

The Effect of Cross-cultural Engagement on Intercultural Sensitivity Levels in Monolingual and Multilingual individuals

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INTRODUCTION

While the idea of intercultural competencies is viewed as important by employers, there has been difficulty finding an accurate way to measure intercultural competencies, which can lead to a costly increase in turnover of expatriate employees (Graf et al, 2005). The problem of high turnover of expatriate employees is not the only issue that places increasing importance on intercultural competency. Culturally diverse teams at work can suffer if there is a lack of intercultural competency. When individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds work together, they can face a lack of cohesion because of different views and backgrounds (Lloyd et al, 2009). Interculturally sensitive individuals are more confident when it comes to intercultural interaction (Chen et al, 2000).

Intercultural Sensitivity:

- For today's globalized work force, intercultural interaction is common, making interculturally sensitive employees necessary.
- While many organizations understand the importance of having interculturally sensitive employees, there is not much information on how intercultural sensitivity is increased.
- Cross-cultural engagement can facilitate a positive view of an unknown culture (Marginean et al, 2019).
- Often when dealing with another culture, or a group with values and experiences that are different than one's own, individuals try to protect their own ideals and cultural beliefs and reject ideas from another culture (Marginean et al, 2019).
- When individuals socially engage with people from other cultures, they begin to understand their culture and beliefs although different are valuable (Marginean et al, 2019), and this can lead to an increase in intercultural sensitivity.

Multilingual:

- Individuals on the outside of a cultural group may have trouble communicating not only because of language barriers, but also social and referential cues.
- Referential cues are nonverbal gestures that aid in communicating the intent of the speaker, such as eye gaze and hand gestures (Yow et al, 2011).

INTRO *cont'd*

- Knowing the language of another culture helps employees have better intercultural communication skills, but multilingual individuals have been shown to be better interpreters of referential cues than individuals who speak only one language (Contemori et al, 2019).
- Studies show that children growing up in multi- or bilingual homes can read referential cues, such as hand gestures, better and are more effective communicators (Yow et al, 2011).
- When interacting with an individual whose first language is different than one's own, referential cues can be very important in facilitating intercultural communication.
- Bilingual and multilingual children have a greater level of awareness and understanding than monolingual children (Yow et al, 2011).
- Multilingual individuals and those who have lived in a multilingual household during childhood may have a higher capacity for intercultural sensitivity than those who are monolingual.

HYPOTHESES

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effect of cross-cultural engagement on intercultural sensitivity, and to determine if monolingual or multilingual individuals have a greater increase in intercultural sensitivity.

H1: A positive relationship will exist between cross-cultural engagement and intercultural sensitivity scores on the ISS.

H2: Multilingual individuals and individuals who have lived in a multilingual environment from a young age (4 Years old) will have higher scores on the ISS compared to their monolingual counterparts

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants will include individuals from various global hospitality and education organizations located in the U.S., South Korea, and Thailand.
 - 100 participants from a climate change funding organization in Songdo, South Korea
 - 100 Participants will be Graduate/Undergraduate students from a university in the United States and a university in South Korea.
 - 50 participants from the corporate office of a hotel management company, located in Thailand.

MEASURES

- The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale will assess participants' levels of intercultural sensitivity before and after engaging in cross-cultural activities (Chen & Starosta, 2000).
 - 24 items measured on a Likert scale, with 5 meaning strongly agree and 1 meaning strongly disagree.
 - Internal consistency of the scale was measured at 0.86.

PROCEDURES

- Participants will be separated into two groups based on multilingualism.
 - Group 1 will consist of those who are able to speak one language and have grown up in a monolingual household.
 - Group 2 will consist of those who are able to speak more than one language or those who have grown up in a multilingual household.
- All participants will take the ISS pretest.
- After the pretest, each group will be asked to participate in one intercultural engagement activity per week. The members of each group will be paired with another member of their group from a different culture.
 - The members will do self-introductions and give explanations of their own cultures. Each member will choose a cultural activity to teach their partner about, and they will perform this activity together.
- After 6 months, participants will take the ISS post-test.

PROPOSED ANALYSIS

- A repeated measures ANOVA will be used to investigate whether engagement activities increase intercultural sensitivity
- A regression analysis will be performed to observe whether multilingualism predicts a greater increase in intercultural sensitivity .

CONTRIBUTIONS

Today's work force continues to trend toward globalization. Technological advances make it easier to work with people in other countries. Even within companies, diversity is increasing and may cause issues for those who lack intercultural competencies (Lloyd et al, 2009). When there is a lack of understanding between team members because of cultural differences, there will be conflict within teams (Lloyd et al, 2019). There are also great costs associated with losing expatriate employees because of their lack of intercultural competencies (Graf et al, 2005). It is important for workplaces to be able to train employees to interact with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Intercultural Sensitivity has been shown to be an accurate predictor of an individual's ability to effectively communicate with people from other cultures (Chen et al, 2000). If engagement can be shown to increase intercultural sensitivity, then companies can have a definitive way to help employees increase intercultural sensitivity. If language learning can increase this effect, companies will be able to build their most effective teams .

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References available upon request.