Assessment of Intercultural Competence as an Outcome of Internationalization in Educational Centers

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Abstract

One meaningful outcome of internationalization efforts is the development of intercultural competent students. The purpose of this study was to determine a definition and appropriate assessment methods of intercultural competence as agreed upon by a panel of nationally-known intercultural experts. This information was validated by a sample of higher education administrators and can be used by administrators in identifying and assessing intercultural competence as an outcome of internationalization efforts. Primary findings include a preference for a general definition of intercultural competence. Moreover, the definition of intercultural competence continues to evolve as scholars refine the term further through on-going research and the group agreed that it is possible to assess degrees of intercultural competence and in so doing, that it is best to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess intercultural competence, including interviews, observation, and judgment by self and others.

1. Introduction

The internationalization of higher education has become one possible response to such challenges (Byram, 2011). Many institutions describe results of internationalization in terms of numbers such as how many of their students study abroad, how many international students study on their campus, how many foreign faculty teach courses, how many courses are included in the internationalized curriculum, and so on (Odağ et al., 2015). While these numbers are an important element to evaluation, what do they indicate about meaningful outcomes of international education and internationalization (Borghetti, 2011). One meaningful outcome of internationalization efforts is the development of interculturally competent students (Gonzalez Rodriguez L & Borham Puyal, 2012). Yet, few universities address the development of interculturally competent students as an anticipated outcome of internationalization in which the concept of "intercultural competence" is specifically defined (Keller, & Hodge, 2016). This lack of specificity in defining intercultural competence is due presumably to the difficulty of identifying the specific components of this complex concept (Fitch, 2015). This study addresses some of these questions through the collection and analysis of data on the identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization in educational centers. Intercultural competency assessment measures are needed to assess more effectively the student outcomes of internationalization efforts at institutions of higher education. In other words, how can students' intercultural competence be measured as one effective outcome of internationalization efforts? To answer this, another underlying question must first be answered: Do experts agree on a common definition and the specific components of intercultural competence and if so, what are those components?

The process and procedures used to develop and validate this information were a 3- round Delphi technique involving the intercultural experts, along with an institutional questionnaire to higher education administrators involved in internationalization efforts. The Delphi technique is a reiterative, interactive process between a researcher and a panel of experts, often with the goal of reaching consensus among panelists. Three rounds of questions were communicated to the panel through the use of electronic mail. Experts generated and submitted definitions of intercultural competence, refined those definitions, and reached some agreement on key elements of intercultural competence and appropriate assessment methods. In addition, higher education administrators participated in the final round of the Delphi to indicate their acceptance or rejection of the data developed by the intercultural experts.

Conclusions made from this study include identified elements of intercultural competence and assessment methods upon which both the intercultural experts, resulting in the first study to document consensus on intercultural competence. Primary findings include a preference for a general definition of intercultural competence among both experts. Moreover, the definition of intercultural competence continues to evolve as scholars refine the term further through on-going research. This group agreed that it is possible to assess degrees of intercultural competence and in so doing, that it is best to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess intercultural competence, including interviews, observation, and judgment by self and others. The model of intercultural competence, along with an assessment guide on intercultural competence, are presented based on the findings of the study.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to identify specific components of intercultural competence (based on experts' agreement) in an effort to provide higher education administrators with a more thorough definition of intercultural competence that they can use in assessing intercultural competence as a outcome of internationalization efforts at educational centers. In this way, this study will help administrators become better evaluators of internationalization efforts on their campuses.

1.2. Research Questions

Below are the specific research questions that will be explored by this study:
What is intercultural competence according to intercultural experts?
What are the best ways to assess intercultural competence according to intercultural experts?

1.3. Measuring Intercultural Competence as an Outcome

Many institutions cite intercultural competence as one desired outcome of internationalization. For example, an international education office at a post-secondary institution may state that a long-term outcome of internationalization is to establish a reputation for skilled, interculturally-competent graduates, but what does "interculturally-competent graduates" mean? There is little agreement as to specifically what constitutes intercultural competence (Barrett et al., 2013). For example, if intercultural competence is comprised of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness to enable a person to interact effectively with those from other cultures, what actually comprises intercultural knowledge? Intercultural skills? intercultural attitudes? intercultural awareness? While there has been some effort to research and write about this in the field, there has been no real agreement on the specifics (Fantini, 2009). Furthermore, how can intercultural competence be assessed? How can this demonstrate effective implementation of internationalization strategies? (Bennett, 2009). These and other related questions will be addressed in this study. As such, a basic assumption has been made that intercultural competence is indeed a desired outcome of internationalization, that it is definable and measurabl institution may state that a long-term outcome of internationalization is to establish a reputation for skilled, interculturally-competent graduates, but what does "interculturally-competent graduates" mean? There is little agreement as to specifically what constitutes intercultural competence (Deardorff & Edwards, 2012). For example, if intercultural competence is comprised of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness to enable a person to interact effectively with those from other cultures, what actually comprises intercultural knowledge? intercultural skills? intercultural attitudes? intercultural awareness? While there has been some effort to research and write about this in the field, there has been no real agreement on the specifics (Bennett, 2014). Furthermore, how can intercultural competence be assessed? How can this demonstrate effective implementation of internationalization strategies? These and other related questions will be addressed in this study. As such, a basic assumption has been made that intercultural competence is indeed a desired outcome of internationalization, that it is definable and measurable (Deardorff, 2012).

2. Data Analysis and Finding

2.1. Structure of the Delphi Method

The Delphi Method is a communication process to solve a problem. One has to try to reach a consensus on specific subjects through the interrogation of experts. The experts are able to clarify areas of uncertainty and to provide a decision support. The Delphi Method is based on investigation by a dialectical approach: Thesis (establishing an opinion), antithesis (a contradictory opinion) and a synthesis (a new consensus). The synthesis becomes the new thesis. This method can establish an agreement on a complex topic. The process is repeated until a consensus is reached. It can be used in the field of management, economics, technology, but also in the field of social science.

The different phases of the Delphi Method:

- Step 1 Formulating the problem and developing the questionnaire: This is a fundamental stage because it is important to define the problem clearly. The questionnaire is made according to certain rules where questions must be accurate, independent and quantifiable.

- Step 2 Choosing the experts: The experts are selected in relation to their ability to envision the future. One must isolate the experts in order to avoid having a distorted opinion issued from a group. Their opinion is collected anonymously and by postal services.
- Step 3 Exploration of the results: The questionnaire is sent to the experts explaining them the goals and the practical conditions of the investigation. In the 2nd round the experts must give new answers. They are informed of the results of the 1st round, so they have to justify their responses if they derivate from the ones of the group.

In the 3rd round they have to comment the arguments of the deviants and in the 4th round it is the definitive answer to clarify the final opinion. Successive questionnaires are sent to reduce the fragmentation of the opinions. Specialty community research ioncluding technical and professional experts. In this study, simple random sampling was used. To determine the sample size in this research was used sampling formula of Cochran.

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$$n = \frac{Z^2 pqN}{(N-1) + Z^2 pq}$$

According to the formula, the total sample consisted of 17 experts.

As noted, the objective of the questionnaire is awareness from opinions of experts about the assessment of intercultural competence as a outcome of internationalization in educational centers Therefore, experts should express "amount" values through the variables. Qualitative variables give more freedom to the Experts.

2.3. Finding One

What is intercultural competence according to intercultural experts?

There was an even greater breadth of definitions among intercultural experts than among the administrators, with a wide variety of definitions put forward. Based on the data generated from intercultural experts through the Delphi study, the top-rated definition was one in which intercultural competence was defined as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes." There were numerous other statements developed by the experts regarding intercultural competence which received 85% or higher agreement including the ability to shift one's frame of reference appropriately, the ability to achieve one's goals to some degree and behaving appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations. The definitions seemed to focus primarily on communication and behavior in intercultural situations. Of the specific components of intercultural competence noted, many of them addressed an individual's personal attributes such as curiosity, general openness, and respect for other cultures. Other delineated components involved cultural awareness, various adaptive traits, and cultural knowledge (both culture-specific knowledge as well as deep cultural knowledge).

One surprising result of this study was the specific skills that emerged through consensus which included skills to analyze, interpret, and relate as well as skills to listen and observe. Cognitive skills emerged including comparative thinking skills and cognitive flexibility. These skills point to the importance of process in acquiring intercultural competence and the attention that needs to be paid to developing these critical skills. In regard to specific components of intercultural competence, the intercultural experts in particular seemed to feel strongly that one component alone is not enough to ensure competence i.e. knowledge by itself. Table 1 contains all items receiving 80% or higher acceptance by the top intercultural experts in this study. This is a very important finding of this study since there has previously been no consensus among experts as to what constitutes intercultural competence. The items contained in Table 1 provide documented consensus on intercultural competence. It is important to note that only one element received 100% agreement from the intercultural experts which was "the understanding of others' world views." This substantiates other literature that views respect for other worldviews as essential to intercultural competence, where world view is described as basic perceptions and understandings of the worl .papers/presentations, student portfolios, observation of students by others/host culture, professor evaluations (in courses), and pre/post tests. An important finding from this study is that these institutions used a variety of methods to assess students' intercultural competence, with an average of five different assessment methods used per institution. The results of the administrators' participation in the last round of the Delphi study indicated that administrators achieved 100% agreement on four specific assessment methods: Observation by others/host culture, case studies, judgment by self and others, and student interviews. Administrators were nearly unanimous (95%) in using a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures to assess students' intercultural competence. Also receiving 95% acceptance among administrators were the following assessment methods: analysis of narrative diaries, self-report instruments, other-report instruments, triangulation (multiple methods), and a bottoms up approach involving such techniques as focus groups, dialogues, and workshops.

Table-1. Intercultural competence elements with 80%-100% agreement among top intercultural Experts

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE (ICC)

ITEM	SD	MEAN
Ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes	0.5	3.8
Ability to shift frame of reference appropriately and adapt behavior to cultural context; Adaptability, expandability, and flexibility of one's frame of reference/filter.	0.8	3.6
Ability to identify behaviors guided by culture and engage in new behaviors in other cultures even when behaviors are unfamiliar given a person's own socialization	0.7	3.4
Behaving appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations based on one's knowledge, skills, and motivation	1.0	3.4
Ability to achieve one's goals to some degree through constructive interaction in an intercultural context	0.8	3.4
Good interpersonal skills exercised interculturally; the sending and receiving of messages that are accurate and appropriate	0.6	3.6
Transformational process toward enlightened global citizenship that involves intercultural adroitness (behavioral aspect focusing on communication skills), intercultural awareness (cognitive aspect of understanding cultural differences), and intercultural sensitivity (focus on positive emotion towards cultural difference).	1.0	3.1

SPECIFIC COMPONENTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE INCLUDE

ITEM	SD	MEAN
Understanding others' world views	0.7	3.4
Cultural self-awareness and capacity for self-assessment	0.6	3.8
Adaptability - adjustment to new cultural environment	0.6	3.7
Skills to listen and observe	0.6	3.5
General openness toward intercultural learning and to people from other cultures	0.8	3.4
Ability to adapt to varying intercultural communication and learning styles	0.4	3.8
Flexibility	0.4	3.8
Skills to analyze, interpret, & relate	0.6	3.7
Tolerating and engaging ambiguity	0.6	3.6
Deep knowledge and understanding of culture (one's own and others')	0.8	3.5
Respect for other cultures	0.9	3.5
Cross-cultural empathy	0.9	3.5
Understanding the value of cultural diversity	1.0	3.4
Understanding of role and impact of culture and the impact of situational,	0.9	3.3

	SD	MEAN
social, and historical contexts involved		
Cognitive flexibility – ability to switch frames from etic to emic and back again	1.0	3.2
Sociolinguistic competence (awareness of relation between language and meaning in societal context)	0.8	3.0
Mindfulness	1.1	3.0
Withholding judgment	0.8	3.6
Curiosity and discovery	0.8	3.4
Learning through interaction	0.9	3.2
Ethnorelative view	1.2	3.1
Culture-specific knowledge/understanding host culture's traditions	0.9	2.9

*Results of Round 3 Delphi Study

2.4. Finding Two

What are the best ways to assess intercultural competence according to intercultural experts?

According to the intercultural experts, the best way to assess intercultural competence is through a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures (rated 3.7 out of 4.0). Specifically, case studies and interviews received the strongest agreement (90%) followed by analysis of narrative diaries, self-report instruments, observation by others/host culture, and judgment by self and others (all at 85% agreement). Table 20 contains further details.

Table-2. The best way to assess intercultural competence elements with 80%-100% agreement among top intercultural experts

WAYS TO ASSESS INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE INCLUDE

ITEM	SD	MEAN
Case studies	0.9	3.2
Interviews	1.0	2.9
Mix of quantitative and qualitative measures	0.8	3.7
Qualitative measures	0.7	3.4
Analysis of narrative diaries	0.9	3.2
Self-report instruments	0.9	3.2
Observation by others/host culture	0.9	3.2
Judgment by self and others	1.0	3.1
Developing specific indicators for each component/dimension of ICC and evidence of each indicator	1.1	3.1
Triangulation (use of multiple data-collection efforts as corroborative evidence for validity of qualitative research findings)	1.2	3.0

ISSUES RAISED BY EXPERTS IN ASSESSING INTERCULTURAL COMETENCE INCLUDE

ITEM	SD	MEAN
ICC assessment involves more than just observable performance	0.5	3.6
It is important to consider the cultural and social implications of assessing ICC	0.6	3.4
It is important to determine who measures ICC, who is the locus of evaluation, in what context, for what purpose, to what benefit, the time frame involved, the level of cooperation, and the level of abstraction	0.6	3.6
It is important to measure the degrees of ICC.	0.9	3.2
When assessing ICC, it is important to analyze the impact of situational, social, and historical contexts involved	3.1	0.7

*Results of Round 3 Delphi Study

3. Conclusion

The literature review raised the question of whether intercultural competence can be measured; some of the intercultural experts on the Delphi panel raised this same issue. Based on the overall consensus of both the experts and administrators, however, it can be concluded that intercultural competence can indeed be measured. Furthermore, it is important to measure degrees (levels) of intercultural competence. It can be concluded that it is important to measure intercultural competence over a period of time as opposed to one time (this corresponds with the literature and in particular, systems thinking espoused by Senge, 1990, in which it is important to look for patterns of change over time.) However, measuring intercultural competence is complex and severalconclusions can be made on assessing intercultural competence based on the results of this study. In measuring intercultural competence, it is important first to determine who is engaged in the actual measurement (including identifying their cultural biases), who is the locus of evaluation, in what

context, for what purpose, to what benefit, the time frame involved (e.g. ongoing assessment), the level of cooperation, and the level of abstraction. Furthermore, it is important to determine how the assessment will be used and how measurement methods will account for multiple competencies and multiple cultural identities within individuals. It is vital for the assessment method to match the definition devised for intercultural competence (i.e. more specific methods for more specific definitions and more general methods for more general definitions). This leads to the importance of developing indicators (perhaps in specific contexts) and delineated objectives and criteria for measurement if definitions and assessment methods are more specific.

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