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The Relationships between Cultural Intelligence, Reading Proficiency and Vocabulary Knowledge of Iranian EFL Students

Malihe Zomorrodi

Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Damavand.

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ABSTRACT

Now days Culture has become one of the factors that create effects on the performance of the students through four skills and discussing its relationship with one of these skills is a controversial issue. The aim of the present study is to investigate whether there is any significant relationship between intercultural intelligence (known as CQ) awareness and reading proficiency (RP). The participants were 250 Azad University students of English translation with the same level of proficiency but different genders. To this end, the participants first were provided with CQ questionnaire by (Ang et al., 2007) and vocabulary tests which was developed by Paul Nation taken from his website as well as a reading proficiency test developed by Sadeghi and Everatt (submitted). The results of the present paper indicates that there is no significant relationships between cultural intelligence band score and reading proficiency, however a significant relationship among metacognitive factors as one of the four important sub-categories of cultural intelligence was evident. When looking into vocabulary, while a positive significant correlation with CQ band score was found, again similar to the reading proficiency skills a significant relationship between vocabulary knowledge and metacognitive factors was evident. The fact that the results show no correlation between either reading proficiency skills or vocabulary knowledge with cognitive factor represented in the questionnaire needs further research.

Introduction

The adaptation of each person to a new context is referring to cultural intelligence (Early & Ang, 2003). Cultural intelligence influences each individual capability to deal with new circumstances according Early and Peterson (2004). The way people use to communicate with others who are from different cultural context to make an effective interaction is known as an intercultural intelligence (Bennet, 2011). According East (2012) as the interactions among nations are increasingly grows cultural intelligence plays an important role in the successful global communication. Now the question is "why is intercultural intelligence important?" in recent years researches on this field has become more important in language teaching. The most well-known model of intercultural intelligence proposed by Byram (1997) helps English teachers with how to deals with cultural intelligence. In this model, Byram analyzed the essential factors that affect intercultural communication such as knowledge skills and attitudes. Generally speaking, Byram believes that cultural intelligence is the interdecipline of linguistic intelligence, sociolinguistic intelligence, discourse and intercultural intelligence.

There are four-sub category of communicative intelligence according Canale and Swain (1980); the first one is grammatical intelligence that refers to becoming master of the linguistic code. This is especially important for those whom accuracy is important; the second one is sociolinguistic intelligence which is concerned with the appropriate use of language in different social circumstances. Attaining to this kind of intelligence is difficult, as it needs sensitivity to cross-cultural differences. The third one is strategic intelligence which refers to the use of language neither spoken nor written form. Finally, discourse intelligence is the intelligence that allows one to become master of verbal and non-verbal strategies of communication. This mainly focuses on two main goals: the first one is the effectiveness of communication; and the second one is compensating for breakdowns in communication. According to Bachman, having the ability of communicative language skills includes four elements, namely language, strategic, physiological and pragmatic intelligence (1990).

Four model factors: According to Early and Ang (2003), cultural intelligence is comprised of four different factors "metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral factors". What an individual does is called the process that refers to behavioral focuses, whereas the other factors focuses on what the individual thinks that is called content. The following is a brief summary of each of these factors.

Cognitive cultural intelligence: Cognitive cultural intelligence refers to a person's intelligence surrounded by many factors such as practical views, knowledge of norms in different cultures being acquired from personal experience or educational background (Van Dyne et al., 2008). According to Ang (2007), such knowledge is based on the understanding of similarities of cultures as well as their differences. Cognitive cultural intelligence could be classified in to two different parts according Van Dyne (2012). The first one is "cultural-general knowledge" which is divided into objective and subjective knowledge. Subjective knowledge refers to the aspects of culture which is not visible, while objective knowledge is visible like the knowledge of different forms of communication such as facial expressions, as well as understanding of social, political

Tele:
E-mail addresses: kjalilzadeh1983@gmail.com

system. "Context-specific knowledge" Is the second classification of cognitive cultural intelligence that could be applicable to a specific country or sub-culture" (p. 302).

Metacognitive cultural intelligence: Metacognitive elements in fact refer to the abilities that a person has in preparing themselves to reflect and questioning their own assumptions. Such preparation causes to improve one understands of other individuals and circumstances (Van Dyne, Ang, & Kuh, 2008). Metacognitive cultural intelligence has been developed to include "checking and planning". The former refers to SLL abilities in changing their understanding of the culture, while "planning" refers to the ability of developing strategies or an action plan before a cross-cultural is encountered (Van Dyne et al, 2012).

Motivational cultural intelligence: There are different elements that contribute to an individual's motivation to succeed in cultural diversity (Van Dyne et al, 2012) such as positive or negative attitudes toward a specific culture, satisfaction and successful communication. A foreign language learner should focus on learning how to efficiently function a cross-cultural interaction so the magnitude and direction of the motivation are considered (Strenberg, 1986).

Behavioral cultural intelligence: According to Van Dyne et al (2012), cultural intelligence includes a person's "speech acts" as well as their "capability to be flexible in making relation with others even verbal or non-verbal" (p.304). Non-verbal behavior may refer to the eye contact, while verbal behavior may refer to the tone of your voice during communicating with others. Gardner defined intelligence as the ability of solving problems valued by one or more cultural settings (1983).

Fantini (2006) presented a categorization of intercultural intelligence that is similar to the explanations of Sercu and Bandura (2005). Based on Byram's five Saviors, attitude is the, curiosity to delay beliefs about other cultures and belief about one's own culture while , knowledge relates to the social groups and their products in one's own country of those with whom the person comes into contact. Skills of interpreting and relating also refer to the capability to elucidate an event from another culture. Skills, discovery and interaction refer to acquiring new cultural habits and the intelligence to apply skills and perspectives under certain circumstances. Finally, critical cultural awareness/political education refer to the products in one's own countries which they wish to apply in the other cultures and countries (Byram, 2000).

Research has formulated an analytic framework to help teachers in the process of developing intercultural intelligence through the incorporation of on line learning by representing the relationships between a seldom-targeted set of skills (CQ), a context (teacher professional development) and medium which refers to the online learning.

Characteristics of Intelligence: There are some sub-categories for intelligence according to Gardner (1999). Verbal/ linguistic: the ability of conveying meaning as well as understanding others which refers to the verbal and linguistic intelligence. Bodily/ kinesthetic: the capacity of using the whole or parts of the body to elaborate or solving problems. Interpersonal: the ability of understanding others like salesperson, teachers or religious leaders referring to interpersonal skills. Intrapersonal is generally related to the metacognition or the ability of self-monitoring in particular. Each individual has to understand him/ her, who they are or what they can do. Music/ Rhythmic: Ability of making recognition between music patterns and manipulating the patterns. Being sensitive to the living things as well as other features of natural world referring to another category called Naturalist. Logical/ Mathematical: The ability of understanding someone's casual system principles. Presenting internal special world in one's mind is called Visual/ Spatial intelligence. Finally, existential intelligence refers to the human existence such as the meaning of life and its role in the world.

Relationships between metacognition, cognition and reading proficiency: Paris, Lipson and Wixson (1983) mentioned that metacognition is crucial to strategic reading. According to these researchers, knowledge about cognition and awareness of its executive or regulatory functions are two aspects of metacognition in relation with reading comprehension. The first one refers to the conditional and procedural knowledge and the second one refers to the way that one may control the process of reading because a reader needs to be aware of their comprehension levels. We can divide metacognitive knowledge into three sub-categories including knowledge of a person, task and strategy. Hence, conscious experience that is both cognitive and affective is known as metacognitive skills (Flavell, 1987). Hajhashemi, Akef and Anderson (2012) conducted research on the relationships between multiple intelligence and reading proficiency among pre-university students. The results indicated that students' performance varying from one intelligence to another. Therefore, it seems that research to further scrutinize the role of cultural intelligence in second language acquisition, in particular looking into higher level skills such reading proficiency is needed to shed a light on this vague area of knowledge. Hence, the current paper is an attempt to address this issue.

Research Questions: The current study intended to answer the following questions:

1) Is there any significant relationship between CQ and reading proficiency among Iranian English translation students?
2) Is there any significant relationship between CQ and knowledge of vocabulary among Iranian English translation students?
3) Is there any significant relationship between male and female reading proficiency levels and those of their cultural intelligence?

Aim of the study

The primary aim of the current study was to investigate whether intercultural intelligence correlates with the levels of students reading proficiency and its role between male and female participants. After collecting the data utilizing the CQ questionnaire, reading and vocabulary tests, and Spearman rank order correlation was calculated. With interval data, Spearman correlation can be used for correlational analysis according (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The quantitative data was statistically analyzed using SPSS.

Participants

During the process of this paper, 250 students from the Islamic Azad University were recruited who were at somehow similar levels of English reading proficiency at intermediate levels. Participants were selected from both genders within the age range of 20-40 years based on convenient sampling method. All participants were studying English for their major.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation of the present paper was based on the CQ questionnaire developed by Ang et al., (2007), the reading proficiency test developed by Sadeghi and Everatt, (submitted), and the vocabulary test develop by Paul Nation. All measures will be explained briefly in this section.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics across Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Male	79	31.6	31.6	31.6
Valid	Female	171	68.4	68.4	100.0
	Total	250	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Descriptive statistics regarding 7 variables

	Mean	Std.Deviation
Reading Proficiency (max score 40)	22.82	5.219
Vocabulary (max score 50)	21.30	7.255
Questionnaire band score (max score 140)	82.59	18.632
Raw score of Metacognition (max score 24)	17.90	5.357
Raw Score of Cognition(max score 42)	22.50	6.666
Raw Score of Motivation (Max score 35)	23.00	6.773
Raw Score of Behavior (Max score 35)	20.68	6.553

There are different types of intercultural intelligence questionnaires such as Cultural Differences-General questions developed by internship to industry, and Cultural Awareness developed by united students, and an instrument developed by Chen and Starosta (1996) to measure the level of cultural sensitivity in the United States. Among all available questionnaires, the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) consisting of 20 items in four parts (i.e., metacognitive, cognitive, behavioral and motivational CQ) developed by Ang et al., (2007) was used in this paper. The questionnaire requires the participants to indicate if they completely agree, agree, agree to some extent, offer no idea, disagree to some extent, disagree and completely disagree with the 20 statements. It also provides information about participant's attitudes toward intercultural intelligence and its relation with teaching skills and learning proficiency. It is a free tool for academic researches, and its reliability has been reported in Iran (the context of the current research) reported by Khodadadi and Hasanzade Yazdi (2014).
The reading comprehension test was developed by Sadeghi and Everatt, (submitted). The test consists of several passages followed by about 10 comprehension questions. The vocabulary measure was taken from Paul Nation's website.

Procedure

All participants completed a 20-point four-factor cultural intelligence. After that, they tool the reading comprehension test and finally the vocabulary measure. Participants were tested in their own classes and were given a short break after each test. The whole procedure took about 90 minutes with the reading comprehension test taking about 40 minutes followed by the vocabulary measure which took about 10 minutes. It should be mentioned that the instructor of all these classes were different and there was no need to divide students into groups because the primary aim of the present study being to investigate the relationship between the CQ awareness and the level of students' performance on reading tests.

Design

In accordance with the topic of the study, a correlational descriptive method was used during the present study as it attempts to determine the relationships between variables (Mackey & Gass, 2005). During this study, the goal was to determine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables in general and in the other estimation to investigate correlations between each specific items of the questionnaire. A correlational design was also performed to show the specific relationships between cultural awareness of the participants and their reading proficiency levels.

Data Analysis

The primary aim of the current study was to investigate whether intercultural intelligence correlates with the levels of students reading proficiency and its role between male and female participants. After collecting the data utilizing the CQ questionnaire, reading and vocabulary tests, and Spearman rank order correlation was calculated. With interval data, Spearman correlation can be used for correlational analysis according (Mackey and Gass, 2005). The quantitative data was statistically analyzed using SPSS.

Results and Discussion

In order to investigate the participants' levels of reading proficiency, knowledge of vocabulary and their relations with their cultural intelligence, the following statistical procedure was carried out using SPSS version 20. First of all, descriptive statistics were calculated to show how the scores were spread out with regards to their percentages and frequencies. During the analysis of the present study the Phi-coefficient and Pearson coefficient were conducted to show the variables relations.

The following table presents the numbers of Females whom participated in this study which formed the majority with the total number of 171 while Males whom participated was 79. As the following table shows, 68.4% of the population was female and the other (31.6%) was male.

Since the purpose of the present paper was to investigate the relationships between reading proficiency and the participants' cultural intelligence, the descriptive statistics was calculated with mean and standard deviation (SD) shown in Table 2. Both mean and SD for each variable presented. Additionally, the data on vocabulary knowledge including mean and SD was presented too.

In order to provide an answer to the three main questions of the presented study, Pearson correlation coefficient was calculates as presented in Table 3 The data was analyzed to answer the question that whether reading proficiency and their vocabulary knowledge of second language is related to their knowledge of that specific foreign culture or not, and how they affect each other.

The correlation coefficient is varying from -1 to +1; accordingly, the correlation between two variables can be positive or negative. It should be clarified that it is the intensity of relation between two variables. The hypothesis of the presented study was tested by looking into the correlation presented in Table 4 for both Reading proficiency and CQs band scores. The results indicated that there is no meaningful correlation between participants' reading proficiency and their cultural intelligence band scores.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Results

	RP	CQs band score	Gender
RP Pearson Correlation	1	.038	.086
Sig. (2-tailed)		.545	.175
N	250	250	250
CQs BS Pearson Correlation	.03	1	-.002
Sig.(2-tailed)	.545		.975
N	250	250	250
Gende Pearson Correlation	.086	-.002	1
Sig.(2-tailed)	.175	.975	
N	250	250	250

Note

RP = reading proficiency; CQs = cultural intelligence questionnaire; Sig. = significant; N = Number of the participants.

Table 4 describes the relationships between the dependent variable and Raw scores of CQs. There is a week positive correlation between metacognitive factors and students' reading proficiency but there are no meaningful relationships between Raw scores and the other parts of the CQs.

The CQ was in the form of Likert scale with the participants being required to put their responses from 1 to 7. In other words, the alternatives were: completely agree, agree, agree to some extent, offer no idea, disagree to some extent, disagree and completely disagree which the participants were required to insert in front of each sentence. The scores in the following table is the sum of the total answers obtained from each part. As mentioned, all the four parts of CQs were considered as the variables as well as vocabulary tests and the reading proficiency test used in this study.

There is a positive significant relationship between vocabulary test scores and CQs band scores in contrast to the results of students' performance on reading test and its relationships with CQs band score as it is presented by table 5.

Discussion of Findings

This paper focused on the relationships between cultural intelligence awareness and reading proficiency and knowledge of the vocabulary among English translation students of Azad University. The first finding of the study indicates that there is no significant correlation between CQs and RP among English translation students of Azad University. There are some specific points that should be highlighted here.

As mentioned before, the results demonstrated that there is no significant correlation between cultural intelligence and reading proficiency among English translation students. Looking into the various parts of the questionnaire (i.e., metacognition, cognition, behavior and motivation), the relationships between other variables was also computed and resulted in various findings. It should be clarified that in contrast to other researches in this field the CQs found to have no significant correlation with reading proficiency in general but when the relationships between sub-categories of the cultural intelligence were investigated, a strong correlation between meta-cognition factors and reading proficiency levels was observed. Rezvani (2012) states that meta-cognitional strategies should be focused by focusing on other factors like vocabulary knowledge and the readers' historical background in reading proficiency. Young and fray (2008) and Yang (2009) who studied the use of meta-cognitive strategies on the achievements on reading English as a foreign language suggested a strong positive correlation between meta-cognition strategies and achievements in English language.

About the significant correlation between cognitional, motivational and behavioral categories of the CQs, the results demonstrates that there are no significant relationships between these three and a reading proficiency of the English translation students. Gholami and Manuchehry (2012) also reported that there is no significant correlation between cognitive and meta-cognitive factors on reading proficiency among elementary students.

Concerning the significant correlation between CQs and the performance of the students on vocabulary tests, the results showed a different finding. Knowledge of vocabulary was found being strongly correlated with socio-cultural factors. Like reading proficiency, meta-cognitional factors were also found to be positively and strongly correlated with the performance of the participants on the vocabulary test.

The process of computing data made it clear that there is a lack of significant correlation between cognitional factors and vocabulary tests. In contrast to the cognitional factors, the results demonstrated that there is a significant correlation between motivational and behavioral factors with the performance of the participants on the vocabulary.

In addition, the results proved that reading proficiency and vocabulary knowledge are interrelated with the gender having no significant effects on them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the main purpose of the presented paper was to elaborate the significant relationships between cultural intelligence and reading proficiency as well as their performance on vocabulary test among English students of Azad University. In this study four important factors of cultural intelligence were considered as variables (Meta-cognition, Cognition, Motivation and Behavior) (Ang et al.,2007). As mentioned before, this dimension can be important for both teachers and learners of the second language, and can influenced the process of language teaching and learning. The results showed that there is no significant correlation between cultural intelligence and reading proficiency in general among English translation students of Azad University but when breaking down the cultural intelligence in to its smaller sub-categories the results indicated significant relationships with some of these categories including meta-cognition.

Additionally, there is a significant correlation between the CQs and the knowledge of vocabulary. A significant correlation with metacognition, motivation and behavioral aspects of the cultural intelligence was also found. Similar to the finding reported for the reading proficiency, no significant correlation with cognitional factors was found.

In summary, the results indicated that the most influential variable which affects the process of reading proficiency is the meta-cognition; however the question is that "why there is no significant correlation between cognitional factors?" of course it needs further research. Additionally, the study proved no significant relationship between male and females' reading proficiency and cultural intelligence.

Table 6 indicates that there is a correlation between vocabulary and metacognition, motivation and behavioral factors except cognition. This result is consistent with the findings for the reading proficiency as presented in Table 4.In comparison with the data presented in Table 4, two additional correlations between vocabulary knowledge and the constituents of the CQ questionnaire was found. This table shows a strong positive correlation between the three items of the questionnaire (i.e., metacognition, behavior and motivation).

Table 4. Pearson correlation results

		RP	Meta.c	Cognition	Motivation	Behavioral
RP	Pearson Correlation	1	.127*	-.014	-.018	-.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.046	.822	.775	.639
	N	250	250	250	250	250
Meta.c	Pearson Correlation	.127*	1	.291**	.469**	.386**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-.014		.000	.000	.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250
Cog	Pearson Correlation	-.014	.291**	1	.217**	.389**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.822	.000		.001	.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250
Mot	Pearson Correlation	-.018	.469**	.217**	1	.523**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.775	.000	.001		.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250
Beh	Pearson Correlation	-.030	.386**	.389**	.523**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.639	.000	.000	.000	
	N	250	250	250	250	250

Note. RP = reading proficiency; CQs = cultural intelligence questionnaire; Sig. = significant; N = Number of the participants; Meta.c= Metacognition; Cog= cognition; Mot= Motivation; Beh= Behavioral

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Pearson Correlation results

		Vocabulary	CQs BS
Vocabulary	Pearson Correlation	1	.252**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
CQs BS	Pearson Correlation	.252**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6. Pearson correlation results

	Vocabulary	Meta.c	Cog	Mot	Beh
Voc	1	.247**	.086	.195**	.196**
Pearson		.000	.173	.002	.002
Correlation	250	250	250	250	250
Sig. (2-tailed)					
N					
Meta.C	.247**	1	.291**	.469**	.386**
Pearson	.000		000	.000	.000
Correlation	250	250	250	250	250
Sig. (2-tailed)					
N					
Cognition	.086	.291**	1	.217**	.389**
Pearson	.173	.000		.001	.000
Correlation	250	250	250	250	250
Sig. (2-tailed)					
N					
Motivation P.	.195**	.469**	.217**	1	.523**
Correlation	.002	.000	.001		.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	250	250	250	250	250
N					
Behavioral	.196**	.386**	.389**	.523**	1
P.Correlation	.002	.000	.000	.000	
Sig. (2-tailed)	250	250	250	250	250
N					

Note

Voc = Vocabulary; CQs = cultural intelligence questionnaire; Sig. = significant; N = Number of the participants; Meta.c= Metacognition; Cog= cognition; Mot= Motivation; Beh= Behavioral

**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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