

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND CULTURE SHOCK AMONG VIETNAMESE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

KHÁM PHÁ MỐI QUAN HỆ GIỮA TRÍ TUỆ VĂN HOÁ VÀ SỐC VĂN HOÁ CỦA SINH VIÊN VIỆT NAM: NGHIÊN CỨU TÌNH HUỐNG

Vo Thi Kim Anh*

The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: vtkanh@ufl.udn.vn

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Abstract - Going abroad for study or internship is becoming increasingly popular in Vietnam. Besides great benefits in terms of academic performance and career development, students are facing challenges due to cultural differences. The study aims at investigating how Vietnamese students suffered culture shock and what is the relationship between their cultural intelligence and the level of culture shock they suffered. The data were collected via the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The number of participants is 34, who studied or had an internship in Australia, the United States of America, and Thailand. The study reveals that students had a relatively high cultural intelligence level, and they experienced culture shock in their time abroad. Yet, the level of culture shock they suffered varies, depending on their cultural intelligence. It is recommended that to overcome such difficulties, students should equip themselves with cultural knowledge and skills before going abroad.

Key words - Cultural intelligence; culture shock; cultural distance; intercultural; international study

1. Introduction

In the era of globalisation, going abroad for study or work is increasingly becoming trendy, especially when the living standard is higher and the number of families which can afford to send their children abroad is rising quickly. Universities also seek opportunities to enhance their students' future employment capabilities. Being in a new environment brings students tremendous experiences, which may be associated with some degree of emotional disturbance. They may be overwhelmed by a large number of new things, which causes them to having certain adjustment and adaptation. Such phenomenon is considered to be culture shock, a term used by an anthropologist [1]

Individuals are recognized to suffer from different levels of culture shock. Some can quickly adapt themselves to the new environment while others find it extremely challenging to face the cultural differences. Reasons of such differences are identified to be genders, ages, kinds of environment, the amount of time being abroad, and especially students' cultural intelligence [2], [3]. The term "cultural intelligence" (CQ), which refers to the individual ability to function effectively in the environment with cultural diversity, was first introduced by Earley and Ang in 2003 [4]. Studies have been done to explore CQ in various settings, from the employment to educational ones [3], [5], [6].

Tóm tắt - Việc ra nước ngoài để học tập hoặc thực tập đang ngày càng phổ biến ở Việt Nam. Bên cạnh những lợi ích lớn về thành tích học tập và phát triển nghề nghiệp, sinh viên phải đối mặt với những thách thức do sự khác biệt văn hoá. Nghiên cứu tìm hiểu sốc văn hoá sinh viên Việt Nam trải qua và mối quan hệ giữa trí tuệ văn hoá với mức độ sốc văn hoá họ gặp phải. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua bảng hỏi và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc. Số lượng người tham gia là 34 sinh viên học tập hoặc thực tập tại Úc, Hoa Kỳ và Thái Lan. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy, sinh viên có mức trí tuệ văn hoá tương đối cao và đã trải qua sốc văn hoá trong thời gian ở nước ngoài. Tuy nhiên, mức độ sốc văn hoá của sinh viên khác nhau, phụ thuộc vào trí tuệ văn hoá. Nghiên cứu khuyến nghị để vượt qua những khó khăn, sinh viên cần trang bị cho mình kiến thức và kỹ năng về văn hoá trước khi ra nước ngoài.

Từ khóa - Trí tuệ văn hóa; sốc văn hóa; khác biệt văn hóa; liên văn hóa; du học

Numerous studies have been done so far to explore CQ and culture shock as separate elements, but the ones to identify the relationship between them are not paid enough attention [3], [6] - [8]. In order to contribute to the understanding of CQ and cultural shock, the case study entitled "Exploring the Relationship between CQ and Culture Shock among Vietnamese Students: A case study" was conducted.

The study aims at addressing three research questions:

1. What is surveyed Vietnamese students' CQ level?
2. What culture shock do students experience?
3. What is the relationship between students' CQ and their culture shock?

2. Literature review

2.1. Cultural intelligence

The term "cultural intelligence" (CQ) was first used in 2003 [4]. CQ is considered to be a non-academic intelligence that characterises a person's competence in functioning in environments of cultural variety [9]. CQ is different from emotional and other non-academic intelligence which is culture constrained and do not transfer from the cultural spectrum [10].

According to Earley and Ang [4], CQ is a "complex, multifactor individual attribute that is composed of metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral

factors” (p.584). Metacognitive CQ refers to a person’s level of conscious cultural awareness during cultural interaction. This dimension of CQ includes strategies that allow people to develop heuristics rules for social interaction in various new cultural settings. A person with high metacognitive CQ is found to have good capacity to deal with cultural differences. It is a person metacognitive CQ that drives him to face cultural differences, leading to a better ability to adapt to a new cultural environment [6].

The second dimension of CQ is cognitive CQ which denotes a person’s knowledge of cultural practices, cultural norms, and convention that he can get from education, and personal experience. In different cultural settings, cultural norms and convention are used in different ways [11]. Being in a new cultural environment, people need to be equipped with cultural knowledge in order to behave appropriately to avoid cultural misunderstanding. the cognitive CQ is the key factor for people to adapt to a new environment. A person with low cognitive CQ may face cultural shock and misunderstanding in lives and work/study places.

Motivational dimension refers to the ability to acquire and function well in various cultural contexts despite cultural differences. It is conceptualized as self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation in intercultural settings [11], [3]. A person with high motivational CQ is identified to be more successful to communicate or perform in intercultural interactions.

The final dimension behavioral CQ is the one that reflects the person’s actual activities in communication. This dimension refers to a person’s ability to utilize appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions to communicate with others from various cultures [12]. In this dimension, the person’s CQ capability is visible. People interact or make conversations through reliance on others’ behaviors expressed by verbal or nonverbal actions like facial, vocal expressions, and body actions. Based on such expressions and actions, people will make decision on what they use in interaction or how they react. Based on the behavioral CQ, they know what they can do, what they cannot do to be appropriate in such cultural settings.

All in all, CQ consists of four dimension as discussed above. People who have high CQ are recognized to perform and adapt themselves better in intercultural settings. CQ reflects a person’s ability to adapt themselves and have flexibility in communication when being in a multicultural settings or new cultural environments. The CQ ability is not only useful for a person who goes abroad for studying or working, but also for those who work in multicultural settings in their home country such as tourism companies, and international organizations.

2.2. Culture shock

Culture shock is defined as an individual’s emotional reaction due to the effect of being unable to control behaviors in a new cultural environment. Culture shock is identified to occur when people move to a new cultural environment for living, studying or working [3]. Culture shock often has symptoms like distraction, loneliness, anxiety, loss of appetite, tiredness, etc. Being in a new

culture, people are shocked by strange food, cultural differences, or life styles.

Six specific aspects of culture shocks have been identified: (i) strain caused by efforts to make necessary psychological adjustments; (ii) feeling of loss and deprivation; (iii) being rejected by and/or members of the new environment; (iv) being confused in role, cultural role norms, values, feelings, and self-identity; (v) sense of impotence due to being unable to face the new environment [13]. People who are in a new cultural environment will suffer from culture shock at various levels, depending on the amount of time they spend in the setting. There are four different stages [1].

Honeymoon stage: This is the initial stage when people are first exposed to the new culture with curiosity and fascination. They may find new things exciting and they are eager to explore them.

Crisis/ frustration stage: In this second stage, cultural differences appear to be clearer, which may make people confused, anxious, homesick or irritated. As the time they are in the new culture is not long enough for them to understand the differences in culture, misunderstanding and communication problems occur frequently, causing them to be frustrated. This stage is considered to be the most difficult one.

Recovery/ adjustment stage: In the third stage, people gradually have better experience when they understand and begin being able to adapt to the new environment. Frustration they may undergo in the second stage begins to fade. People’s language skills are improved. Their new life routines are established, and their adaptation to the new culture begins.

Adjustment (or Adaptation) stage: The final stage marks the success of adaptation to the new culture. At this stage, people feel more comfortable and fully adjusted to the new setting. They are now being able to function effectively in the new culture. Some may even start to appreciate the new culture, even more than their home country’s culture.

2.3. Culture shock and CQ

There is a relationship between culture shock and CQ. While culture shock is the one that a person suffers in a new cultural setting, CQ is the ability that helps him/her to overcome such difficulties. According to Presbitero [14], a person’s CQ can help him to reduce cultural shock. With high CQ, a person can more easily adapt himself to the new environment. It is identified that there is a close relationship between the level of CQ and culture shock. The higher level of CQ a person possesses, the less severe culture shock he suffers when being in a new cultural setting [3], [14].

2.4. Review of previous studies

Since the first introduction of the term “Culture shock”, numerous studies on culture shock have been conducted so far [15], [16], [1]. Cui et al. did a study to investigate the culture shock of Thai students who were in Chinese universities [17]. The qualitative study found that Thai students experienced culture shock caused by the new

environment, language, cultural differences and new academic experience. The findings also highlighted that such culture shock can be minimized with the support from universities. Yet, the results of the study with limited number of participants (10 students) cannot be generalized.

Another recent study examined the culture shock that Indonesian students underwent when they studied abroad [18]. The findings of the research reveal that language, learning system, and culture are three factors causing culture shock among these students. In addition, the study came up with the conclusion that self-adjustment is the key solution to overcome culture shock. The study is a good reference for further study; yet, Malaysia has many similarities in culture with Indonesia, the culture shock reflecting in the study may not be serious.

Though CQ is a new field of study, the number of studies on CQ increases. Lambert Snodgrass [19] did a study on how CQ students were before and after the internship in South Korea. The research reveals that students' CQ increased after the internship. Yet, the study failed to identify how specific dimensions of CQ were interrelated and further studies should be conducted.

Bui conducted a study on how cultural intelligence can ease the stress of workers in airline industry [20]. The research identifies the importance of CQ level among Vietnamese flight attendants working in international flights. Nevertheless, the study limits itself to the flight attendants' activities on international flights and findings serves to improve their performance at work. The very recent research shows that English majored students in a public university had high level of CQ [6]. The participants had five week internship in Thailand. Yet, due to the limited sample size, the generalizability of findings is limited.

Although many studies on CQ or culture shock separately are found. Very few ones have been conducted to identify the relationship between them. Elifondri and Amril [3] did a research to investigate the relationship between students' CQ and their culture shock during the internship in Japan. It is found that there was a relationship between culture shock and CQ. Yet, it is surprising that Indonesian students did not suffer from much culture shock in Japanese universities.

There is a great gap to be covered in order to have a deep insight into the relationship between CQ and culture shock. In order to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between them among Vietnamese students who have spent some time abroad for exchange, internship or study, this case study was implemented.

3. Methodology

The study employed mixed methods in which the survey was implemented to collect numerical data, followed by interviews to gather deep information to further explain what was identified in the quantitative data.

3.1. Instruments

The questionnaire was developed from previous studies. Specifically, the questionnaire consists of four

main parts. The first part aims at collecting demographic information. The second part, which is employed to evaluate students' CQ, used the 20 CQ evaluation items developed and validated by Van Dyne et al. [21]. These 20 item are divided into 4 groups to evaluate 4 CQ dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. The third part is to collect information about students' cultural shocks with items based on Mumford and the final one was open-ended questions [16], [22]. The semi-structured interview was designed to gather information to clarify what was found from the survey.

3.2. Participants

The respondents of the survey should comply with two criteria. They must be Vietnamese students studying or having internship abroad. 34 respondents were selected, with the age ranging from 21 to 43 years old. 5 of them agreed to take part in the interview. These students come from different areas in Vietnam, and are taking either undergraduate and post graduate programs.

3.3. Validity and reliability

The validity and reliability of the research was maintained through a careful design of the research and the development of instruments. In addition, the instruments were built up from previous studies (See Section Instruments) with high reliability level. Specifically, the questionnaire has the level of reliability of .947; the CQ part is identified to have the reliability of .908, and .916 is the reliability of culture shock part.

3.4. Data analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 24. Descriptive analysis and inferential analysis were conducted to address the research questions. Themes and codes were utilized to analyse the qualitative data.

4. Findings

4.1. Students' CQ Level

Students' CQ level is identified to be relatively high with the range of mean values from 3.1618 to 4.0353 [12]. Among four dimensions, motivational CQ has the highest mean value (=4.0353), and the lowest one belongs to Cognitive CQ (=3.1618) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' CQ Levels

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Metacognitive CQ	34	2.25	5.00	4.0294	.65065
Cognitive CQ	34	2.00	5.00	3.1618	.75488
Motivational CQ	34	2.40	5.00	4.0353	.67235
Behavioral CQ	34	2.20	5.00	3.6765	.78472

All five interviewed students told that they knew that they should prepare themselves before going abroad for study. It may be the reason why they had fairly high level of CQ. Four of them reserved time and efforts to upgrade their knowledge of the country where they come before going abroad. Yet, one of them replied that she did not pay much attention to preparing herself for her study as she had come to that country for a short holiday before that.

4.2. Students' Culture Shock

As identified in Table 2, the mean values of 10 items are between 2.56 and 3.47. Students had the greatest challenge in adapting to the new environment while they found it least difficult in performing/seeing religious activities. It is found that students suffer little from culture shock related to feelings of not being accepted, unfriendly manner of local people, making friends or communication. Yet, they found it hard to adapt to the new environment with living cost, strange food, life serenity, and individualism in the country where they study.

Table 2. *Students' Culture Shock*

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
5.1. I have experienced culture shock with self-adjustment to live in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	3.47	1.212
5.2. I have experienced culture shock with food in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	3.12	1.250
5.3. I have experienced culture shock with living-cost in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	3.47	1.261
5.4. I have experienced culture shock with life serenity in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	3.18	1.218
5.5. I have experienced culture shock with individualism in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	3.24	1.281
5.6. I have experienced culture shock with being unacceptable by people in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	2.62	1.349
5.7. I have experienced culture shock with the unfriendly manner of people in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	2.65	1.178
5.8. I have experienced culture shock to make friends with people in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	2.68	1.319
5.9. I have experienced culture shock to communicate with people in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	2.74	1.263
5.10. I have experienced culture shock to perform/see religious activity in the country where I am studying.	34	1	5	2.56	1.236

Interviewed student 2 was shocked when beginning his student life in USA when he had to manage his life himself. Even though he stayed in the dormitory and his parents covered all cost, he could not get used to the food there,

and was shocked with what he had to pay for things there. "I have experienced culture shock as a result of the quiet and calm lifestyle in the country where I am studying. At first, I found it difficult to adjust to the slower pace of life, as it felt unfamiliar and even isolating. However, over time, I began to appreciate the tranquility and balance it offered. Everything here is expensive, much higher than in Vietnam" cited from his interview. USA people respect individualism and the university where he studied is in the countryside. By contrast, Vietnam is a developing country with the low living standard and community life styles.

"During the first week of my internship in Udon Thani, Thailand, I felt out of place when everyone greeted each other with the traditional wai gesture, while I instinctively used handshakes. I also struggled with the indirect communication style-people rarely expressed disagreement openly, which made it hard for me to interpret feedback", cited from the interview with Interviewed student 1. Behaving appropriately is not easy when students are in a new cultural setting, even in South-East Asia countries.

Being asked what they feel when they have chances experiencing religious activities, students interviewed normally expressed excitement. "Shocked? No, I find it interesting to see religious activities", cited from Interviewed student 3. Others have similar feelings about religious activities. For them, it is the chance to know about religion. All participants have good English proficiency as they need to meet at least B2 or 5.5 of IELTS to go abroad for study, so language is not a big problem for them, even for those who took internship in Thailand.

4.3. Correlation between CQ level and culture shock

The result of the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between CQ and culture shock with $r=-.431$, and $p=0.01<0.05$. The result indicates that those with high level of CQ tend to suffer from less culture shock. In other words, students' CQ helps them to better adapt to the new cultural setting.

The analysis of interview data further explains what is found in the quantitative data. According to "Interviewed student 2" who is studying in the United States, he had equipped himself with knowledge and culture of USA before he started his study, so he knows how to behave in this country, resulting in his good adaptation. Yet, not all students have good preparation. Another female student (Interviewed student 4) who is taking courses in Australia replied in the interview that this was the first time she was in Australia and she did not travel a lot before that. As a result, she found it hard to know how to behave in such new setting. She did not know that in Australia, people would keep to the left on the street, so she had trouble travelling on the first days.

Yet, the interview also reveals that besides CQ level, some factors are found to cause students' culture shock. Interviewed student 1 who had internship in Thailand told us that Thai culture was not much different from Vietnamese culture, so she did not suffer much from the culture shock. In other words, the level of cultural

difference also causes various levels of culture shock. In addition, “open-minded” characteristic is also identified to reduce the culture shock among Vietnamese students as expressed by Interviewed student 2. He suggested that culture shock is not the big problem if people have the awareness of accepting cultural differences as a normal phenomenon. Language barriers are another factor causing culture shock. According to Interviewed student 1, as she did not know Thai language, she met some problems in communication. Thai people said something and touched her at the same time to express something, making her feel irritated as in the Vietnamese culture, touching the other in such a way is considered to be impolite.

4.4. Gender difference

Independent T test was used to test whether gender has any effects on students' CQ and culture shock. There is no statistical significance identified when p is .259 for CQ and .989 for culture shock.

4.5. Countries and culture shock

MANOVA was conducted to test whether the country where students study has any statistical effects on students' culture shock. The p -value was .00, less than .05, indicating that there is statistical significance between the country where students study and their culture shock.

The result is further explained from the analysis of interview data. Thailand is a South-East Asia country which share many cultural features with Vietnam. According to Interviewed student 1, she did not have much culture shock in Thailand as she found Thailand familiar in the lifestyle, food, and even living cost. Yet, USA with very different lifestyles in which individualism is highly respected brings students more challenges in adapting to the new life. Interviewed student 5 who studied in USA expressed in the interview that he found USA quite different from Vietnam in regard to lifestyles, foods, and living cost, resulting in much culture shock he suffered. He shared the room with one American student in the dormitory and misunderstanding often occurs due to the cultural distance between the two countries.

All in all, students in the study have a fairly good level of CQ and their CQ has negative correlation with their culture shock. In addition, many other factors like students' characteristics, language abilities, and the cultural distance should also be considered in studies about culture shock.

5. Discussion of findings

The findings of this study reveals that Vietnamese students surveyed have relatively high CQ. The findings aligns with previous studies. University students often have good CQ as found in studies conducted in Romani, Japan, and Vietnam [11], [3], [6]. According to Vo [6], English-majored students in a public university in Vietnam have good CQ, resulting in their less challenges in their internship abroad. One of major reasons for the high CQ of tertiary students come from education. University students, especially those studying languages have chances to obtain cultural knowledge which increases their CQ.

The study also reveals that living cost, individualsim, and life adjustment are major elements causing students' culture shock. Similarly, Mumford [15] finds that physical surroundings including food, and environment contribute to students' culture shock. Yet, Mumford [15] also adds to the list of such elements that health is one of main factors causing the seriousness of culture shock when people study or work in other countries. Culture shock is identified to have statistically significant negative relationship with CQ level in the research. This findings is also recognized in previous studies. According to Elifondri and Amril [3], students' culture shock can be minimized by their CQ. Yet, many factors contribute to culture shock. It is revealed from the study that the country where students come for study or internship may affect their culture shock. Nations with similar culture cause less culture shock to students [3], [15].

6. Conclusion and implications

It is concluded that Vietnamese students in the study have relatively high CQ level and their CQ level and culture shock have statistically significant negative relationship. It means that the higher CQ level students possess, the less culture shock they suffer. Besides, it is identified that many underlying factors like students' characteristics, and cultural distance among countries may have certain effects on students' culture shock.

In order to avoid culture shock, it is recommended that students need to upgrade their CQ levels [17]. Studying the culture of the country where they are going to study is a good choice to accumulate CQ. Careful pre-depart preparation is also suggested to help students avoid serious culture shock. In addition, studying abroad requires students to be financially prepared.

7. Limitations of study

Although the study contributes to the understanding of CQ level and culture shock of the Vietnamese students to some extent, its limitations regarding the small sample size leads to the fact that the research findings cannot be generalized. Therefore, further studies with larger samples should be conducted to have generalizable findings. In addition, studies on underlying factors contributing to culture shock are recommended to be carried out.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

Part 1: Demographic information

Gender

Age

Study level

Major

Country for internship or study.

Part 2: Cultural Intelligence Level

Metacognitive CQ

Q1: I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.

Q2: I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me.

Q3: I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions.

Q4: I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures.

Cognitive CQ

Q5: I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures.

Q6: I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages.

Q7: I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures.

Q8: I know the marriage systems of other cultures.

Q9: I know the arts and crafts of other cultures.

Q10: I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures.

Motivational CQ

Q11: I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.

Q12: I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.

Q13: I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me.

Q14: I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.

Q15: I am confident that I can get accustomed to the shopping conditions in a different culture.

Behavioral CQ

Q16: I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

Q17: I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.

Q18: I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.

Q19: I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.

Q20: I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

Part 3: Culture Shock

Q1. I have experienced culture shock with self-adjustment to live in the country where I am studying.

Q2. I have experienced culture shock with food in the country where I am studying.

Q3. I have experienced culture shock with living-cost in the country where I am studying.

Q4. I have experienced culture shock with life serenity in the country where I am studying.

Q5. I have experienced culture shock with individualism in the country where I am studying.

Q6. I have experienced culture shock with being unacceptable by people in the country where I am studying.

Q7. I have experienced culture shock with the unfriendly manner of people in the country where I am studying.

Q8. I have experienced culture shock to make friends with people in the country where I am studying.

Q9. I have experienced culture shock to communicate with people in the country where I am studying.

Q10. I have experienced culture shock to perform/ see religious activity in the country where I am studying.

Open-ended questions:

Q1. During the time abroad, have you ever experienced a culture shock? If yes, please specify the situation.

Q2. What are the difficulties that you faced in your study/internship abroad?

Q3. In your opinion, what should be prepared for an effective study/internship abroad?