelligence Scale** [8]: The Cultural Intelligence Scale is a 20-item self-report rating scale that measures four dimensions of cultural intelligence: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural. It has been validated for use with diverse college student populations.

2. **Friedman Well-Being Scale** [15]: The Friedman Well-Being Scale consists of twenty bi-polar adjectives. It is easy to administer, score, and interpret. It can be scored for an overall measure of well-being, the Friedman Well-Being Composite, and for five subscales: emotional stability; self-esteem/self-confidence; joviality; sociability; and happiness. Norms exist for a clinical, college, and community populations. It correlates significantly in the expected directions with over 100 clinical, personality, attitudinal, stress, relational, marital and interpersonal scales and subscales.

Statistical Analysis

The data obtained on the variables of Cultural Intelligence and Well-Being were analyzed using SPSS 25. Stepwise regression analysis was used to predict well-being based on the four sub dimensions of Cultural Intelligence. The analysis was carried out separately for girls and boys.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results of regression analysis for females and males. The four sub dimensions of Cultural Intelligence, Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence, Cognitive Cultural Intelligence, Motivational Cultural Intelligence and Behavioural Cultural Intelligence were used as predictor variables. In females, Motivational Cultural Intelligence and Behavioural Cultural Intelligence were found to significantly and positively predict well-being accounting for total of 41% in well-being; whereas in males Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence and Cognitive Cultural Intelligence (Cognitive Component of Cultural Intelligence) was seen to significantly predict wellbeing accounting for 48% of variance. The sub dimensions were used to see how they function differently in both the genders in predicting well-being, even though the overall Cultural Intelligence remains same. The regression coefficient for Motivational Cultural Intelligence and Behavioral Cultural Intelligence was found to be significant in females ($b = 0.85, 0.77; p < 0.01$) and non-significant for the cognitive sub dimensions of Cultural Intelligence. On the other hand, Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence and Cognitive Cultural Intelligence were found to significantly predict well-being in males ($b = 2.01, 0.86; p < 0.01$)

Table 1: Results for regression analysis along with R² and significance level for females and males

Predictor Variable	FEMALES					Predictor Variable	MALES				
	B	β	R ²	F ratio	P		B	β	R ²	F ratio	p
Motivational CQ	0.85	0.28	0.34	22.44	0.01*	Metacognitive CQ	2.01	0.47	0.40	36.21	0.01*
Behavioural CQ	0.77	0.31	0.07	14.08	0.01*	Cognitive CQ	.86	0.32	0.08	24.25	0.01*
Total Variance = 41%						Total Variance = 48%					

DISCUSSION

Perusal of table 1 shows the results for stepwise regression analysis. The results give us insight into the effect on well-being of students studying outside their home culture based upon their level of Cultural Intelligence. In case of females, the dimensions of Motivational Cultural Intelligence and Behavioural Cultural Intelligence were found to predict Well-being significantly and in positive direction. Motivational Cultural Intelligence alone accounted for 34% of variance in Well-being among females. It is the *drive* aspect of Cultural Intelligence that enables an individual to direct his/her energy and attention towards learning about a situation that involves intercultural contact and is marked by cultural diversity [16]. Motivational Cultural Intelligence involves intrinsic and extrinsic interest as well as self-efficacy of an individual. In case of females, given the background of bringing up females to make them more reserved

and shy, they tend to stay withdrawn, not fully involving in the situation. This not only affects their adjustment to that environment, but their psychological well-being to a great extent. On the other hand, those females who have higher drive to indulge in such intercultural contact, have higher interest to learn and apply oneself in the novel environment, thereby improving their adjustment and well-being. Behavioural Cultural Intelligence was also found to be significant in predicting well-being among females. It is overt capacity of Cultural Intelligence wherein an individual consciously alters his/her verbal as well non-verbal behaviour during intercultural transactions. It shows willingness on the part of the person that makes him exhibit such behavioural manifestations. In case of females, higher Behavioural Cultural Intelligence leads to better well-being among them. It can be attributed to the fact that when we change our behaviour in order to suit the intercultural environment, in a way that shows our willing participation in same, it leads to better relationships with those from other cultures and psychological ease, thus leading to enhanced well-being. Previous studies have also brought out the significance of Cultural Intelligence, leading to increased well-being [10-11].

On the other hand, in case of males, only the *cognitive* aspect of Cultural Intelligence was found to be significant in predicting well-being among them; with other two dimensions being insignificant. This again highlights the fact that in Indian environment, male off-springs are reared in a manner that provides them with great opportunity to express themselves or indulge in variety of situations, without any fear of suppression. In such a condition, interactions in intercultural environment may not be a novel thing for them and they may do so without any hesitation. But, in case they are found to be lacking on the cognitive aspect whilst in a culturally diverse environment, they make feel maladjusted to the group who are higher on Cognitive and Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence. A total of 48% in well-being among males is accounted for based upon Cognitive and Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence. Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence is awareness of knowledge of self, one's perceptions and insight of the culture one is thriving in. Cognitive Cultural Intelligence on the other hand is the knowledge of cultural norms, traditions, practices and beliefs which are essential to a culture. Both the aspects when higher in males were found to significantly predict well-being among them.

The differences found in both the genders in prediction of well-being based on sub- dimensions of Cultural Intelligence were amply clear. Whereas in males the Cognitive aspect emerged as a strong predictor of well-being, in case of females it was the Motivational and Behavioral aspect. This brings out the variation in the genders, in adapting to new environment, particularly the one which is characterized by cultural diversity. In case of males, the higher is their knowledge of self-awareness about the cultural differences and that of norms and perceptions of a culture, higher will be their well-being, attributed to the fact that they will be more indulged in the novel culture and such interactions leading to higher adjustment. In case of females on the other hand, changes in overt behavior and motivational factors come more into play, leading to their enhanced well-being. Their cognitive factors of Cultural Intelligence have least significance as far as prediction of well-being is concerned.

CONCLUSION

The study was conducted with an aim to see the prediction of Well-being among students studying in an intercultural environment based upon the level of their Cultural Intelligence. Results of regression analysis conducted separately for males and females show that, in case of females only the behavioral and motivational factors of Cultural Intelligence are significant in predicting well-being whereas in males, Cognitive factor of Cultural Intelligence significantly predicts Cultural Intelligence. The results provide insight into the difference in functioning of same level of Cultural Intelligence among males and females, with significance of different sub dimensions in both the genders. For more understanding into the well-being of students, other variables of adjustment and personality can be taken into consideration.

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