



Exploring the Relationship between Intercultural Competence and Work Engagement: A Case Study of Teachers at a Large International School in Bangkok

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Received: May 17, 2021; Revised: June 29, 2021; Accepted: July 5, 2021

Abstract

Despite the fact that intercultural competence and work engagement seemed to have the potential to predict organizational success, few researchers had looked into their relationship. The link between intercultural competence and work engagement was investigated using online survey results from 247 teachers at a large International School in Bangkok. One-way ANOVA and post-hoc analysis were used to examine relationship between intercultural competence and work engagement, and to examine the mean differences between groups respectively. The school offered a multi-cultural environment for both students and teachers, necessitating intercultural competence in order for everyone to blend in. Results revealed that teachers from various places of origin had varying degrees of intercultural competence and intercultural competence was significantly linked to work engagement.

Keywords: Intercultural Competence, Work Engagement, International School Bangkok, School Engagement

Introduction

Internationalization of education and its reforms in response to globalization have shrunk the world and brought citizens from diverse cultural backgrounds together, making intercultural competence essential (UNESCO, 2009) and core element of global competence (Francois, 2015). Moreover, with continually increasing number of international schools in Thailand, more people working in international school from both local and international countries are experiencing more cultural diversity in the workplace. To cope with this changing landscape, the international school communities worldwide realized the importance of equipping their workforce with intercultural competence. Intercultural competence refers to an individual's attitudes, knowledge, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultures (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). Previous studies show that culturally competent teachers can transmit to students and help them to become global citizen and succeed in interconnected environment (Cushner & Mahon, 2009). In conclusion, intercultural competence will help school to achieve one of the biggest goals which is creating global citizen that effectively perform in local, national, and global arena. Intercultural competence then becomes priority competence for any people who work in multi-culture environment.

One of the validated indicators of teacher performance was work engagement (Bakker & Bal, 2010). High level of teachers' engagement is required to maximize students' outcomes (Davis, 2003; Klassen, Perry, & Frenzel, 2012; Pianta, Hamre, Allen, 2012; Wang, 2009). This is particularly important in international school settings in which various kinds of activities, examinations, and students' progress tracking are

conducted. Those require teachers to coordinate and engage in team-based practices. Moreover, students are encouraged to feel, touch, and learn through their experiences. This makes work engagement truly matters in international school settings.

Work engagement is a concept of motivation which refers to the voluntary allocation of personal resources (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). Three domains are keys to define work engagement: physical, emotional, and cognitive (Saks, 2006). The work of teaching also includes social engagement both with students and colleagues which evidently improve student engagement and positive student outcomes (Davis, 2003; Klassen et al., 2012; Pianta et al., 2012; Wang, 2009). Scholars in both business and education conduct studies on how work engagement effected organizational outcomes. In the area of education, research show that teachers' attitudes and motivation levels are transmitted to students (Roth, Assor, Kanat Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007) which makes studying teachers' engagement level is essential in school contexts.

While past studies investigated intercultural competence and work engagement in schools (Riley, Bustamante, & Edmonson, 2015), for example, a study by Riley et al. (2015) found the correlation between intercultural competence and student's engagement, few explored the links between intercultural competence and teachers' work engagement. In this study conducted in an international school in Bangkok, we aimed to explore the relationship between intercultural competence and work engagement of teachers, and to determine whether teachers from different continents have a different level of intercultural competence. The findings would strengthen the body of knowledge on intercultural competence and work engagement and inform international school managements how significant the role of intercultural competence could play in improving teachers' work engagement.

Purposes of the Study

1. To determine level of intercultural competence and work engagement of teachers.
2. To investigate whether teachers from different continents have different level of intercultural competence.
3. To explore the correlation between intercultural competence and work engagement of teachers.

Literature Reviews

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence referred to an individual's ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different culture, which required adequate knowledge, attitudes, and skills to be able to succeed in culturally interactions and inter-connected community (Deardorff, 2009). It was also described as a person's ability to communicate meaningfully, appropriately, and effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (Hammer et al., 2003). Three dimensions could be found in reviews of studies about intercultural competence including (1) attitudes which mean seeking out other cultures' attributes and intercultural interaction while performing at the school, (2) knowledge refers to having fundamental local language skills and acting in differences in both verbal and non-verbal communication in school settings, and (3) skills refer to an ability to listen, observe, evaluate, analyze, and think critically in culturally situations (Deardorff, 2009). Intercultural competence was important not only for international employees, but also for local employees, as it aided in the integration of people from various cultures. (Mahon & Raman, 2015). The competence was considered critical since culturally competent teacher could influence their students' accordingly (Cushner et al., 2009).

Work Engagement

Work engagement gathered much interest academically since it was introduced in the organizational behavior literature by Kahn (1990). He argued that engaged workers felt positive about their situation, but beyond their satisfaction, it motivated them to spend energy on a task (Kahn, 1990). Years later, Bakker (2011) concluded that high levels of energy and participation in work could be defined as work engagement.

Work engagement was a multidimensional term that reflects an individual's simultaneous expenditure of physical, cognitive, and emotional resources in productive, full-time work performance. (Kahn, 1990). By including three dimensions, this construct provided a more complex and better understanding of individuals' relationships with their work, over and above concepts such as organizational commitment, workaholism, job satisfaction, job embeddedness, or job involvement (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Based on Kahn's and others, three dimensions of work engagement were distinguished by Schuafeli Salanova et al. (2002). It consisted of absorption (cognitive dimension), dedication (emotional dimension), and vigor (physical dimension). The most frequently used measure of work engagement (Bakker et al., 2011), the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), was designed for research involving workers in the business sector. Although the scale remained robust for its factor structure (Klassen et al., 2012), its item content may not be relevant for all contexts. For example, while UWES had been used with teachers (Bakker et al., 2010), the scale content did not include the particular conditions associated with teachers' work. The dimension of social interaction with students, which may be the most important aspect of teaching, was not considered by the UWES and other job engagement scales. (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The job of teaching necessitated a degree of social participation that was infrequent in other careers. (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Social engagement can be categorized

in teaching into two, with students and colleagues during work (Klassen, Yerdelen, & Durksen, 2013). Teachers, like employees in other professions, develop social relationships with coworkers over the course of their careers, but the emphasis on social relationships with students was central to teaching (Klassen et al., 2013).

From those conceptual perspective, four dimensions of work engagement were investigated here, which were cognitive engagement (CE), emotional engagement (EE), social engagement: students (SES), and social engagement: colleagues (SEC).

Hypothesis

Intercultural competence and hometown

Teachers who came from different hometown held different culture backgrounds. As people from different background could have different beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Deardorff, 2009). Even they were working in the same multi-cultural environment as international school which culturally competent was required. It was unclear that different hometown had different level of intercultural competence.

Hypothesis 1: teachers from different home regions had different level of Intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence and work engagement

There could be several arguments on why intercultural competence and work engagement associated. In the context of international school, developing intercultural competence was a must as it was reported to associated with school's success (Hofstede et al., 2005). A study showed that intercultural competence related to student's engagement (Riley, Bustamante, & Edmonson, 2015) but it had not been found that it related to teachers' work engagement. If these two were associated, it would be benefit so much as by developing intercultural competence, work engagement would also be developed.

Hypothesis 2: Intercultural competence was positively associated with work engagement, in the form of cognitive engagement (CE), emotional engagement (EE), social engagement: students (SES), and social engagement: colleagues (SEC).

Research Methodology

Target population, data collection, and sample

The research focused on a well-known and international school with wide range of cultural diversity. Our site selection was a large-sized International School, regarded as one of leading international schools in Bangkok (Keeling, 2020). The school represented a rich cultural diversity for both students and teachers and provided settings that intercultural competence was highly desired. A web-based survey form was used and sent to 247 teachers. Eventually, 165 responses were received amounting 66.8 percent. Of these, most respondents were female (66.06 %), aged between 40 to 49 years old (32.73 %), held bachelor's degree of equivalent (83.04 %), and having 11 to 15 years of work experience (43.03 %). The majority came from United Kingdom (53.33 %) and worked at high school campus (81.21 %) (see Table 1).

Table 1 Demographic information by teachers in the study.

Characteristics	Teacher sample (n = 165)	
	n	%
Hometown		
Thailand	11	6.67
United Kingdom	88	53.33
USA	11	6.67
European Countries	55	33.33

Instrument

All main variables were measured by established multi-item scales. Intercultural competence scale, adapted from Fantini (2007), via online questionnaires, which included the three subscales of attitudes (0.735), knowledge (0.905), and skills (0.917). The range of acceptable reliability of items were from 0.70 to 1.00. Response categories ranged from (1) *extremely low* to (5) *extremely high*.

Work engagement was assessed using questions developed by Klassen et al. (2013) to fit school context. Work engagement was measured with the online questionnaires, which includes cognitive engagement (CE) (0.771), emotional engagement (EE) (0.914), social engagement: students (SES) (0.787), and social engagement: colleagues (SEC) (0.827). Response categories ranged from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*.

Data analysis techniques

The descriptive statistics was used through the statistical package for the Social Science (SPSS) software to analyze the quantitative data which describes frequency,

percentage, means, standard deviation (SD). Also, Pearson correlations, one-way ANOVA, and post-hoc analysis were computed for all variables.

Results

1. The level of intercultural competence and work engagement of teachers

Table 2 displayed the information of level of intercultural competence and work engagement of teachers using mean and standard deviation. The overall work engagement average was at 4.381. Cognitive engagement (CE) had the highest average (4.556) followed by social engagement with students (SES) (4.336), social engagement with colleagues (SEC) (4.335), and emotional engagement (EE) (4.298) respectively. In terms of intercultural competence, it had high average (3.811). Attitudes was a very high level (4.146) followed by skills (3.678) and knowledge (3.599) respectively.

Table 2 Statistics for main variables in the study.

Constructs/Statistics	Teacher (n = 165)	
	Mean	SD
<i>Intercultural Competence</i>	3.811	0.472
Attitudes	4.146	0.375
Knowledge	3.599	0.539
Skills	3.678	0.684
<i>Work Engagement</i>	4.381	0.421
Cognitive Engagement (CE)	4.556	0.408
Emotional Engagement (EE)	4.298	0.729
Social Engagement: Students (SES)	4.336	0.546
Social Engagement: Colleagues (SEC)	4.335	0.619

2. Correlation between intercultural competence and hometown of teachers.

In this section, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to statistically determine significant differences of intercultural competence and work engagement with hometown of teachers. Researchers found that hometown of teachers significantly related to intercultural competence for attitudes, knowledge, and skills. It was also significantly related to both social engagement: students (SES) and colleagues (SEC) but not linked to cognitive engagement (CE) and emotional engagement (EE) as shown in table 3

Table 3 One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of Work Engagement and Intercultural Competence of teachers from different hometown.

Constructs/Statistics	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F
<i>Work Engagement</i>				
Cognitive Engagement (CE)	0.483	3	0.161	0.967
Emotional Engagement (EE)	3.824	3	1.275	2.464
Social Engagement: Students (SES)	5.273	3	1.758	6.497*
Social Engagement: Colleagues (SEC)	34.104	3	11.368	63.476*
<i>Intercultural Competence</i>				
Attitudes	3.292	3	1.097	8.895*
Knowledge	7.301	3	2.434	9.700*
Skills	8.101	3	2.700	6.335*

Note: * denote p value ≤ 0.05 , n = 165 teachers

The result (in Table 4) showed that SES, SEC, attitudes, knowledge, and skills had significantly correlated with different hometown. Post-hoc analysis was analyzed using Dunnett T3, an a priori or multiple comparison test used to determine whether the mean of a control condition differs from that of two or more experimental conditions in an analysis of variance (Cramer & Howitt, 2004) to determine mean differences between group of hometowns. The data showed that teachers from Thailand had the highest average on social engagement: students (SES) whilst the UK teachers were leading on social engagement: colleagues (SEC). In term of intercultural competence, people from USA had the highest average on all attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

3. Correlation between intercultural competence and work engagement

To determine correlation between intercultural competence and work engagement of teachers to answer, Pearson Correlation coefficient was employed for the data analysis (show in table 5). Intercultural competence apparently was significantly correlated with two subcomponents of work engagement: social engagement with students (SES) and emotional engagement (EE). Social engagement with students (SES) showed significant correlation with knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Emotional engagement (EE) also significantly linked to knowledge, attitudes, and skills. However, intercultural competence was not significantly related to cognitive engagement (CE) and social engagement: colleagues (SEC).

Table 4 Post-hoc analysis using Dunnett T3 to compare mean differences.

Constructs/ Statistics	I Hometown	J Hometown	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95 % Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Social Engagement: Students (SES)	Thailand	United Kingdom	0.48295*	0.10429	0.001	0.1874	0.7786
		USA	0.04545	0.08131	0.992	0.2147	0.3056
		European Countries	0.59545*	0.10019	0.000	0.3077	0.8832
		United Kingdom	0.44602	0.12373	0.021	0.0615	0.8306
Social Engagement: Colleagues (SEC)	Thailand	USA	1.46875	0.03400	0.000	1.3773	1.5602
		European Countries	0.76875	0.08579	0.000	0.5372	1.0003
	USA	Thailand	0.63636	0.07131	0.000	0.4082	0.8645
		United Kingdom	0.56250	0.04137	0.000	0.4513	0.6737
Attitudes	USA	European Countries	0.53333	0.04570	0.000	0.4088	0.6579
		Thailand	0.63636	0.09858	0.000	0.3210	0.9517
		United Kingdom	0.84375	0.06286	0.000	0.6747	1.0128
		European Countries	0.66250	0.05528	0.000	0.5118	0.8132
Knowledge	USA	Thailand	0.82955	0.15288	0.002	0.3404	1.3187
		United Kingdom	0.90625	0.08730	0.000	0.6715	1.1410
		European Countries	0.85000	0.05092	0.000	0.7112	0.9888

Table 5 Correlation matrix of the main variables.

	Work Engagement			Intercultural Competence			
	CE	EE	SES	SEC	Attitude	Knowledge	Skill
Cognitive Engagement (CE)	1						
Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.109	1					
Social Engagement: Students (SES)	-0.006	0.707*	1				
Social Engagement: Colleagues (SEC)	0.108	0.532*	0.438*	1			
Attitude	-0.044	0.389*	0.669*	0.084	1		
Knowledge	-0.032	0.572*	0.730*	0.074	0.850*	1	
Skills	0.097	0.331*	0.524*	-0.005	0.688*	0.804*	1

Note: * denote p value ≤ 0.05 , n = 165 teachers

Discussion

Based on our findings, teachers' work engagement and intercultural competence were at or above high average. Based on past research, effective teaching relied on motivated teachers who were fully engaged in their work, not only cognitively and emotionally, but also socially (Rimm, Kaufman, & Hamre, 2010; Staiger & Rockoff, 2010). Work engagement was also considered a crucial element in its ability to alter the perception of demands in the environment, reducing stress and facilitating

adjustment (Bakker et al., 2007). In addition, teachers with intercultural competence could help their students in the improvement of intercultural competence, considered one of global citizen's characteristic and core element of twenty-first-century life (Lasonen & Teras, 2010).

Although generally most dimensions of intercultural competence appeared to be at excellent level, two of them needed special attention. Our findings showed that knowledge and skills had the lowest mean comparatively resulting knowledge and skills could potentially be prioritized.

Regarding the correlation between hometown of teachers and intercultural competence, researchers found that teachers from different home regions had different level of intercultural competence. According to study by McCrae, Bernardos and Jocic (2005), conducted with more than 12,000 college students from 51 cultures, the average scores of intercultural competence varied across cultures. People from different countries, between nation variation also emerged in average personality (Schmitt, 2007). These supported our findings that people from different hometown had different level of intercultural competence. The result required the administrators' attention in varying development methods to serve different level and suit each origin of teachers and their level of intercultural competence. The variable development methods could have positively led schools to develop their teachers' intercultural competence successfully and effectively.

For example, based on the rankings in each sub-dimension, the school administrators' team could determine which aspects of intercultural competence should be prioritized as professional development programs for teachers from different hometowns differently to suite their need of development and their level of competence.

Lastly, according to our results, intercultural competence was found to be strongly and positively linked to social engagement: students (SES) and emotional engagement (EE). This finding strengthened prior study by Deci (2001), which stated that “personal resources may jumpstart a motivational process that leads to employee engagement by fulfilling basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence.” Thus, this reinforced that intercultural competence was one of the competences that could improve teachers' work engagement. This provided useful and practical implication for teacher development in international school environments as intercultural competence could be a key to enhance teacher work engagement which, in turn, enabled organization success and growth (Hofstede et al., 2005).

Recommendations

Based on the finding that different teachers' hometowns had different levels of intercultural competence and the positive relationship between intercultural competence and work engagement, international school administrators may consider endorsing intercultural competence as a main competence in teacher development. In addition, school administrators should offer various types of teacher development approaches to suit different levels of intercultural competence and individual teacher background. Determining suitable development methods should benefit the community in ascending the level of teachers' intercultural competence. As intercultural competence and work engagement showed positive relationship, school recruitment process might consider including high level of intercultural competence as one of key desirable qualities of prospective teachers.

Regarding future research recommendation, since this study was conducted during the pandemic situation which limited the data collection to only one international school; future research should extend the sampling size to cover teachers from more

international schools nationwide. Finally, we would recommend future research and development to present approaches to develop intercultural competence for teachers with different cultural background and level of intercultural competence to optimize the outcomes.

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