



IRAQI
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية

ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <http://jls.tu.edu.iq>



Iraqi EFL University Students' Cultural Intelligence and Language Proficiency: A Correlational Study

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Recived: 23 /3/ 2022 , Accepted: 20/4/2022 , Online: 17/7/2022

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between cultural intelligence and language proficiency as well as seeks to identify Iraqi EFL University students' cultural intelligence levels. To this end, 400 students were selected randomly from different Iraqi universities / Colleges of Education/ English Departments / during the academic year (2020- 2021) as a sample for this study. Those 400 students were asked to respond to a cultural intelligence scale containing 20 items. After validating the adopted scale, Iraqi EFL University students' cultural intelligence was measured and compared by using ANOVA. Findings indicated that Iraqi EFL University students possess a good level of cultural intelligence and there is a significant relationship between cultural intelligence and Language Proficiency. Finally, the results were discussed and some suggestions were made for further studies.

Key Words: Cultural Intelligence, Language Proficiency.

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العلاقة الارتباطية بين الذكاء الثقافي وكفاءة اللغة الانكليزية لدى طلبة الجامعة العراقيين
الدارسين اللغة الانكليزية بوصفها لغة اجنبية

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الملخص : تبحث هذه الدراسة في العلاقة بين الذكاء الثقافي وكفاءة اللغة الانكليزية وتسعى إلى تحديد مستويات الذكاء الثقافي لطلاب الجامعة العراقيين الدارسين اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية/ المرحلة الرابعة. ولهذه الغاية ، تم اختيار 400 طالب بشكل عشوائي من مختلف الجامعات / كليات التربية / أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية / خلال العام الدراسي (2020-2021) كعينة لهذه الدراسة. طُلب من هؤلاء الطلاب البالغ عددهم 400 طالب الاستجابة لمقياس الذكاء الثقافي الذي يحتوي 20 فقرة. وأشارت النتائج إلى أن طلاب الجامعة العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يمتلكون مستوى جيد في الذكاء الثقافي وأن هناك علاقة موجبة بين الذكاء الثقافي وكفاءة اللغة. وأخيرا، تمت مناقشة النتائج وتم تقديم بعض التوصيات .

الكلمات الدالة: الكف المعرفي، كفاءة اللغة الإنكليزية.

Section One

Introduction

1.1 The Statement and Significance of The Problem

The cultural factors in the academic context are a hot point in modern Education. Affective and cultural factors like cultural intelligence. cultural knowledge is considered an indispensable aspect of communicative competence and an integral aspect of second language pedagogy. In other words, learning the target language's culture has proved to be both the means and end for language teaching. Attempting to learn a new language, learners are expected to familiarize themselves with the target culture to become proficient in that language. Some EFL learners may not be adequately knowledgeable or familiar with the cultural norms of the target language; this may result in an invisible communicative barrier that considerably affects their communication skills. In this regard, for the students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL), curriculum designers should incorporate

sufficient materials in the course books to enhance the students' cultural competence. Increasing EFL learners' CQ can facilitate the learning process in the English classroom. CQ is defined as the individual's ability to function effectively in multicultural environments. The reason for including teaching culture in the curricula is because it provides teachers and learners with an insight into cultural norms and differences. Enhancing the students' CQ promotes better communicative skills and facilitates academic success. Studies that exclusively address the relationship between CQ and language proficiency are not many in the Iraqi context

1.2 Aims

The current study aims at finding out Iraqi EFL university students' levels of Cultural Intelligence and Language Proficiency as well as identifying the correlation between Iraqi EFL university students' Cultural Intelligence and Language Proficiency.

1.3 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to

1. Iraqi EFL fourth-year university students at the Colleges of Education in Iraq except for the Kurdistan region during the academic year (2020-2021).
2. Also, Cultural Intelligence was examined not from a purely psychological perspective in detail, but to the extent sufficient to reveal its relationship with language proficiency.

1.4 Significance of the Study

1. The current study will make a useful contribution to the available literature.
2. This study also focuses on understanding the interrelationships between Cultural Intelligence and language proficiency among Iraqi EFL university students.

1.5 Definitions of Basic Terms

1. Cultural Intelligence is a factor of more efficiency and performance and proficiency improvement and as an essential variable across ascendancy of organizations should be considered " (van derail, 2011, p14).
2. Language Proficiency: refers to a learner's general ability in speaking, listening, reading, and writing based on some kind of criteria or measure (Haldey, 2001 as cited in Arana, 2008,p.25).

Section Two

Theoretical Background and Related Studies

2.1 The Concept of Cultural Intelligence (CQ, for Short)

The concept of cultural intelligence was only created and introduced to the academic areas of social sciences and management in 2003 (Earley & Ang, 2003; Van Dyne & Ang, 2008). Despite the scarcity of research on it, it has already been argued that cultural intelligence is "conceptually distinct from personality traits, other bits of intelligence and other intercultural competencies" (Ang et al., 2007, p. 6), and its development took place under reasoning around theoretical models of intelligence, a need based on the increasing multiculturalism in the

workplace and the need to understand the capacity of some people to adapt to new cultural environments as this capacity varies from person to person. As stated by Earley and Ang (2003, p. xiii), cultural intelligence theory is a “theory of intercultural interaction based on the concept of intelligence”, and it is determined by an individual’s cognition, motivation, and behaviors that reveal adaptation to different cultural settings (Earley & Ang, 2003; Van Dyne & Livermore, 2005-2011).

The necessity of adaptation comes from the fact that we understand the different cultural elements within our own cultures, and we behave appropriately. Still, we lack these characteristics within a different culture as there are new and other cultural elements and behaviors we are not familiar with. To adapt to new cultural settings and carry ourselves appropriately, we need to develop different skills and capabilities and, therefore, increase our cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003,p.43).

2.2 The History of Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence was first introduced by Earley & Ang (2003), who examined the concept from three main perspectives: the cognitive aspect dealing with how individuals formulate patterns out of cultural cues, the motivational aspect dealing with how individuals attempt to achieve a socialized interaction with others from different cultures and the behavioral factor dealing with how cognition and motivation regulate the behaviors of individuals. Livermore (2010, p.19) defines CQ as “the capability to function effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational cultures. It is a four-dimensional model, four-step cycle, different from emotional intelligence, and inside-out approach.”

The concept of CQ first appeared in management studies where the behaviour of employees in other cultures was examined. Later, it was borrowed into several disciplines after the year 2006. By 2009, the Handbook of Cultural Intelligence: Theory, Measurement, and Applications (Ang & Van Dyne (eds.), 2008) was published, and it contained more than 20 chapters on diverse disciplines. The handbook did not include a chapter dedicated to education or instruction per day. Instead, several mentions of teaching and learning were scattered here and there. However, Sternberg’s subsection was devoted to instruction which concluded that “teaching in ways that capitalized on cultural knowledge enhanced student performance. This would be true for any culture one might choose to examine”(Sternberg: 2009, p. 314).

Further, Livermore (2010) claims that cultural intelligence was tested mainly in business and education. Yet after 2003, it has gained exponential growth in several interdisciplinary fields such as nursing, engineering, law, consulting, mental health, government, and religion. While a relatively recent concept, scholars proposed different definitions for cultural intelligence. For instance, (Thomas & Inkson, 2003) argued that cultural intelligence is a multidimensional capacity composed of cultural knowledge, mindfulness, and a stock of behavioral skills. This definition resembles the definition proposed by (Earley & Ang, 2003) in that both of them consider cultural intelligence as capability/capacity, which is composed of three constructs.

The cultural knowledge, practicing mindfulness, and behavioral stock constructs proposed by (Thomas & Inkson, 2003) can be compared respectively to the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects proposed by (Earley &

Ang, 2003). Cultural knowledge is a cognitive aspect that requires examining how people formulate patterns from cultural cues. Similarly, practicing mindfulness focuses on achieving a cultural interaction with others, and such an intention necessitates a degree of internal or external motivation.

The behavioral dimension of (Thomas & Inkson, 2003) refers to the behavioral skills used by an individual while achieving a cultural interaction with others. Such a cultural interaction is governed by the cognition and motivation constructs. Randrian Asolo et al., (2020) found that “motivational CQ influences cognitive, metacognitive and behavioral CQ and cognitive and behavioral CQ influence consumer willingness to buy foreign products ...[and] motivational CQ mediates the relationships between global identity and the other three CQ dimensions”.

2.3 Related Studies

1. Khodadady and Ghahari 2012

This study explored the relationship between cultural intelligence (CQ) and English as a foreign language (EFL). The sample was one hundred forty-five undergraduate university students majoring in various fields of knowledge in three Iranian universities. The instrument of the study was a validated Persian Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) and a disclosed test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Results showed that cultural intelligence is significantly but negatively correlated with English proficiency.

2. Rafie ,Robab and Nasri (2016)

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' CQ and their Performance in the IELTS listening modules. The study sample was sixty advanced EFL students majoring in English translation at the University of Zanjan. The researchers used the CQ scale developed and validated by Ang et al. (2007) to assess the learners` CQ. The listening skill was evaluated by the Oxford Quick Placement Test. Results revealed a statistically significant relationship between CQ and students` performance on IELTS listening modules. Also, the multiple regression analysis indicated that the four components of CQ (metacognitive, cognitive, behavioural, and motivational) are the best predictors for the students' performance in listening.

2.3.1 Discussion of Related Studies

All the previous studies aim at finding out the relationship of CQ with other variables, also the current study aims to find the relationship between CQ and LP. The samples of the previous studies are different, the sample of Khodadady and Ghahari 2012 consisted of one hundred forty-five students/Eighth grade, and Rafie, Robab, and Nasri (2016) included sixty school students. Like these studies, the sample of the current study is university students which consists of (400) male and female students. Khodadady et, al., 2012 and Rafiem et, al.,(2016) used a test and a scale to find out CQ like these studies the current study used a CQ scale and a test to find out the level of CQ among EFL Iraqi students.

Section Three

Procedures

3.1 Descriptive Design

Selecting an appropriate design for research work is one of the most important decisions that researchers should make (Van Dalen,1979,p.232). The descriptive design has been used as being the most appropriate one for studying the correlational relationships between variables and revealing the differences between them to describe and analyze the phenomenon being studied. Correlational research is treated as descriptive research, primarily because it describes an existing condition. Correlational research involves collecting data to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables. The degree of relationship is expressed as a correlational coefficient. (Mills and Gay,2019, p.224)

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population comprises all the subjects under study (Bluman,2007:797). The population of the current study includes fourth-year university students at the colleges of Education/ Departments of English who are enrolled in all Iraqi Universities except the Kurdistan region. The sample of the current study includes (400) students majoring in EFL 4th year university students who are chosen randomly from the colleges of Education for human sciences /Departments of English in the universities of Baghdad/ Tikrit/ Babylon, Karbala, and Misan and as shown in Table (3.1).

Table (3.1)

The Sample of the Study

Name of Iraqi Universities	Sample
Baghdad University College of Education /Ibn Rushd	65
Baghdad University College of Education for Women	50
Tikrit University College of Education for Humanities	77
Tikrit University College of Education for Women	44
Babylon	65
Kerbala	55
Misan	44
Total	400

3.3 The Instruments of the Study

To achieve the aims of the current study, two instruments have been used, the first one is the scale (CQ) which has been adopted to discover the level of students in cultural intelligence. The scale is scored according to a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, to (5) always for the positive statements and 5-1 for the negative statements and the scoring is reversed for the negative statements. The second instrument is a test that is developed relying on TOFEL tests that consists of five parts (Listening, Speaking, Writing, and Reading Comprehension).

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Study Instruments

Validity refers to "the truth of the test when it measures the components that the examinee intended to measure". (Bynom, 2001,p.13). The final form of the study instruments has been given to a (12) jury of specialists to obtain its face validity. The jurors have approved the appropriateness of all the items on the scale and the test. They put forward some modifications which have been considered.

On the other hand, Reliability refers to the consistency of the results when the researcher gives the same test to the same group of the examinee on two different occasions (Brown,2004,p. 20). To obtain the reliability of the study instruments the test-retest method and Cronbach Alpha Coefficient have been used, the reliability of the scale ranges between (0,85-0,86) and the reliability of the test is (0,83).

3.5 Results of the study

3.6.1 Results Related to the First Aim

In order to achieve the first aim which states "Finding out Iraqi EFL university students levels of CQ, and LP, arithmetic mean and standard deviation have been used. A t-test for one sample has been used to determine the significant differences between the arithmetic and theoretical means. The manipulation of the collected data reveals that the testees have a medium level of CI since the arithmetic mean score is higher than the theoretical mean. The difference is not significant statistically at the (0.05) level of significance, since the computed t-value (1.338) is lower than the critical t-value(1.96) with (399) degree of freedom. See Table (4.1) and Graphic (4.1).

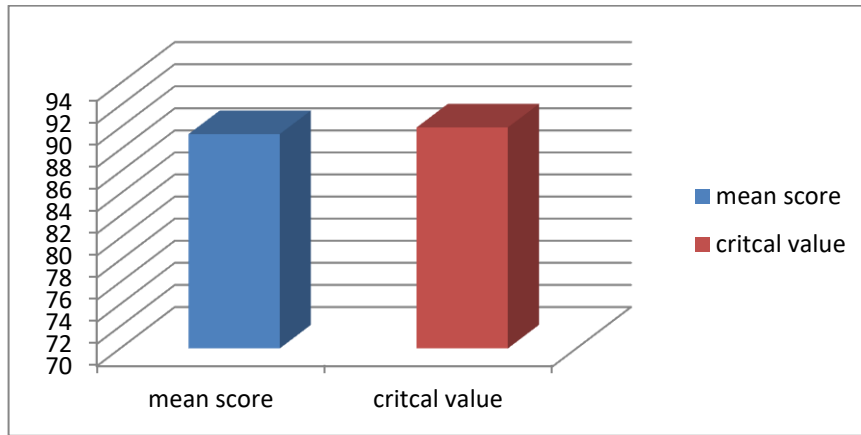
Table (4.1)

Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviations, and t-values of the CQ

Variable	Sample	Arithmetic Mean	SD	Theoretical Mean	t-Values		Significance Level (0.5)
					Computed	Critical	
CI	400	89.410	8.817	90	1.338	1.96	Not Significant

Graphic (4.1)

Arithmetic and Theoretical Means of the CQ



The level of LP among Iraqi EFL University students, results show that the arithmetic mean is (50,292) with a standard deviation of (14,237). To know the significance of the difference between the arithmetic mean and the theoretical mean, the T-test for one sample has been used, and finds that there are no statistically differences at the level of (0.05), since the computed T- value is (0.411), which is smaller than the critical T- value of (1.96), with a degree of freedom (399). This means the research sample is at a medium level. See Table (3.3) and Graphic (3.2).

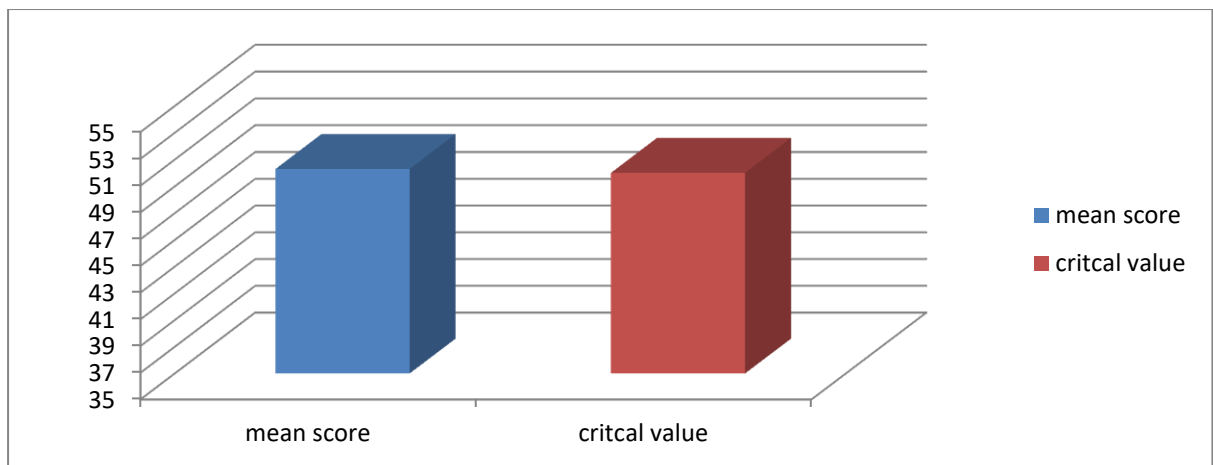
Table (3.3)

The Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values of LPT

Variable	Sample	Arithmetic mean	Standard Deviation	Theoretical Mean	T-Value		Significance (0,05)
					Computed	Critical	
LPT	400	50,292	14,237	50	0,411	1,96	Significant

Graphic (3.2)

The Arithmetic and Theoretical Mean of The LPT



3.6.2 Results Related to the Second Aim

To find out the correlation between CQ and LP among Iraqi EFL university students, Pearson correlation coefficient and T-test have been used to reveal the significance of the correlation between these two variables. Results show that the value of the correlation coefficient between these variables is (0,250) and to know the significance of the relationship T.test formula has been used. Results show that the computed t- value (5,250) is higher than the critical t -value (1,96) at (0.05) level of significance and under (399) a degree of freedom. Concerning the obtained results, the relationship between CQ and LP is a statistically significant direct relationship. See Table (3.3).

Table (3.3)

The Calculated Correlation Coefficient Between CQ and LP

Sample	The Calculated Correlation Coefficient	T-Value		Level of Significance
		Computed	Critical	
400	0,250	0,250	1,96	Significant

3.7 Discussion of Results

According to the results of the current study, Iraqi EFL university students have a good level of cultural intelligence and this result indicates that, although university students deal with a huge amount of different information, that requires them to keep with that information and retrieve them when it is needed, they can stop the interference, information that is not related to the task and eliminate the effect of disruptive stimuli. This can be attributed to several factors, including the maturation factor of brain activities and the factor of experience since students passed through a lot of experiences and a lot of information during the study stages, which give them the ability to deal with the stimuli according to the mental schemas that have been retained previously in dealing with stimuli and information.

3.8 Conclusions

In the light of the results, it is concluded that

1. Iraqi EFL university students have a good level of cultural intelligence and can adopt cultural situations where needed.
2. Students` cultural capabilities should be improved by involving materials, activities, and tasks within their study materials which can improve their cultural abilities.
3. Iraqi EFL university students` level in LP has been influenced by cultural factors like cultural intelligence.

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