

# **An Investigation of Educational Leaders' Cultural Intelligence to Influence Supervision Leadership: Perceptions of Ed.D. Students**

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## **Abstract**

There is an increased need for current and future PK–12 and higher education leaders to process high levels of cultural intelligence given the continued diversification of stakeholders served by educational institutions. Cultural intelligence is the ability to perform effectively in cross cultural settings which provides awareness of behaviors associated with making equitable and socially just decisions. This study utilized Campinha-Bacote's (2002) *Process of Cultural Competence Theoretical Framework* to measure and explore the cultural intelligence of educational leaders enrolled in a Doctor of Education program. Participating doctoral students completed a two-part activity (CISA-EL) to assess their cultural intelligence within the context as educational leaders and to reflect on their personal level of awareness and understanding of cultural differences based on assessment results. Based on the findings, this paper recommends educational leadership preparation programs to further develop cultural intelligence of current and future school leaders within culturally responsive course design and curriculum.

## **Keywords**

cultural intelligence; cultural awareness; cultural knowledge; educational leadership; supervision

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## Introduction

America's educational institutions mirror society (Casserly et al., 2021). The socio-demographic makeup of students' applied curriculum and pedagogy, and campus-level decision-making all reflect our nation's social ideologies, trends, issues, and cultural movements (Sellars & Imig, 2022). In the context of current events (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, social movements, and globalization), the role of educational leaders has not only gained importance, but this heightened complexity affects leaders in K–12 schools (Brauckmann et al., 2020) and higher education institutions (Morris et al., 2023).

Public schools and college campuses are more diverse now than ever regarding the race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification, and religious and political beliefs of stakeholders (Floden et al., 2020). Recent data analyzed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023) provide insight into the contemporary racial diversity of students. For example, of the 49.4 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the fall of 2021, less than half were White (45%; 22.4 million), and over one-fourth were Hispanic (29%; 14.1 million). Additionally, 7.4 million students identified as Black (15%) and 2.7 million identified as Asian (5%) (para. 2). Like the K–12 setting, when the higher education student body is examined, there are more minority students than White students (NCES, 2023). Whereas the phenomenon of 'minority white,' also referred to as 'majority-minority,' is recent within the history of the United States, data suggest that the trend will continue for the near future (Chen, 2019; Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Based on these data points, educational leaders need to be able to supervise and make socially just decisions based on the cultural environment of the stakeholders they serve (Beach et al., 2022; Johnson & Hackman, 2018). From an equity standpoint, educational leaders should implement culturally responsive practices that influence instruction, school climate, collaboration, and personnel management (Mette et al., 2023a) that benefit marginalized student populations to ensure equitable educational institutions (Grissom et al., 2021).

Educational leaders often encounter challenges and difficulties when operating in and responding to the diversification of their schools (Phillips, 2017). Similarly, McCluskey (2022) stated, "current fights over race, gender identity, prayer, public schooling, and more—in which all must fund a single system of government schools—inevitably pits people with diverse values, needs, and backgrounds against each other" (para. 1). These issues are also present across the nation's colleges and universities despite having campus-wide policies and institutional strategic plans that specifically address inclusion, non-discrimination, and equity (Ellsworth et al., 2022). Some scholars argue that the root problem in higher education is that institutional policies serve only as illusions, and educational leaders "must go beyond simply writing institutional statements to shift priorities, values, and goals" (Templeton et al., 2016, p. 110).

Due to the persistent above-mentioned problems, leaders must continue to reflect on and cultivate their cultural intelligence. What is *cultural intelligence*? Decades ago, Earley (2002) defined cultural intelligence as "a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts" (p. 274). Like Earley (2002), Van Dyne et al. (2010) noted, "cultural intelligence (CQ) refers to an individual's capacity to function effectively across cultures" (p. 132). However, for Ang and colleagues (2015), cultural intelligence differs from the capacity to function effectively

in a single culture and instead “reflects a general set of capabilities that facilitate one’s effectiveness across different cultural environments” (p. 433). These capabilities yield increased levels of cultural sensitivity, acceptance, empathy, and respect for other cultures and values, particularly when critical consciousness is developed (Waite, 2021).

When educational leaders are not actively developing their cultural intelligence or are not interested in developing their cultural intelligence, they cannot acquire the metacognitive skills, communication skills, and cultural insights that would empower them to fully serve the diverse populations represented in their institutions (Johnson & Hackman, 2018). Recent events have highlighted a concerning trend among educational leaders across the United States—a lack of cultural intelligence (Deto, 2020; Rickert, 2022). However, cultural intelligence can be nurtured through professional development assessments and reflective practices (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). To effectively oversee today’s educational setting, educational leaders must first look inward to understand their reactions to the people and places around them (Terrell et al., 2018). As argued by Cormier et al. (2024), there is a need for tools that support the development of culturally competent educational supervisors that can improve curriculum and teaching, as well as create school cultures that include and foster culturally inclusive practices.

This study examines the impact of one such tool and provides insights into how reflecting upon their cultural intelligence advanced educational leaders’ development in a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program. This research not only gathered insights into the status of cultural intelligence among current educational leaders but also investigated how self-reflection yields increased levels of cultural sensitivity, acceptance, empathy, and respect for other cultures. Utilizing a modified version of the Cultural Intelligence Self-Assessment (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Johnson & Hackman, 2018), the participating educational leaders assessed their cultural intelligence to discern their “capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to cultural context” (Ott & Michailova, 2016, p. 2).

The modified version of the assessment provided participating educational leaders an opportunity to reflect on their cultural intelligence within their current setting. The primary purpose of this research was not only to gather insights into the status of cultural intelligence among educational leaders but also to investigate how the process of self-reflection yields increased levels of cultural sensitivity, acceptance, empathy, and respect for other cultures. To accomplish this goal, the researchers collected and analyzed data from a diversity course assignment. Educational leaders participating in an Ed.D. program completed a survey instrument designed to measure one’s cultural intelligence. Based on the results, there is an evident need for opportunities to develop cultural competencies for campus-level leaders operating in today’s diverse educational setting. This paper discusses the potential impact and benefits of culturally relevant course assignments for Ed.D. programs established for K-12 educators (i.e., superintendents, principals, teachers) and higher education administrators (i.e., presidents, deans, faculty).

## **Research Questions**

To examine educational leaders’ cultural intelligence awareness, the following two research questions guided this study.

1. Was there a significant statistical difference in CISA-EL survey responses across participant characteristics (gender, years in educational leadership, years in education)?
2. How do educational leaders enrolled in an Ed.D. program perceive their personal cultural intelligence?

## Literature Review

More than 100 colleges and universities in the United States implement Ed.D. programs with a central focus on pedagogical efforts to nurture the development of scholar-practitioner educational leaders (The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2021; Perry, 2016; Weiler & Lomotey, 2022). Defining the term *scholar-practitioner* is not straightforward due to various interpretations (Hebert, 2010). According to Horn (2002), a scholar-practitioner is someone who possesses both the ability and desire to explore the dynamic “interplay between theory and practice” (p. 83). Mullen (2003) contextualized the definition within educational leadership, describing scholar-practitioners as individuals who actively engage in activities such as evaluation, reflection, research, and application to enhance schools’ performance, particularly the ones they lead (p. 13). Expanding on these concepts, Bouck (2011) characterized scholar-practitioners as leaders who engage in academic pursuits while drawing from their experiential knowledge, all aimed at yielding effective leadership methods (p. 203). In essence, the scholar-practitioner effectively combines academic research with practical application (Godwin & Meek, 2015).

Adopting the scholar-practitioner model in educational leadership and decision-making has been actively promoted for two decades (Hatfield & Wise, 2023; Mullen, 2003; Schultz, 2010). Skilled educational supervisors and educational scholar-practitioners operate in various arenas, including policy, curriculum development, practical teaching, authentic assessment, and instructional supervision (Lowery, 2016). Integrating the knowledge acquired from academic research and practical work experiences, a scholar-practitioner leader cultivates a unique and intellectually innovative approach to school and campus administration (Lowery, 2016). For educational leaders, embracing the concept of a scholar-practitioner means being a school leader who utilizes what they have learned and strives to continually expand their knowledge while actively engaging in leadership responsibilities (Niño et al., 2007).

The concepts of cultural intelligence and scholar-practitioner ideologies are closely interconnected. To be a strong scholar-practitioner, one must also be consistently reflective of one’s cultural intelligence (Bloomquist & Georges, 2022). Two main components of the scholar-practitioner educational model are essential to this article: (a) cultural intelligence and (b) self-reflection. Writing nearly two decades ago on campus administration, Dimmock and Walker (2005) posited:

Leadership is a culturally and contextually bounded process inextricably intertwined with its larger environment ... the cultural influence on leadership is multidimensional, often difficult to discern, subtle, and easy to overlook ... leadership [in terms of its nexus to culture and contextual influences...can lead to improvement in [leadership] practice (pp. 3–4).

In a similar line of thought, Schultz (2010) argued that scholar-practitioners must “embrace community, democracy, social justice, caring, and equity” (p. 52). Lowery (2016) asserted, “the scholar-practitioner leader as a moral democratic agent of cultural relevance must learn to ‘read’ the inequitable relationships that develop in school settings” (p. 3050). For educational leaders who lead efforts to improve instructional practices to meet the needs of all students—cultural awareness is key (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Lowery, 2016; Schultz, 2010). Similarly, Khalifa et al. (2016) identified four behavioral strands in culturally responsive school leaders (pp.1282–1284). 1) Critical Self-Reflection—emphasizes the importance of educational leaders to self-reflect about their biases and develop critical consciousness; 2) Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers—highlights the need for teachers to enhance their cultural responsiveness, with the responsibility of school leaders initiating, leading, and ensuring their teachers are continually culturally responsive; 3) Promotes Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments—pertains to the actions school leaders take to eliminate barriers and create environments where all students feel valued; 4) Engages Students, Parents and Indigenous Context—asserts school leaders advocate for policies, recourses, and practices that promote, accepts, and validates inclusive environments.

Self-reflection is a central characteristic of the scholar-practitioner model (Jenlink, 2006) and culturally responsive school leader (Khalifa et al., 2016). By developing critical consciousness (Waite, 2021), educational leaders are better able to provide culturally responsive instructional supervision, reflect on outcomes and experiences, gain valuable insights, and facilitate personal growth and continual improvement in their ability to lead their organizations (Mette et al., 2023b; Mette et al., 2024). In particular, self-reflection empowers school administrators and campus leaders to refine their supervision skills and enhance their decision-making abilities (Hebert, 2010). By regularly examining their practices and critically analyzing their actions, educational leaders can make informed adjustments and improvements, benefiting students, staff, and the broader educational community they serve.

## Conceptual Framework

To support the conceptual underpinning of this study we combined Campinha-Bacote’s (2002) Process of Cultural Competence Model and Johnson and Hackman’s (2018) Process of Cultural Intelligence Model. When these two theories are compared, the main variance relies at the root difference between cultural competence (Campinha-Bacote, 2002) and cultural intelligence (Johnson & Hackman, 2018). In simple terms, cultural competence provides a foundational understanding, whereas cultural intelligence is a bit more dynamic and adaptive when navigating cultural interactions. Both frameworks emphasize the importance of self-awareness, knowledge, skills, encounters, and motivation when interacting with individuals with diverse backgrounds. A visual representation of the theoretical combination is presented in Figure 1.

Campinha-Bacote’s (2002) Process of Cultural Competence Model integrates five constructs that assist practitioners in effectively working with the cultural context of others. This model consists of constructs that include; a) **cultural awareness**—self-exploration of one’s cultural background; b) **cultural knowledge**—knowledge of cultural and ethnic groups; c) **cultural skill**—evaluation of cultural data, observations, and assessments; d) **cultural encounters**—engagement and interaction with diverse cultural groups; and e) **cultural desire**—motivation to

learn and engage with others from varied cultural backgrounds (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, pp. 182–183). This model requires individuals to become increasingly aware of their cultural competency through self-reflection and lived-learned experiences. Campinha-Bacote (2002) used this model in the healthcare setting to assist healthcare providers in becoming more culturally competent and effective caregivers. However, the constructs of the model of cultural competence can be applied beyond the healthcare setting. For example, Wall-Bassett et al., (2018) used the Campinha-Bacote (2002) framework to investigate an interdisciplinary, international service-learning program. To the best knowledge of the authors, this study is one of the first to utilize Campinha-Bacote’s (2002) Process of Cultural Competence Model to gain a perspective on educational supervision.

**Figure 1:** *Educational Leaders Cultural Intelligence Model*

| Campinha-Bacote’s   | Commonalities                                          | Johnson & Hackman  |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Cultural Awareness  | Awareness of one’s own and others cultural differences | (Metacognitive CQ) |
| Cultural Knowledge  | Knowledge of customs and beliefs                       | (Cognitive CQ)     |
| Cultural Skill      | Applying Cultural knowledge appropriately              | (Cognitive CQ)     |
| Cultural Encounters | Real-life interactions fostering understanding         | (Behavioral CQ)    |
| Cultural Desire     | Genuine interest to learn about cultural backgrounds   | (Motivational CQ)  |

*Note:* modified from Campinha-Bacote (2002) and Johnson & Hackman (2018).

In their model, Johnson and Hackman (2018) classified cultural intelligence into four dimensions. The first dimension—*Metacognitive CQ*—can be established by “the level of cultural awareness” when experiencing or interacting with people from other cultures. The second dimension—*Cognitive CQ*—is evident when individuals understand “the norms and practices” of a particular culture. The third dimension—*Motivational CQ*—is the “desire to want to learn about other cultures and interact in a cross-cultural setting.” Finally, the fourth dimension—*Behavioral CQ*—is the ability to “communicate both verbally and non-verbally” with others from a different culture (p. 335; as cited by Beach et al., 2022).

For this study, we integrated Campinha-Bacote’s model (2002) with Johnson and Hackman (2018) by modifying the terms and definitions to represent an educational setting. In our modification, Campinha-Bacote’s five constructs of cultural competence are integrated with Jackson and Hackman’s dimensions of cultural intelligence. Within the educational setting, the constructs were described as follows:

- a) cultural awareness—an educational leader’s self-exploration of one’s cultural background, understandings of one’s cultural biases, and recognizing the importance

- of cultural differences, which aligns metacognitive CQ and one's own awareness of their own cultural backgrounds and biases;
- b) cultural knowledge—an educational leader's knowledge of cultural and ethnic groups, their customs and beliefs, which aligns to cognitive CQ that individuals possess the knowledge of various cultural groups, beliefs and customs;
  - c) cultural skill—educational leaders' evaluation of cultural data, observations, and assessments which also aligns to Cognitive CQ that requires individuals not only to possess knowledge but to apply their cultural knowledge appropriately;
  - d) cultural encounters (Behavioral CQ)—educational leaders' engagement and interaction with diverse cultural groups which aligns to the behavioral CQ in the ability to communicate and interact with cultural groups; and
  - e) cultural desire (Motivational CQ) – an educational leader's motivation to learn and engage with others from varied cultural backgrounds which aligns with motivational CQ as the desire to learn about others cultures.

The integration of the models provides an additional level of awareness of the differences and similarities between cultural competence and cultural intelligence. Although similar, cultural competence provides a foundational understanding, while cultural intelligence adds a more dynamic and adaptive dimension to navigating culturally diverse decisions within educational settings.

## **Methods**

The context of this study was a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) educational leadership program at a mid-sized university in Texas. The program is tailored to K–20 educational leaders but includes individuals outside the traditional K–20 setting. Within the program's course mapping, doctoral students enroll in a 16-week Educational Equity and Identity course during their second Fall semesters. The course's overall objective is to offer enrolled school leaders the opportunity to evaluate models and theories of change to address equity, diversity, social justice, and oppression issues in educational environments. A key learning outcome is to prepare educational leaders to address the needs of their diverse learning communities.

Within the educational equity and identity course's context, a variety of theoretical models and influential works of literature are investigated such as Khalifa et al. (2016), Van Dyne and Ang (2008), Ott and Michalova (2016), and Wang and Goh (2020) to further aid faculty in announcing the importance of cultural intelligence of school leaders and their responsibility to be culturally responsive from all disciplines. During assignments and class discussions, students in this course learn how to identify and contextually address problems of practice that exist within their professional settings. The dual role of educational leaders and doctoral students is an essential factor to highlight as it influences individual approaches to personal reflection and recognition of challenges and barriers associated with their cultural awareness.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Of this study's four researchers included two males and two females. The four researchers included two White, one Hispanic, and one Hispanic-African-Filipino. The two Hispanic

researchers were the doctoral faculty teaching the Education Equity and Inclusion course during the Fall 2022 semester. The collaborative nature of the study provides diverse perspectives and insights that influenced the study's design and interpretation of the findings. The faculty's intent to use the study's outcomes to inform teaching practices underscores a practitioner approach which emphasizes the practical application of teaching to enhance pedagogical strategies to strengthen student learning experiences and outcomes.

### **Sampling and Participants**

Convenience sampling was utilized in this study. Noted by McMillan (2012), convenience sampling is a common, justifiable research practice in the education field when (a) the researcher or researchers are not concerned with generalizing results to a larger population and (b) a target sample is identified due to availability. In fact, McMillan (2012) provided the following example of common convenience sampling—"a class of a university professor who is conducting a study on college students" (p. 103). As such, the targeted participants were students enrolled in their second year of a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) educational leadership program at the research site. In their second year in the program, these students were enrolled in the 16-week Educational Equity and Identity course during the Fall 2022 semester. Two sections of the Educational Equity and Identity course were offered during the Fall 2022 semester, with 33 total enrolled students. As previously stated, two of the researchers were assigned instructors for the Education Equity and Identity course sections. The researchers sampled students enrolled in this course due to the perceived judgment student responses to the CISA-EL would yield "information-rich" data (McMillan, 2012).

Of these 33 students enrolled across the two course sections, 26 agreed to participate. Presented in Table 1, Participants had an average of 16 years of experience in education and seven years in educational leadership. To ensure the anonymity of participants, demographic data was not collected.

**Table 1:** *Participant Demographics*

| Participants | <i>N</i> | <i>n</i> |             | Mean years in education | Mean years in leadership role |
|--------------|----------|----------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Section 1    | 18       | 12       |             | 16.2                    | 7.8                           |
| Section 2    | 15       | 14       |             | 15                      | 6.7                           |
| <b>Total</b> | 33       | 26       | <b>Mean</b> | 15.6                    | 7.25                          |

*Note.* *N* = total number of students enrolled in course; *n* = number of students in course that completed CISA-EL survey.

### **Instrumentation**

Faculty used a two-part activity, titled Cultural Intelligence Scale Assessment—Educational Leadership (CISA-EL), to allow doctoral students an opportunity to measure and reflect on their

cultural intelligence as educational leaders. The first part of CISA-EL includes a validated 9-question survey, whereas the second part includes a self-reflective, short essay prompt. The survey was modified after the surveys presented by Ang et al. (2007) and Johnson and Hackman (2018). Ang and colleagues (2007) developed a 20-item measurement tool based on the four dimensions of cultural intelligence—Metacognitive CQ, Cognitive CQ, Behavioral CQ, and Motivational CQ. As part of their survey design process, Ang et al. (2007) conducted a factor analysis process to ensure the scale was validated, which resulted in a composite reliability exceeding 0.70. Over a decade later, an abridged version of the Cultural Intelligence Scale was presented by Johnson and Hackman (2018), which included 9 of the 20 questions from the evaluation tool designed by Ang et al. (2007). While Ang et al.'s (2007) CISA survey ran factor analysis to validate their study, this was not the case with Johnson and Hackman (2018). It is important to note the Cultural Intelligence Scale (Ang et al., 2007) and the Cultural Intelligence Scale Shortened Version (Johnson & Hackman, 2018) are not designed to tailor to a specific subgroup of leaders.

For this study, the researchers modified the Cultural Intelligence Scale Shortened Version (Johnson & Hackman, 2018). To align the evaluation tool with the leadership role of the doctoral students enrolled in the course, the researchers modified the items on the scale by adding the phrase “As an educational leader.” This phrasing was placed at the beginning of each item and no alterations were made to the original language associated with the cultural intelligence dimensions. The researchers ensured the scale was valid across the nine modified items. An internal consistency analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha level of  $\alpha = .802$ , which is above the level of acceptability ( $\alpha = .7$ ) for scale reliability (Ang et al., 2007). The survey used a scoring range from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree for each question. The higher the total accumulated score, the greater one's perceived level of cultural intelligence (Ang et al., 2007; Johnson & Hackman, 2018). Upon completing the survey (Table 2), the participating doctoral students were tasked with tallying their total scores.

After completing the Likert-scale questions and tallying their total, participants were provided an opportunity to narratively reflect on the survey score. The short essay prompt was as follows:

After completing and evaluating the cultural intelligence self-assessment results, please take a moment to briefly describe what you have learned and/or discovered about yourself.

In addition to the short essay prompt, a space was given for participants to self-disclose demographic information on their years in education and years of leadership experience. These demographic data points were collected to give further contextual insight into the range of experiences brought within the cohort of educational leaders.

**Table 2:** *CISA-EL Survey Questions (Likert scale 1 to 5)*

| Question Number | Survey Question Narrative                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q1              | As an educational leader, I enjoy interacting with people of different cultures and ethnic groups.                                                          |
| Q2              | As an educational leader, I am confident that I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to cultures and ethnic groups that are new to me.                   |
| Q3              | As an educational leader, I am knowledgeable of the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures and ethnic groups.                              |
| Q4              | As an educational leader, I am familiar with the customs and the legal and economic systems of other cultures and ethnic groups.                            |
| Q5              | As an educational leader, I am familiar with the language of other cultures and ethnic groups.                                                              |
| Q6              | As an educational leader, I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds or ethnic groups. |
| Q7              | As an educational leader, I monitor the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures or ethnic groups.               |
| Q8              | As an educational leader, I change my verbal behavior (e.g. accent, tone) when cross-cultural or multi-ethnic interactions require it.                      |
| Q9              | As an educational leader, I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural or multi-ethnic situation requires it.                                       |

### **Data Collection**

As part of the course's learning objectives, students were informed about the study and invited to participate. The administration of the CISA-EL and short essay prompt was conducted voluntarily as a non-graded activity, taking place at the end of the second-class meeting. This activity was offered to both in-person attendees and those joining remotely via Zoom. To maintain confidentiality, the professors left the room while a student volunteer, also participating in the study, administered the CISA-EL and short essay prompt. Students who participated in the classroom remotely (Zoom) were emailed a copy of the CISA-EL and prompt. Names were not collected to ensure anonymity. Students who did not want to participate could leave at any time during the survey administration.

Students participating in person completed the CISA-EL and short essay prompt response and left the classroom after placing their documents in an envelope on a designated table. Students who participated via Zoom could email their responses or drop off responses to the lead investigator's office. The CISA-EL data was put into an encrypted Excel file for descriptive statistical analysis, and short essay prompt data were uploaded into NVivo for deductive coding. Both the Excel file and NVivo file were housed on a secure network drive, which required dual authentication.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize data from the CISA-EL survey (Likert scale responses). To answer RQ1—Is there a difference in CISA-EL survey responses across participant characteristics?—three independent *t*-tests were run utilizing SPSS. In quantitative research, the *t*-test analysis is a parametric equation that determines if there is a difference between mean scores across two groups (McMillan, 2012). To measure if a statistically significant difference occurred, a *p*-value less than .05 was required. The mean score evaluated in this data analysis included the total average score from the CISA-EL survey. Previous research utilizing Ang et al.'s (2007) 20-item measurement tool examined differences in participant responses across the four dimensions of cultural intelligence—Metacognitive CQ, Cognitive CQ, Behavioral CQ, and Motivational CQ (Wood & St. Peters, 2014). However, due to this study utilizing a shortened version of this survey (nine questions), the researchers did not incorporate an itemized analysis of each survey question, but rather an average of participants' total cultural intelligence. To run the *t*-test analysis, the researchers categorized participants based on the following three categories: gender, years in educational leadership, and years in education. Table 3 below provides an overview of this process

**Table 3:** *CISA-EL Independent T-Test Results*

| Variable            | Categories         | <i>n</i> |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Gender              | Male               | 14       |
|                     | Female             | 12       |
| Years of Leadership | 7 or less years    | 14       |
|                     | More than 7 years  | 12       |
| Years in Education  | 16 or less years   | 13       |
|                     | More than 16 years | 13       |

To answer RQ2—How do educational leaders enrolled in an Ed.D. program perceive their personal cultural intelligence?—Essay prompt responses were coded using content analysis procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Concepts and themes were identified from the essay responses utilizing deductive coding techniques (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, the researchers coded the data with pre-determined themes aligned with the Campinha-Bacote (2002) framework. These themes included cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural desire, cultural skill, and cultural encounters.

## Findings

By utilizing descriptive statistics, the researchers examined the implications of the Likert-scale scores to determine the potential implications for future deployment of the CISA-EL and inform potential adjustments to the course material. Researchers analyzed descriptive statistics for participant's total score, average score, and individual items. Individual accumulated scores for participants varied, with the lowest score of 21 and the highest score of 40. Table 4 shows the total accumulated average scores for each question and the average overall score.

**Table 4:** *Average CISA-EL Score*

|      | Q1  | Q2  | Q3  | Q4  | Q5  | Q6  | Q7  | Q8  | Q9  | Overall<br>Average |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------------|
| Mean | 4.3 | 3.9 | 3.4 | 3.0 | 2.9 | 3.3 | 3.7 | 3.3 | 3.5 | 31.2               |

*Note.* The Likert scale ranged from 1 to 5.

Researchers utilized the CISA-EL scores to enhance the learning environment where students reflected on their cultural intelligence in open dialogue with classmates and instructors. The CISA-EL value provided a marker that allowed students to reflect on their cultural competency and provide a sense of measure for their reflection. The dialogue on one's reflection of their cultural intelligence reflection was part of the course, regardless of their participation in the non-graded and optional CISA-EL activity. The students who participated had a quantifiable reference point to help them reflect on potential areas of weakness and strengths regarding their cultural intelligence.

When participants in the study were asked about interacting with people of different cultures and ethnic groups, responses indicated a high level of comfort (4.3 Average, Q1). However, participants expressed low levels of confidence in two areas: 1) familiarity with the customs and the legal and economic systems of other cultures and ethnic groups (Avg. 3.0, Q4); and 2) familiarity with the language of other cultures and ethnic groups (Avg. 2.9, Q5).

### Independent *t*-test Results (RQ1)

To answer RQ1—Is there a difference in CISA-EL survey responses across participant characteristics?—three independent *t*-tests were performed in SPSS. For this analysis, participating doctoral students were grouped based on the following characteristics (gender, educational leadership years, and years in education). Furthermore, the mean analyzed to answer this research question was participant accumulated scores of the CISA-EL survey. Even though male participants had a larger mean of accumulated score (32.07) than female participants (30.17), there was no significant difference for gender,  $t(24) = .95, p = .18$ . Furthermore, there was no significant difference for educational leadership years,  $t(24) = .18, p = .43$ . Finally, a significant difference was not evident for years in education,  $t(24) = .48, p = .34$ , despite students with fewer years in education (31.622) scoring higher than students with more years in education (30.77). Presented in Table 5, independent *t*-test results indicated there were no differences in CISA-EL accumulated scores across any of the examined characteristics.

**Table 5:** *CISA-EL Independent T-Test Results*

| Variable            | Categories         | <i>n</i> | Mean  | SD   | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------|-------|------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Gender              | Male               | 14       | 32.07 | 5.33 | .95      | 24        | .18      |
|                     | Female             | 12       | 30.17 | 4.82 |          |           |          |
| Years of Leadership | 7 or less years    | 14       | 31.36 | 5.83 | .18      | 24        | .43      |
|                     | More than 7 years  | 12       | 31.00 | 4.33 |          |           |          |
| Years in Education  | 16 or less years   | 13       | 31.62 | 4.99 | .48      | 24        | .34      |
|                     | More than 16 years | 13       | 30.77 | 5.36 |          |           |          |

*Note.* *p* value >.05 was used to measure significant difference.

### Short Essay Prompt Themes (RQ2)

CISA-EL short essay prompt responses were analyzed to answer RQ2—How do educational leaders enrolled in an Ed.D. program perceive their personal cultural intelligence? As such, the researchers utilized deductive coding using Campinha-Bacote's (2002) framework to understand educational leaders' perceptions of their cultural competency. Researchers gained insights into the perceptions of educational leaders' cultural competencies by using constructs from the cultural competency framework (cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural desire, cultural skill, and cultural encounters). The findings from participant's responses to the open-ended essay prompt are presented below.

#### *Cultural Awareness*

The National Center for Cultural Competence (n.d.) defines cultural awareness as “being cognizant, observant, and conscious of similarities and differences between cultural groups” (para 1). Participants shared an increased awareness and realization of their verbal and nonverbal (i.e., body language, eye contact, gestures) actions when interacting with others outside their culture. For example, one participant wrote, “I need to work more on monitoring the non-verbal tone when addressing other cultures,” indicating their personal awareness of their verbal and nonverbal behaviors when interacting with others from a different culture.

Three participants' cultural awareness extended beyond their personal awareness and captured the importance of being cognizant of how others from different cultures perceive their words and actions. Participants observed, “I need to be more aware of my actions and words could be interpreted by others based on their culture;” “I need to be more culturally aware of my body language around different ethnic groups;” and “I learned how often I unconsciously modify my verbal and nonverbal behavior based on who I am communicating with.” For these participants, an awareness of how others from diverse cultures perceive their actions varies among different cultural groups.

Over half of the participants revealed the potential impacts of their cultural competence on their leadership capacity. One participant stated, “Yet, so long as I remain blind—even if unintentionally—to the way I speak, my mannerisms and the implicit messages such communicate, then I cannot fulfill the obligations of leadership.” This sentiment was echoed by

another participant who shared, “I might value being culturally competent, but I still likely commit oppressive acts or engage in implicitly discriminatory practices that confound my ability to reach all students and all faculty.” These two participants captured the complexities of educational leaders’ desires to meet the needs of their community while also recognizing their shortcomings despite their quest for deeper cultural awareness.

### ***Cultural Knowledge***

Cultural knowledge is defined as one’s knowledge of cultural and ethnic groups within an organization (Campinha-Bacote, 2002). Over two-thirds of participants expressed interest in increasing their cultural knowledge. One participant stated, “I have so much to continue to learn about cultural awareness.” Another participant shared, “I am open and accepting of others who do not share my worldview and who have a different set of values.” In addition to their openness and desire to learn, one participant stated, “There are some knowledge gaps I haven’t considered until looking at this questionnaire.” For this participant, the CISA-EL heightened their self-awareness of cultural knowledge gaps they had not considered.

Participants’ approaches to advancing their cultural knowledge varied. For one participant, learning from their students was their strategy: “I think trying to learn from my students will help me discover not only more about them but more about me.” For another, “I learned that everyone has different beliefs and values. You must listen to learn.” For these two participants, advancing their cultural knowledge came with the understanding that they would learn not only about other cultures but increased awareness of themselves.

While some participants expressed a genuine desire to learn about new cultures, it is worth noting some individuals were not actively seeking such opportunities. One participant stated,

I allow new cultural information to find me, and I absorb what I am exposed to, but there is a lack of knowledge and awareness on my part due to a lack of action. To increase my awareness, I would need to step out and find more information, educate myself, and increase my experiences.

### ***Cultural Skill***

A leader’s ability to evaluate cultural data, make observations, and assess cultural nuances is defined as cultural skills (Campinha-Bacote, 2002). Several themes showcased the cultural skills of study participants. The respondents provided varied examples of how their cultural skills are used and how the CISA-EL activity allowed them to reflect on those cultural skills. The following themes provide insights into how school leaders utilize their cultural skills within their institutions. First, participants indicated the importance of observing the cultural knowledge gaps. One participant shared,

Completing this self-assessment helped me identify some gaps in my cultural awareness and the ways in which I move and interact in intercultural settings. For example, while I am confident in my ability to authentically ‘code switch,’ ... I have not considered my non-verbal behaviors in similar situations.

The participants' use of the term "code switch" indicates an awareness of functioning in their leadership capacity in a culture different than their own. In addition, it sheds light on the complexities school leaders face as they navigate their interactions with others.

Second, the quest for knowledge and discovery about themselves and others was communicated in the responses. Respondents shared the need to not only learn about others but to learn about themselves in the process. For example, one participant stated: "I think trying to learn from my students will help me discover not only more about them but more about me."

Third, the ability to educate oneself and increase cultural experiences was highlighted in one participant's response. They shared: "I am open and accepting of others who do not share my world view and who have a different set of values." Accepting others' worldview, knowledge, and values demonstrates the willingness of educational leaders to learn about others' cultural experiences.

Last and most importantly, educational leaders expressed the need to continue learning and creating awareness to address the diverse concerns and needs in educational environments. One participant shared, "I am the mother of a special needs individual, so my lenses are many." This statement exemplifies how one's personal connections and experiences can broaden their understanding of different cultures. Another example of the various skills utilized by respondents is captured in the following quote,

I learned how often I unconsciously modify my verbal and nonverbal behavior based on who I am communicating with. I do this because it's a learned behavior that I have been taught to make sure I am not offensive to anyone, and I don't come across as aggressive because of the color of my skin.

This quote highlights the importance of self-awareness and positionality as a cultural skill. These quotes demonstrate educational leaders' ability to informally collect relevant cultural data to inform their understanding of the needs and concerns of the communities they serve.

### ***Cultural Encounters***

A leader's ability to engage and interact with diverse cultural groups is known as cultural encounters (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, pp. 182–183). These cultural encounters were evident when leaders emphasized the importance of recognizing cultural differences and language barriers that could hinder communication between the families and the community. One participant commented, "Understanding things like religions and cultural values of these other groups would make me a more cognizant educational leader and more open to better equip and help my students." This quote demonstrates the value of a leader's awareness of different values, religions, and cultural rules when interacting and communicating with varied groups. Increasing one's level of awareness enables school leaders to engage with families of culturally diverse backgrounds to better meet their needs. Additionally, this level of interaction empowers school leaders to consider the impacts of their leadership influence in supporting marginalized

communities, as noted in this participant's comment, "For me, leadership is about creating opportunities for those with less organizational/institutional power to fully express themselves, to flourish, to be liberated individually and effectively."

School leaders did not indicate language as a barrier during their cultural encounters yet indicated that language differences provided an opportunity to establish open communication and connection with families from various cultures. One school leader emphasized how language was an asset in their communication with families. The participant stated, "When I have the opportunity to use Spanish at work with families that share my ethnicity, it is much easier to connect, even in tough situations." Several respondents indicated a desire to learn languages. For example, one participant stated, "I would love to learn the different languages of the people I serve." For these school leaders, language was an asset in growing their cultural understanding rather than a deficit.

Many school leaders demonstrated their understanding of the importance of honor, value, and respect during their cultural encounters with community members. These sentiments are highlighted in the following two quotes: "I believe it is very important for educational leaders to honor and respect the cultures of the students and staff in their school and district," and "Treating everyone with great respect and care is paramount in my interactions with people." This heightened awareness positively influenced the ability of these leaders to foster inclusiveness, creating a community of care and understanding that supports their students and families. Although the two participants referenced respecting other cultures as an important characteristic during cultural encounters, it is unclear if the participants share a mutual understanding of the term respect or if their cultural experiences define respect equally. It must be noted that values such as honor and respect may manifest themselves differently in various cultural settings.

### ***Cultural Desire***

Cultural desire was defined as the motivation to learn and engage with others from varied cultural backgrounds (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, pp. 182–183). Most participants shared a common motivation and desire to engage with others from various cultural backgrounds to better connect with their families and community members. This cultural desire was manifested amongst participants in two distinct ways: a general desire and deliberate intentionality. School leaders shared their cultural desires using phrases such as: "try to value other cultures;" "enjoy getting to know other cultures;" "enjoy interacting with different cultures;" "I seek out more information about other cultures;" "first seek to understand before making a decision;" and "continue to be open." School leaders indicated that they desire to learn about other cultures by being open-minded and seeking a deeper understanding of others.

This new awareness supports their ability to be culturally responsive in their decision-making. One participant described this awareness: "Understanding things like religions and cultural values of these other groups would make a more cognizant educational leader and more open to better equip and help my students." Educational leaders showed the importance of increasing their cultural desire to improve their cultural awareness, understanding that it impacts their ability to effectively connect with their students, students' families, and communities.

In addition, a few participants expressed a lack of opportunity to engage with others from diverse backgrounds. One respondent acknowledged their limited cultural awareness and explained that this was due to the lack of diversity within her community. They shared, “I am not well-versed with other cultures. This is primarily because there is not much diversity in my immediate surroundings/community/work environment. It further confirms my feelings and longing to interact with diverse people on multiple levels.” Although they lack opportunity, they clearly desire to interact with people from diverse cultures.

Although participants recognized that cultural awareness is essential, there was a lack of deliberate intentionality to seek out opportunities to expand their cultural desire and their cultural awareness. Two participants acknowledged the effort it takes to build cultural awareness. For example, one stated, “Cultural awareness takes great effort—not due to a lack of want but rather so many diverse backgrounds.” Another participant emphasized the effort it took to communicate with other cultures by stating, “It takes great effort, I tread lightly from cultures I don’t know, meeting people where they’re at, and continue to be open to dialogue.”

All participants shared a desire to learn about other cultures, yet some did not intentionally seek opportunities to engage in communities unless it was within their institutional context. As one respondent shared, “Though I don’t shy away from learning new experiences, I don’t purposely seek them out.” These results shed new light on a potential conflict between cultural awareness opportunities and the lack of intentional effort to engage with others from diverse backgrounds. Due to this conflict, the data reflects an awareness of participants’ lack of intentionality and heightens the awareness of opportunities to engage with various cultures within their demographic context.

## **Discussion**

The use of the CISA-EL in the classroom setting provided educational leaders enrolled in an Ed.D. program the opportunity to reflect on their cultural intelligence. Educational leaders were given the space to express their perceived limited access to experiencing other cultures or the need to address perceived cultural differences within their community. Regardless of gender, years in education, or years in educational leadership roles, all participants expressed a desire to enhance their cultural intelligence. However, some participants perceived their ability to expand their cultural intelligence was restricted by their location or lack of access to diverse communities. In addition, the CISA-EL survey captured educational leaders’ internal personal struggles as they reflected on their cultural intelligence. Like Phillips (2017), educational leaders in this study expressed discomfort, greater perceived interpersonal conflict, and a concern about being seen as disrespectful in their interactions with members of diverse communities. They acknowledged their own cultural biases and considered how others may perceive their actions or intentions. Educational leaders explored their nonverbal and verbal interactions with others who did not share similar cultural backgrounds. These findings have profound impacts in how we consider the ongoing training and development of instructional supervisors.

It is important to note the CISA-EL does not require educational leaders to detail how they will apply cultural intelligence in their professional settings. As stated earlier, the CISA-EL allows participants to self-assess their current cultural intelligence. Therefore, it is unclear if the CISA-

EL allows educational leaders to analyze and evaluate their professional practice, particularly around instructional leadership. However, understanding how the CISA-EL might help students examine their supervision practices and critically analyze their actions may provide insight into how educational leaders make informed adjustments and improvements to provide culturally responsive feedback, which would in turn benefit students, staff, and the broader educational community they serve. Upon using CISA-EL, education leaders could gain insights into how they might improve their connection with their community as they reflect on their cultural knowledge, skills, and encounters. A qualitative study to explore how the CISA-EL impacts educational leaders' ability to analyze and evaluate their professional practice, especially within the realm of instructional supervision, could be beneficial.

The opportunity to increase their awareness of their cultural intelligence strengths and weaknesses via the CISA-EL, educational leaders can be better informed of the needs of their diverse students and community. This awareness can impact their cultural skills as they use their knowledge to make informed decisions and enhance their leadership philosophies. As a result, educational leaders' growing desire to learn about diverse cultures can lead them to seek opportunities and broaden their interactions with members of diverse communities. The experience with completing the CISA-EL aligns with Lowery's (2016) conclusions that knowledge acquired from academic research and practical experiences can lead to innovative supervisory approaches. In addition, it supports Khalifa et al.'s (2016) emphasis on the "need for leadership preparation programs to emphasize culturally responsive leadership" (p. 1288). Using the CISA-EL as a pedagogical tool supports incorporating culturally responsive principles within the curriculum, which aligns with Cormier et al.'s (2024) emphasis for educational institutions to affirm such equity-oriented practices as instructional leaders.

As noted earlier, Ed.D. programs aim to develop scholar-practitioner educational leaders. Given this focus, Ed.D. and leadership development programs should be pedagogically structured to help influence supervision leadership behaviors such as self-reflection, creating inclusive environments, and championing anti-oppressive awareness (Khalifa, 2018). These behaviors directly aid in the development of one's cultural intelligence as well as indirectly influence cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural encounters, and cultural desire amongst stakeholders in the communities at large in which they serve as educational supervisors. Engaging in the CISA-EL can potentially help strengthen educational leaders enrolled in Ed.D. programs to enhance their capacity and increase their ability to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Furthermore, the CISA-EL allows educational leaders to communicate their beliefs relative to their understanding of sensitivity, acceptance, empathy, and respect for other cultures and values. Establishing cultural encounters provides educational leaders with valuable opportunities to increase their engagement and interaction. Through these experiences, educational leaders can reflect on their behaviors and make equitable and socially just decisions that prioritize the needs of the organizations they lead (Brock et al., 2022). Most importantly, the CISA-EL provides educational leaders with a metacognitive experience that allows them to assess, reflect, and process their cultural intelligence within the context of their role as educational leaders. The impact of CISA-EL is consistent with Hebert's (2010) approach of providing educational leaders with reflective experiences to help improve their organizational leadership.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, due to continued diversification of our educational institutions and the widening achievement gaps between cultural groups, cultural responsiveness and cultural intelligence are instrumental in transforming educational institutions to prevent inequitable practices within the realm of instruction (Cormier et al., 2024; Gordon & Espinoza, 2020; Mette et al., 2023b). It is the responsibility of leadership preparation programs, therefore, to provide future and current educational leaders with opportunities to cultivate and reflect on their cultural intelligence, especially as instructional supervisors. The CISA-EL is one of many tools that can be used by such programs to create opportunities for current and future educational leaders to expand their cultural intelligence.

Using the CISA-EL as a pedagogical tool, Ed.D. faculty teaching current and future educational leaders can design classroom experiences to further shape their students' cultural intelligence. The scale provides a numerical marker that sets the stage for one's reflection of their cultural bias, social perceptions of culture, and needs for improvement. We recommend Ed.D. faculty lead class discussions on cultural intelligence and believe the CISA-EL can facilitate an enriched discussion and supplement the course curriculum.

As part of the survey modification process, the researchers added, "As an educational leader," to each item. The reason for this was to place the participant mindset in their contextual setting as educational leaders, whether that be in K–12 schools or higher education institutions. The authors believed without this occupational qualifying phrasing; participants may rank their answers to each item based on various other perceptions. With that said, the researchers recommend similar validated modifications to better cultivate the cultural intelligence of societal leaders, not just in the educational setting. We encourage the use of the CISA-EL to be modified and used in occupations outside the education profession. For example, if you are teaching students in finance, you might add the phrase, "As an accountant," at the beginning of each survey question.

Within this study, there were adjustments made to the course content to address student learning needs and maximize student learning opportunities. The CISA-EL proved to be a valuable resource to support metacognitive thinking around one's cultural intelligence. The reflective nature of the CISA-EL provides educational leaders with the ability to consider the communities they serve and explore how they interact within those communities.

The potential impact on any school system is contingent upon how the educational leaders transfer their learning into their unique context. As participants' cultural awareness was raised, they were more conscientious about communicating with community members from other cultures. Their experience with CISA-EL helped broaden their understanding of the impact of decision-making on various members of those communities. As a result, they can now implement meaningful changes within their current leadership context. Ultimately, the CISA-EL revealed various nuances that impact one's cultural intelligence. Future studies to explore the impact of CISA-EL on student learning is worthy of exploration. In addition, a study using the

CISA-EL in a quasi-experimental design to assess the impact of a course on a student's cultural intelligence should be considered.

Leaders and administrators of educational supervisors must be intentional in providing educational experiences that promote the development of culturally responsive educational leaders. This study provides insights into the perceptions of Ed.D. students regarding their cultural intelligence but only provides a glimpse of the nuances of the complex dynamics of leadership and cultural intelligence. It is recommended that all Ed.D. programs utilize some form of cultural assessment that requires metacognitive reflection in areas of cultural intelligence. The CISA-EL is a tool with the potential to enrich the classroom experience, provide opportunities for leadership development, and empower students to impact their school systems. Future research could explore a comparison of CISA-EL scores between higher education and PK–12 Ed.D. students to evaluate the current state of each educational setting.

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