

Measuring the Cultural Intelligence of Bulgarian University Professors

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Abstract. *Cultural intelligence is a key success factor for academics and is required for the effective internationalisation of universities worldwide. The paper introduces the concepts of internationalisation and cultural intelligence. Characteristics of cultural intelligence and its connection to HEIs are described. The objective of the study is to measure the cultural intelligence of Bulgarian university professors according to Soon Ang's cultural intelligence scale (CQS). Research methods include a questionnaire based on CQS, descriptive statistics and correlational analysis. The questionnaire was given to Bulgarian university professors (N=421) to assess the four components of CQ: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. Three hypotheses were formulated in relation to CQ assessment. Results were analysed with SPSS software. Findings show that the first hypothesis, Bulgarian university professors do not experience communication difficulties when contacting foreigners and/or teaching foreign students, was confirmed. The second hypothesis that the cultural intelligence among Bulgarian university professors is well developed, was also confirmed. The third hypothesis, that there is an existing correlation between the teaching experience of Bulgarian professors and their cultural intelligence, was rejected. The overall level of CQ among Bulgarian professors is very high and it is not connected to their teaching experience. Professors demonstrate lower results mostly in the cognitive component. The reasons behind these results could be traced in Bulgarian cultural values, according to which being able to adapt and blend in foreign cultures is an asset and a desirable outcome. The paper concludes that cultural intelligence is applicable to internationalisation in higher education institutions (HEIs).*

Keywords: cultural intelligence, workplace globalization, university professor, HEIs, descriptive statistics, cultural diversity.

Introduction

Globalisation is the primary catalyst for progress in academic and other professional domains. As a result, there is an increase in the number of professionals who work internationally, either as members of foreign projects or as expatriates. Academic institutions have experienced a growing level of internationalisation. As a consequence, there is a growing trend of recruiting professors from foreign countries to institutions located abroad. In the past decade, faculties and departments have observed a significant increase in internationalisation (Sousa, et al., 2023). Unintentionally, this leads to complications between the hosting institution and the arriving academic. The internationalisation of the academic world is further exemplified by the mobility of students abroad, facilitated by programmes like Erasmus. Furthermore, communication barriers arise due to the

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interaction between international students and their host university's teaching staff. The purpose of this investigation was to evaluate the current level of intercultural competence exhibited by Bulgarian professors in their ability to adapt to intercultural environments. This assessment also evaluates Bulgarian professors' confidence in communicating with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The study examines whether Bulgarian academics encounter difficulties when teaching students from other countries, and the nature of these difficulties.

Literature review

Intelligence has been regarded as a crucial element in the examination of human relationships and may take up several forms. There is a variety of concepts that represent intelligence (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008), such as social intelligence (SQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), or general mental ability (IQ) and they are influenced by cultural norms, values, and expectations. Globalization has led cross-cultural scholars to suggest the concept of cultural intelligence, which represents the ability of individuals from different cultures to engage successfully with each other (Earley & Ang, 2003). Cultural intelligence, as defined by Earley and Ang (Earley & Ang, 2003), is the capacity to adapt and assimilate among different cultures. The concept is gaining significant attention in the areas of cross-cultural psychology and social sciences.

Cultural intelligence is related to and developed on the basis of emotional and social intelligence. In the context of interpersonal or real-world intelligence, the term "social intelligence", or SQ, refers to a generalized set of skills that include the capacity to comprehend and manage other people (Van Dyne, et al., 2012). The ability to successfully navigate and manage complicated social connections and surroundings is a necessary component of it. On the other hand, in order to alleviate stress, communicate successfully, empathize with others, overcome problems, and diffuse conflict, we need to possess the so called emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence, or EQ, refers to the capacity to recognize, utilize, comprehend, and control one's emotions in a constructive manner (Van Dyne, et al., 2012). Those who possess a high level of emotional intelligence are able to perceive the feelings, desires, and requirements of other people.

The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) incorporates both viewpoints by changing the emphasis subject matter away from a comparison of intelligence across cultures and towards an examination of the potential to operate successfully within the unique setting of intercultural exchanges. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) (Ang, et al., 2007) is a multidimensional construct that includes four dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. People are able to adjust to their surroundings and gain knowledge from one another via these components. Metacognitive CQ represents higher-order cognitive processes, which are used to acquire and understand cultural knowledge - planning, monitoring, and revising mental models of cultural norms (Gozzoli & Gazzaroli, 2018). Individuals with high Metacognitive CQ are aware of others' cultural preferences and question cultural assumptions. Cognitive CQ reflects knowledge of norms, practices, conventions, economic, legal, and social systems, and basic frameworks of values in different cultures. Individuals with high Cognitive CQ understand similarities and differences across cultures. Motivational CQ focuses on learning about and functioning in situations distinguished by cultural differences, based on intrinsic interest and confidence in their effectiveness. Behavioral CQ reflects the capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures. People with high Behavioral CQ exhibit situationally appropriate behaviors based on their broad range of verbal and non-verbal capabilities. CQ dimensions represent the four distinguishable factors for our capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings. An individual's general level of CQ is determined by these

dimensions. Authors Earley and Ang suggest that CQ is a "culture-free" construct, which is not linked with academic intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003). It can be increased over time, independently from the context.

Development of CQ theory is based on a nomological network by Ang and Van Dyne (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). Nomological network of CQ refers to the relationships between CQ and other constructs, such as personality traits, international experiences, and various outcomes in intercultural settings (Sawhney, 2014). The causal constructs of CQ include two clusters – distal factors (e.g. Big Five personality traits, ethnocentrism, self-monitoring, self-esteem, demographics) and other correlates such as different types of intelligences (general mental ability, emotional, social and practical intelligence). In its nomology CQ is influenced by external factors such as uncertainty and anxiety during cross-cultural contacts, participation in cultural activities, and managing individual and interpersonal outcomes in the cross-cultural interaction. Ang's and Van Dyne's research shows that CQ predicts cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes, and mediates or moderates the effects of other predictors.

Measurement of CQ can also be assessed by other methods, such as The Short Form Cultural Intelligence Scale (SFCQ) (Neto, Neto, & Neto, 2021); observer reports on an individual's cultural intelligence by others; performance-based assessments an individual's proficiency in activities or circumstances that need cultural intelligence (Gozzoli & Gazzaroli, 2018). These methods provide complementary information and should be used together for a comprehensive evaluation of CQ.

Research in the field at the moment shows that there is growing interest in measuring the cultural intelligence of educational leaders. We provide a brief summary of three studies. The first study (Al Dhaheri, 2022) tested and validated the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Scale in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), specifically among public and private school leaders. The results indicated a high level of CQ among school leaders in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The results confirmed previous research that found CQ to be higher in culturally diverse settings, which applies to the UAE. A second study (Boštjančič, Johnson, & Belak, 2018) investigates the extent to which the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) may be applied across different cultures, based on research conducted in Slovenia. The paper offers views from American and Slovenian academics who translated the instrument into Slovene and modified it for utilization in Slovenia. The third study presented results from Portugal (Sousa, et al., 2023). The study aims to examine Cultural Intelligence (CQ) within a Portuguese engineering higher education institution. Furthermore, it delves into the process of cultivating CQ and emphasizes the importance of cognitive CQ, which was insufficient among Portuguese higher education staff. Intercultural exposure and language learning seem to help with improvement in CQ levels. The authors suggest that the cognitive CQ could be increased in case of an introduction of learning methodologies and training programs for cultural sensitivity.

The results of the cultural intelligence (CQ) studies discussed above demonstrate the existence of a positive relationship between intercultural exposure and cultural intelligence. Hence, an individual's intercultural experience can serve as an indirect measure of their cultural intelligence. The opportunity for people experience life-time exposure to different cultures increases their intercultural knowledge (Sousa, et al., 2023). As an effect of ubiquitous globalization, the increase of intercultural knowledge in different communities can generally be sought.

National education systems, and higher education in particular, are also feeling the effects of globalization. Universities are taking an institutional approach via the so called academic internationalisation. Many aspects of a university's daily activities, including teaching, research,

and student life, undergo radical transformations as a result of academic internationalisation. The goals include expanding international collaboration, becoming more embedded in the global educational arena, and fortifying the international component. According to Jamil and Jaffar (Jamil & Jaffar, 2023), academic internationalisation is a strategic process that HEIs go through when they aim to incorporate an international, intercultural, or global dimension into their mission, operations, and educational programmes. All students and faculty should benefit from higher-quality education and research as a result of this process. Higher education institutions are required to formulate a strategy for the process which includes policies for equity, diversity and inclusion. The ambition of such policies is not only to cause changes in academic culture, but also to instigate larger scale social improvements. According to Sousa et al. (2023) in order to fulfil their mission for successful internationalisation, “higher education institutions need individuals capable of effectively interacting with others who come from different cultural backgrounds”. This requires paying attention to the levels of cultural intelligence among university professors and other academic staff.

The accelerated internationalisation of Bulgarian higher education was facilitated by the gradual opening of the economy and social environment to the Western world, which began in the late 1990s. This process was supported by various international programmes such as Fulbright and Erasmus, which aimed to promote academic exchange between teachers and students.

Bulgarian higher education institutions are currently undergoing the full impact of academic internationalisation. Furthermore, the state provides funding for it through the Ministry of Education and Science, and it is explicitly designated as a strategic objective in the "Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021-2030" that has been put into effect. The strategy encompasses initiatives aimed at enhancing the readiness of academic staff, administrative personnel, and students to effectively operate in a diverse and multilingual setting. This will be achieved through targeted training programmes, particularly in the areas of information and communication technology (ICT) and foreign language proficiency. (MON, 2021).

We believe that academic internationalisation in Bulgaria is a process that needs a comprehensive strategy and one of the elements in such strategy could be measuring and later on developing the cultural intelligence of university professors. Developing cultural intelligence is useful for the incorporation of an international component into the teaching, research, and service responsibilities of higher education institutions (Sousa, et al., 2023)

Therefore we suggest that there is practical benefit of measuring cultural intelligence among the teaching body of academic institutions in Bulgaria. The current study is gathering data on the cross-cultural interactions of Bulgarian university professors.

Based on this analysis, the research team formulated three hypotheses:

First hypothesis: Bulgarian university professors do not encounter any challenges in communicating with individuals from other countries and/or instructing foreign students.

Second hypothesis: Bulgarian university professors possess a significant level of cultural intelligence.

Third hypothesis: there is a correlation between the teaching experience of Bulgarian professors and their cultural intelligence.

Methodology

The survey was done throughout the period spanning from November to January of 2024. The survey was conducted online using Google Forms, accessed through a research team member's

profile. The sample size of 421 respondents, out of a total population of 20,882 instructors, achieved a confidence level of 96.18% and a margin of error of 4.73%. The survey is aimed at the educators working in the higher educational institutions in Bulgaria. Based on statistics provided by the National Statistical Institute (NSI, 2023), the total number of teaching staff in higher education institutions for the academic year 2022/2023 was 20,882 individuals. It is assumed that this group represents the target demographic for the study.

Employed research methods are descriptive statistics to record the primary attributes of the participants under investigation and correlation analysis to identify links between these attributes. The data were obtained firsthand from the subjects. A questionnaire was selected as the most suitable method for gathering primary quantitative data and it was distributed among participants. The survey included a standardised questionnaire with predetermined responses.

The questionnaire includes 28 inquiries, categorised into three sections – familiarity with foreign cultures, cultural intelligence, and demographic characteristics of participants.

The second group of 20 questions represent the Soon Ang Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), translated into Bulgarian language. All 4 components are represented (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural – a table of the questions and their post-processing coding is available as an appendix to this paper) and are designed to assess the cultural intelligence of Bulgarian university professors.

A ranking (ordinal) scale, was used to evaluate the level of agreement with the proposed statements. The scale ranged from 1, indicating significant disagreement, to 7, indicating strong agreement.

The third group has five questions that clarify the characteristics of the researched population, such as age, gender, teaching experience, higher education, and scientific field.

The data were presented using tables that displayed one-dimensional and two-dimensional distributions. Ordinal (rank) scales are used to indicate order relationships between categories of a given variable. In order to measure the teaching experience of Bulgarian professors and responses to questions, Kendall's tau-b and Spearman's (Spearman-R) correlation coefficients were employed. The subsequent scale is used to calculate the values of the coefficients: $0 < R < 0.3$ indicates a weak correlation, $0.3 < R < 0.5$ indicates a moderate correlation, $0.5 < R < 0.7$ indicates a substantial correlation, $0.7 < R < 0.9$ indicates a high correlation, and $0.9 < R < 1$ indicates a very high correlation. Computations were performed using the IBM SPSS 25.

Results and discussions

In the first question, professors are asked to share whether and on what occasion they have been abroad (see Table 3).

Table 1. Distribution of answers to the question: On what occasion have you been abroad?

Answers	Frequency	Percent*
Participation in an international conference, congress or symposium	267	63,4
Teaching mobility under the Erasmus program	220	52,3
Fulbright program specialization	7	1,7
Business trip for a different purpose	192	45,6
Travel on a personal occasion (excursion, holiday or other)	357	84,8
I haven't been abroad	5	1,2

* Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents gave more than one answer.

Source: Authors' own research.

The results show that 98.8% of participants have been outside Bulgaria at least once. The aspiration of higher schools to internationalize, the support of various academic exchange programs, the organization of various scientific forums abroad, contribute to the accumulation of professional experience in communicating with foreign cultures. Therefore, the answers to the next two questions, whether they had communication difficulties in their contact with foreigners or in teaching foreign students, should not be surprising (see Tables 4. and 5.).

**Table 2. Distribution of answers to the question:
Have you had communication difficulties in your contact with foreigners?**

Answers	Frequency	Percent
Yes	74	17,6
No	315	74,8
I cannot decide	32	7,6
Total	421	100,0

Source: Authors' own research.

Of all professors surveyed, $\frac{3}{4}$ answered that they had no problems in their contacts with foreigners.

**Table 3. Distribution of answers to the question:
Have you had communication difficulties when teaching international students?**

Answers	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
I haven't had any difficulties	232	55,1	232	76,6
Yes, in the language barrier	58	13,8	58	19,1
Yes, in value differences	6	1,4	6	2,0
Yes, in non-verbal communication	3	0,7	3	1,0
Yes, in the teacher-student relationship	4	1	4	1,3
I haven't taught foreign students	118	28	-	-
Total	421	100	303	100

Source: Authors' own research.

Unlike casual communication with foreigners, teaching foreign students requires more effort. However, it seems that this is not a significant problem for Bulgarian university lecturers. After clearing the responses of those who stated that they have not taught international students from the responses of those who have (see Table 5.), the results show that 76.6% do not have any difficulties in teaching international students. Of the reported difficulties, the share of the language barrier is the highest (19.1%).

The results of these questions give us reason to confirm the first hypothesis, namely that Bulgarian university professors do not experience communication difficulties when contacting foreigners and/or teaching foreign students.

The second set of questions aims to measure the cultural intelligence of Bulgarian university professors using the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) and represents the essence of the study.

The metacognitive component includes four questions (see Table 6.). The results show that this is the group with the highest values. The mean of the scales for all four questions were around or above 6, with the most common response being 7, the upper end of the scale.

Table 4. Metacognitive CQ components – statistics, frequency and percentages

Questions (code):		MC1		MC2		MC3		MC4	
N	Valid	421		421		421		421	
	Mean	6,08		6,03		5,94		5,93	
	Median	7,00		6,00		6,00		6,00	
	Mode	7		7		7		7	
Answer the questions		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1-strongly disagree		8	1,9	5	1,2	6	1,4	7	1,7
2		3	0,7	6	1,4	5	1,2	6	1,4
3		3	0,7	8	1,9	7	1,7	11	2,6
4		31	7,4	33	7,8	36	8,6	34	8,1
5		54	12,8	50	11,9	68	16,2	66	15,7
6		110	26,1	119	28,3	112	26,6	99	23,5
7-strongly agree		212	50,4	200	47,5	187	44,4	198	47,0
Total:		421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0

*F – frequency

Source: Authors' own research.

The data confirm that Bulgarian teachers have a high metacognitive CQ and are aware of cultural preferences of others, able to analyze cultural context and consciously make predictions about intercultural interactions.

The cognitive component includes six questions (see Table 7.). The results show that this group has the lowest values, but they are still above the average level on the scale. The mean value of the scales of the six questions ranged from 4.42 to 5.29. Only for the fourth question, concerning knowledge about the marriage systems of other cultures, the most common answer is the average value of the scale – 4.

Table 5. Cognitive CQ components – statistics, frequency and percentages

Questions (code):		COG1		COG2		COG3		COG4		COG5		COG6	
N	Valid	421		421		421		421		421		421	
	Mean	4,31		5,29		5,21		4,42		4,76		4,61	
	Median	4,00		5,00		5,00		4,00		5,00		5,00	
	Mode	5		7		5		4		5		5	
Answer the questions		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1-strongly disagree		17	4,0	4	1,0	4	1,0	20	4,8	9	2,1	11	2,6
2		36	8,6	14	3,3	9	2,1	36	8,6	22	5,2	23	5,5
3		57	13,5	42	10,0	26	6,2	50	11,9	44	10,5	57	13,5
4		105	24,9	61	14,5	72	17,1	105	24,9	91	21,6	97	23,0
5		121	28,7	91	21,6	124	29,5	102	24,2	117	27,8	115	27,3
6		65	15,4	95	22,6	117	27,8	68	16,2	94	22,3	76	18,1
7-strongly agree		20	4,8	114	27,1	69	16,4	40	9,5	44	10,5	42	10,0
Total:		421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0

*F – frequency

Source: Authors' own research.

Cognitive CQ relates to the general and contextual knowledge of culture. The results give us reason to conclude that Bulgarian professors have a relatively high level of cognitive component and understand the similarities and differences between cultures and, on this basis, organize contextual knowledge for effective intercultural interactions.

The motivational component includes five questions (see Table 8.). The results in this group are also high. Mean values from the scales ranged from 4.59 to 6.15. The most common answer for three of the questions was 7 - the upper limit of the scale, for one it was 6 and only one was 4 – enjoying living in unfamiliar cultures. The result of this question can be explained by the fact that adaptability in foreign cultures is highly valued in Bulgarian culture (Minkov, 2011). Teaching and research work requires those working in this environment to interact with colleagues from foreign countries throughout their whole careers. This is seen as an advantage by Bulgarians, since it is culturally desirable to communicate with foreigners.

Table 6. Motivational CQ components – statistics, frequency and percentages

Questions (code):		MOT1		MOT2		MOT3		MOT4		MOT5	
N	Valid	421		421		421		421		421	
	Mean	6,15		5,42		5,38		4,59		5,72	
	Median	7,00		6,00		6,00		5,00		6,00	
	Mode	7		7		6		4		7	
Answer the questions		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1-strongly disagree		7	1,7	6	1,4	5	1,2	25	5,9	4	1,0
2		2	,5	13	3,1	10	2,4	27	6,4	5	1,2
3		7	1,7	19	4,5	28	6,7	48	11,4	17	4,0
4		34	8,1	66	15,7	59	14,0	96	22,8	53	12,6
5		50	11,9	92	21,9	96	22,8	91	21,6	73	17,3
6		75	17,8	105	24,9	119	28,3	69	16,4	118	28,0
7-strongly agree		246	58,4	120	28,5	104	24,7	65	15,4	151	35,9
Total:		421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0

*F – frequency

Source: Authors' own research.

Motivational CQ represents an individual's ability and willingness to focus attention and energy on learning and functioning in culturally diverse situations. Bulgarian professors show high values of motivational component. This means that they feel motivated for interactions with foreigners and they value the benefits received through each intercultural experience. Therefore, professors show high confidence in successfully mastering cultural differences.

The behavioral component includes five questions (see Table 9.). The results in this group are also very high. The average values of the scales are above 5. The most common answer for two of the questions is 7 - the upper limit of the scale, and for the other three it is 6.

Table 7. Behavioral CQ components – statistics, frequency and percentages

Questions (code):		BEH1		BEH2		BEH3		BEH4		BEH5	
N	Valid	421		421		421		421		421	
	Mean	5,47		5,14		5,54		5,53		5,27	
	Median	6,00		5,00		6,00		6,00		6,00	
	Mode	7		6		7		6		6	
Answer the questions		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1-strongly disagree		6	1,4	7	1,7	7	1,7	8	1,9	11	2,6
2		16	3,8	18	4,3	12	2,9	8	1,9	21	5,0
3		19	4,5	27	6,4	22	5,2	14	3,3	26	6,2
4		61	14,5	86	20,4	47	11,2	63	15,0	57	13,5
5		73	17,3	89	21,1	81	19,2	77	18,3	86	20,4
6		122	29,0	108	25,7	120	28,5	130	30,9	111	26,4
7-strongly agree		124	29,5	86	20,4	132	31,4	121	28,7	109	25,9
Total:		421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0	421	100,0

*F – frequency

Source: Authors' own research.

Behavioral CQ is seen as the ability to perform verbal and non-verbal actions when communicating with people from different cultures. The results show that Bulgarian professors have high behavioral CQ and possess a wide range of verbal and non-verbal abilities, and their situational behavior is in accordance with the norms accepted in a given culture.

The results of the assessment confirm the second hypothesis, that the cultural intelligence among Bulgarian university professors is well developed.

The assumptions of the research team were that teaching experience has a positive influence and the greater it is, the higher the cultural intelligence of lecturers would be. The survey data showed that more than half of the respondents had more than 16 years of teaching experience (see Table 10.).

Table 8. Teaching experience of respondents

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
up to 5 years	50	11,9
between 6 and 10 years	53	12,6
between 11 and 15 years	86	20,4
between 16 and 20 years	66	15,7
more than 20 years	166	39,4
Total	421	100,0

Source: Authors' own research.

Kendall and Spearman's rank correlation was calculated between teaching experience and statements on the individual components of cultural intelligence. Based on the calculated correlation coefficients between the specified factors, it was found that all coefficients have a weak correlation dependence and have values tending to 0 (see Tables 11. to 14.).

Table 9. Correlations between teaching experience and Metacognitive CQ components

Correlation Coefficient	Metacognitive CQ components			
	MC1	MC2	MC3	MC4
Kendall's tau _b	0,079	0,037	0,033	0,031
Spearman's rho	0,094	0,044	0,039	0,038

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 10. Correlations between teaching experience and Cognitive CQ components

Correlation Coefficient	Cognitive CQ components					
	COG1	COG2	COG3	COG4	COG5	COG6
Kendall's tau _b	0,113**	0,040	0,017	0,022	0,068	0,048
Spearman's rho	0,141**	0,051	0,022	0,028	0,085	0,060

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

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 11. Correlations between teaching experience and Motivational CQ components

Correlation Coefficient	Motivational CQ components				
	MOT1	MOT2	MOT3	MOT4	MOT5
Kendall's tau _b	0,004	-0,049	0,011	-0,009	-0,025
Spearman's rho	0,004	-0,059	0,014	-0,012	-0,030

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 12. Correlations between teaching experience and Behavioral CQ components

Correlation Coefficient	Behavioral CQ components				
	BEH1	BEH2	BEH3	BEH4	BEH5
Kendall's tau _b	0,052	0,072	0,053	0,067	0,087*
Spearman's rho	0,063	0,089	0,066	0,081	0,107*

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

Source: Authors' own research.

The results did not confirm the third hypothesis of an existing correlation between the teaching experience of Bulgarian teachers and their cultural intelligence.

According to the findings of the study, we can outline a number of conclusions.

First, university professors have high levels of cultural intelligence. They do not experience difficulties in cross-cultural communication, and also possess intrinsic motivation and interest in successful interactions to gain cross-cultural experience.

Second, Bulgarian professors are confident in successfully managing cultural differences during teaching foreign students. We suggest this is a result of the wide range of verbal and non-verbal abilities, possessed by the professors. They demonstrate situational behavior that is consistent with the norms accepted in a given culture.

Third, results relate to previous similar research in Italy (Gozzoli & Gazzaroli, 2018), the UAE (Al Dhaheri, 2022) and Portugal (Sousa, et al., 2023), which shows that contemporary academic staff has high levels of cultural intelligence. Explanation of this phenomenon could be sought in the characteristics of the global academic environment, differences in socio-economic background between professors and the rest of the local population, and local cultural attitudes to cultural diversity. Such suggestions are worth further investigation, though.

Overall, Bulgarian university professors show high levels of self-efficacy in cross-cultural context. Reasons behind this are rooted in Bulgarian cultural values, according to which being able to adapt and blend in foreign cultures is an asset and a desirable outcome (Minkov, 2011).

Conclusion

Results presented in this research shed light on an important but underestimated matter in the internationalisation of higher education institutions. We concluded that educators working at Bulgarian universities possess intrinsic drive and an interest in successful cross-cultural experiences, which is based in local cultural values. Professors seem to not encounter many obstacles when it comes to successfully communicate across cultural boundaries. According to the findings, two of the three hypotheses were confirmed and one was rejected.

Therefore, we suggest that the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) has the potential to be an invaluable instrument in realizing the goals of HEIs' internationalisation strategies. The CQS is applicable to corporate operations as well, particularly in multinational organisations or businesses that have different teams. The importance of learning about one's own cultural subtleties, communication methods, and work ethics is comparable to the importance of knowing about the work ethics of the foreigners with whom we collaborate. Understanding these disparities and being able to navigate them effectively is essential in order to maintain effective collaboration and productivity. It is also possible to use the CQS for self-assessment, which allows a professional to evaluate their own cultural intelligence and pinpoint areas in which they may have room for improvement.

Higher education institutions and enterprises alike can make use of this to enhance cultural sensitivity within their respective organisations. This can be accomplished through activities such as enrolling in cultural sensitivity training or spending more time interacting with the team in question in order to gain a deeper understanding of their culture. The cultivation of cultural sensitivity can, in this manner, contribute to the formation of an educational and professional environment that is more inclusive and effective, and foster the achievement of HEI internationalisation goals.

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Appendix

Statements for measuring cultural intelligence (CQS) and their codes used to represent the results of the study

Code	Metacognitive CQ components
MC1	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.
MC2	I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me.
MC3	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions.
MC4	I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures.
Code	Cognitive CQ components
COG1	I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures.
COG2	I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages.
COG3	I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures.
COG4	I know the marriage systems of other cultures.
COG5	I know the arts and crafts of other cultures.
COG6	I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures.
Code	Motivational CQ components
MOT1	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
MOT2	I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.
MOT3	I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me.
MOT4	I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.
MOT5	I am confident that I can get accustomed to the shopping conditions in a different culture.
Code	Behavioral CQ components
BEH1	I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.
BEH2	I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.
BEH3	I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.
BEH4	I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.
BEH5	I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

Source: Adapted from Ang, et al. (Ang, et al., 2007).