

EDUCATION

AND DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IMPACT ON CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

EDUCACIÓN Y DESARROLLO DE LA INTELIGENCIA EMOCIONAL IMPACTO EN LA SENSIBILIDAD CULTURAL

Imdad Mustafa Bayramov

E-mail: imdad_bayramov@list.ru

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9528-2667>

¹ Baku State University, Azerbaijan.

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the complex relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and cultural sensitivity in the context of education. Emotional intelligence, which encompasses skills such as empathy, self-awareness, and emotion regulation is recognized as a crucial factor in shaping individuals' cultural sensitivity in educational settings. This article aims to demonstrate the implications of emotional intelligence for promoting cultural sensitivity in educational settings, and its implications for promoting inclusive and effective education, through a review of the existing literature and empirical evidence.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Empathy, Self-awareness, Emotion, Education, Training.

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora la compleja relación entre la inteligencia emocional (IE) y la sensibilidad cultural en el contexto educativo. La inteligencia emocional, que abarca habilidades como la empatía, la autoconciencia y la regulación emocional, se reconoce como un factor crucial en la formación de la sensibilidad cultural de las personas en entornos educativos. Este artículo pretende demostrar las implicaciones de la inteligencia emocional para promover la sensibilidad cultural en entornos educativos, así como sus implicaciones para promover una educación inclusiva y eficaz, mediante una revisión de la literatura existente y la evidencia empírica.

Palabras clave: Inteligencia emocional, Empatía, Autoconciencia, Emoción, Educación, Formación.

INTRODUCTION

In today's multicultural and interconnected world, education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' perspectives and promoting inclusion. Emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and use emotions effectively, is increasingly recognized as a key determinant of cultural sensitivity (Li, 2020; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). Recognizing and effectively developing cultural differences requires a deep understanding of emotions in oneself and others. Emotional intelligence, which encompasses self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills, emerges as a foundation for successful interpersonal and cross-cultural communication in education (Todorova & Antonova, 2024). In general, emotional intelligence serves as a fundamental element in shaping the quality of human interactions. It encompasses the ability to identify, understand, manage, and use emotions effectively. In educational contexts, emotional intelligence affects not only the well-being of the individual but also the overall dynamics of the learning environment. Therefore, educators and students may benefit from high emotional intelligence, creating an atmosphere conducive to collaboration, understanding, and academic growth (Goleman, 2008).

Recent studies provide strong evidence linking EI with cultural sensitivity in education. For example, Aydemir & Ulu Kalin (2021) found a moderate and significant positive correlation between EI and intercultural sensitivity among preservice social studies teachers. This correlation was especially strong among those with friends from different cultures, suggesting that exposure to diversity enhances both EI and cultural sensitivity. Similarly, Kai Liao et al., (2021) examined the role of EI in intercultural competence and found that it positively influences cultural adaptability and intercultural adjustment. While focusing on expatriates, the findings suggest educational applications, particularly in study abroad programs, as seen also in the work of Cheung et al. (2022), which highlighted the role of EI in enhancing the cultural awareness of hospitality management students. In addition, Bal & Kökalan (2022) found that cultural intelligence moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction, with a correlation between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction. This is especially relevant for educators, as it suggests that higher emotional intelligence and higher IQ lead to greater job satisfaction, which could improve teaching quality and student outcomes—an unexpected but significant finding for educational policy.

In educational contexts, EI affects both individual well-being and the dynamics of the learning environment. Educators with high EI are able to manage emotions,

understand students' needs, and adapt their teaching methods, as pointed out by Goleman (2006). This creates environments conducive to collaboration and academic growth, essential for culturally diverse classrooms. Strategies for developing EI and cultural sensitivity can include integrating EI training into curricula through workshops and role-playing, promoting cultural exchange programs, and using culturally relevant materials. Professional development for educators, focusing on intercultural communication and empathy, is also important (Butler et al., 2022; Cos et al., 2024). But despite these benefits, there are still challenges to overcome such as the lack of standardized assessment tools for emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity, and/or stakeholder resistance to prioritizing traditional academic competencies. To address these challenges, it is essential to internalize the need for evidence-based practices and longitudinal studies that analyze the impact of these skills on student success. Overall, collaboration between educators, psychologists, and policymakers will allow for the development of comprehensive programs that ensure adequate student development.

Based on the relevant of this topic, this article explores the impact of emotional intelligence on cultural sensitivity in education, highlighting its role in creating inclusive learning environments. In an educational environment characterized by unprecedented cultural diversity and interaction, the role of emotional intelligence in shaping the dynamics of interpersonal and intercultural communication is of great importance. Emotional intelligence has been recognized as a crucial factor in increasing cultural sensitivity and promoting inclusive education. Thus, this article aims to shed light on the profound effects of emotional intelligence on cultural sensitivity and education, and to explore the interconnected nature of emotions, cultural awareness, and learning experiences.

DEVELOPMENT

Cultural sensitivity is the understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural backgrounds, recognizing the richness that diversity brings to the educational experience. Emotional intelligence plays a critical role in developing cultural sensitivity by recognizing one's own cultural biases, emotions related to cultural differences, and acknowledging the value of diverse perspectives. The integration of emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity is essential for creating inclusive educational spaces. The impact of emotional intelligence on education extends beyond individual interactions to the design of the learning environment. Teachers equipped with high emotional intelligence can adapt their teaching methods

to accommodate diverse learning styles, manage cultural contexts, and create inclusive curricula. Students, in turn, benefit from an emotionally safe and culturally aware learning environment that supports their academic and personal development. Intercultural communication requires a thorough understanding of emotions and cultural systems. It equips individuals with the skills needed to communicate respectfully and effectively across cultures. This facilitates building bridges across cultural differences, contributing to shared understanding and appreciation among students from diverse backgrounds. The integration of emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and education provides a dynamic framework that shapes the quality of interpersonal and intercultural communication in the educational environment.

Emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity

Emotional Intelligence (EI) comprises four fundamental components: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 2008). These elements support cultural sensitivity by encouraging self-reflection on cultural biases and enhancing empathy for diverse perspectives. For example, self-awareness allows people to recognize how their cultural background influences perceptions, while empathy allows them to appreciate the emotional experiences of others (Crowne, 2013). Cultural sensitivity, on the other hand, involves adapting behaviors to align with cultural norms, a process facilitated by the social skills component of EI (Thomas & Inkson, 2017). Thus, together, EI and cultural sensitivity form a framework for effectively managing intercultural interactions.

Overall, the relationship between EI and cultural sensitivity is symbiotic, as the two mutually reinforce each other. EI provides the emotional tools to manage intercultural interactions, while cultural sensitivity broadens the understanding of emotional expressions across cultures. For example, Piotrowski et al. (2020) found that cultural intelligence, which includes cultural sensitivity, is positively related to EI, suggesting that individuals with high EI are better equipped to manage emotions in diverse environments. Other researches further support this assertion, demonstrating that cultural exposure influences both EI and cultural intelligence, enhancing adaptability in multicultural environments. This interaction is particularly evident in global business and education, where understanding emotional and cultural issues is essential for success (Butler et al., 2003; Brackett et al., 2011; Crowne, 2009). The influence of these elements in these workplace dynamics are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1. The Role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Cultural Sensitivity in Workplace Dynamics.

Aspect	Impact
Effective Communication	EI helps interpret the emotional tone and intent of messages, which is crucial when communication styles vary across cultures. Cultural sensitivity ensures that people adapt their approach, avoiding misunderstandings.
Conflict Resolution	High EI and cultural sensitivity enable people to manage conflicts with empathy and understanding, leading to more harmonious resolutions. This is especially important in diverse teams, where cultural misunderstandings can escalate tensions.
Teamwork	These attributes foster a cooperative environment where diverse perspectives are valued, improving team performance. Leaders with high EI and cultural sensitivity improve team dynamics in multicultural environments (Brackett et al., 2011).

Source: own elaboration.

On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that empathy, a core component of emotional intelligence, is the foundation of cultural sensitivity. People with high emotional intelligence demonstrate a notable ability to understand and share the feelings of others, regardless of their cultural background. In educational settings, this capacity for empathy enhances educators' and students' appreciation of diverse perspectives, fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Empathy in the context of cultural sensitivity is multidimensional. It encompasses cognitive empathy, which involves understanding the perspectives of others, as well as emotional empathy, which involves sharing and resonating with their emotions. The synergy between these dimensions enables individuals to navigate cultural differences by authentically understanding others' emotional experiences.

Emotional intelligence, which underpins empathy, helps create an inclusive learning environment. Teachers with high emotional intelligence are attuned to the diverse emotional experiences of their students, creating an atmosphere where students from varied cultural backgrounds feel valued, understood, and supported in their academic pursuits. Empathy enables individuals to bridge cultural differences in educational settings. Students and educators with developed emotional intelligence foster connections that transcend cultural differences and go beyond superficial understanding. This empathetic approach contributes to a sense of belonging and community that is essential for effective learning and collaboration (Prinz, 2011).

By fostering empathy, both teachers and students can break down stereotypes and promote a more nuanced understanding of different cultures. This approach reduces the impact of biases and creates a more equitable learning environment. Moreover, there is a growing need to integrate emotional intelligence training into educational curricula. Programs and interventions aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence skills can be tailored for both teachers and students, thereby fostering a culture of empathy, understanding, and cultural sensitivity in educational institutions.

Self-awareness and cultural competence

Emotional intelligence includes the self-awareness necessary to recognize one's own cultural biases and assumptions. Educators and students with developed self-awareness are better equipped to approach cultural differences with an open mind, challenge preconceived notions, and promote cultural competence in educational contexts. Self-awareness enhances emotional regulation. Individuals who are high in self-awareness regarding cultural sensitivity manage cross-cultural interactions more effectively by recognizing how their emotions can affect their perceptions and interactions with individuals from different cultures (Koroleva et al., 2021).

Although no specific experiment directly links self-awareness and cultural competence, researchers often design studies that indirectly assess these constructs in the broader context of cross-cultural interaction. One such study that addresses aspects of self-awareness and cultural competence is the research by Matsumoto & Hwang (2013, 2014) which investigated how individuals from different cultures perceive and interpret facial expressions of emotion. The study included participants from three different cultural groups: East Asian (Japan and Korea), Western (America and Europe), and Southeast Asian (Malaysia and Indonesia). Researchers used standardized facial expression stimuli consisting of photographs depicting various emotional expressions (e.g., happiness, anger, fear). Participants were asked to rate the intensity and identify the emotion expressed in each facial expression. This task was designed to assess participants' ability to accurately recognize and interpret emotions. Additionally, participants completed self-report measures that evaluated their intercultural experiences, cultural awareness, and attitudes toward cultural diversity. Although they did not explicitly measure self-awareness, these measures provided insights into participants' exposure to and understanding of different cultures (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2014).

The study revealed significant differences in emotion perception across cultural groups. Participants from

East Asian cultures demonstrated greater accuracy in recognizing facial expressions of politeness and embarrassment—emotions highly valued in collectivist cultures. Western participants, conversely, showed higher accuracy in recognizing facial expressions of happiness and surprise. While the study primarily focused on cross-cultural differences in emotion perception, the results indirectly illuminated aspects of self-awareness and cultural competence. Participants' accuracy in recognizing culturally specific emotions indicated their level of cultural awareness, as individuals from different cultures exhibited varying degrees of sensitivity to emotions valued in their respective cultural contexts. The self-report measures further contributed to understanding participants' levels of cultural competence by providing insights into their experiences with different cultures.

Teachers and students with high levels of self-awareness are better equipped to recognize their own cultural biases. This recognition is an important first step toward developing cultural competence because it allows individuals to critically examine their assumptions and attitudes, creating an environment of openness and acceptance of diverse perspectives. Self-awareness enables individuals to navigate cultural differences with humility and adaptability. Educators who deeply understand their own cultural identities are better equipped to approach cultural diversity with an open mind, facilitate meaningful interactions, and foster a climate of respect in the educational environment (Leontiev, 2009). Cultural humility, an essential component of cultural competence, is cultivated through self-awareness. Teachers and students who acknowledge the limitations of their own cultural knowledge and actively seek to learn from others contribute to a more inclusive and culturally sensitive educational environment.

Emotion regulation and cross-cultural interaction

Effective intercultural interaction in educational settings requires the ability to appropriately regulate emotions. Emotional intelligence enables individuals to manage potential cultural conflicts, resolve misunderstandings, and maintain a positive emotional climate. Educators who are able to regulate their emotions effectively contribute to a safe and conducive learning environment for students from diverse cultures.

Researchers have conducted studies examining how emotion regulation strategies can influence individuals' experiences in cross-cultural contexts. One example is the 2007 study by Butler et al. (2003) titled "The Social Consequences of Emotional Suppression: A Prospective Study". The main aim of this experiment was to examine the social consequences of emotional suppression,

specifically how emotional suppression can affect social interactions, relationships, and psychological well-being. The study involved a diverse sample of participants, including individuals from different cultures. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental condition in which they were instructed to either suppress their emotional responses during social interactions or to a control condition without such instructions. Participants engaged in a social interaction task in which they had to discuss a distressing event together. Those in the suppressed condition were instructed to conceal their emotional responses during the conversation. Various measures were used to assess the impact of emotion suppression on participants, including self-reports of emotional experiences, physiological markers of stress, and post-interaction assessments of mood and social connectedness.

The study also reported that individuals who suppressed their emotions during social interactions had more negative emotional experiences, higher levels of stress (as indicated by physiological measures), and lower post-interaction mood and perceived social connectedness. These findings suggest that suppressing emotions may have negative consequences for individuals in social interactions. Although Butler et al. (2003) did not explicitly focus on cross-cultural interactions, the results have implications for understanding how emotion regulation strategies may influence individuals' experiences in different social contexts. In cross-cultural interactions, where cultural norms regarding emotional expression may differ, individuals who use emotion regulation strategies such as suppression may face unique challenges.

In addition, emotion regulation refers to the ability to control and modulate one's emotions in response to internal and external stimuli. It encompasses processes such as recognizing emotions, understanding their origins, and effectively managing their impact on behavior. In the context of intercultural interaction, emotion regulation plays a critical role in preventing misunderstandings and creating an environment of mutual understanding. Emotion regulation is a key dimension of emotional intelligence, working in conjunction with other components such as self-awareness, empathy, and social skills. Individuals with developed emotion regulation skills navigate the complexities of cross-cultural interactions with heightened sensitivity and adaptability (Brackett et al., 2011).

Different cultures exhibit varying norms and expectations regarding emotional expression. Emotionally intelligent individuals engage in active observation and recognition of these cultural nuances, understanding that emotional expressions may significantly differ across cultural backgrounds (Stepanov, 2010). Effective emotion regulation

minimizes the risk of misinterpretation and cultural misunderstanding. Individuals who can regulate their emotional responses are less likely to impose their cultural biases on others and are more adept at interpreting and respecting diverse emotional expressions in cross-cultural interactions.

Conflicts frequently emerge in cross-cultural interactions due to differences in communication styles or cultural expectations. Emotion regulation is essential in managing these conflicts constructively, enabling individuals to approach disagreements with cultural sensitivity and a collaborative problem-solving mindset. Emotion regulation empowers individuals to counter stereotypes and biases that may arise in cross-cultural interactions. By proactively managing emotional responses, individuals can approach cross-cultural exchanges with greater openness, foster authentic connections, and challenge cultural misconceptions. Moreover, effective emotional regulation serves as a bridge across cultural divides, enabling individuals to engage in authentic and positive relationships. By regulating emotional responses to cultural differences, individuals contribute to building connections that bridge diverse perspectives, fostering a sense of unity and shared understanding.

The impact of emotional intelligence on education

Emotionally intelligent educators recognize and value the diverse learning styles influenced by cultural backgrounds. They adapt their teaching methods to respond to these differences, creating a more inclusive educational experience that resonates with the diverse needs of students from various cultures. Emotional intelligence in educators encompasses self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and effective interpersonal skills. Teachers with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to understand and respond to the emotional needs of their students, fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment (Manyanina, 2010). Teachers with high emotional intelligence contribute to students' well-being by creating a supportive and emotionally safe learning environment. This approach facilitates effective learning by ensuring students feel understood, valued, and encouraged to express themselves authentically.

A significant psychological experiment investigating the effects of emotional intelligence on education is the study by Brackett et al. (2011). Although not exclusively focused on education, the experiment provides valuable insights into how emotional intelligence interventions can impact academic settings. The primary objective was to assess the impact of a school-based intervention designed to promote emotional intelligence on students'

emotional regulation, social behavior, and academic performance. The study involved 504 students in grades 6 and 7 at a racially and ethnically diverse urban middle school. Researchers implemented the RULER program, an evidence-based emotional intelligence intervention aimed at improving emotional intelligence skills. RULER is an acronym for Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating Emotions. The comprehensive program included classroom lessons, teacher training, and school-wide activities to develop emotional intelligence skills. Researchers assessed students' emotional intelligence using self-report measures and teacher ratings before and after the intervention. The interventions concentrated on key aspects of emotional intelligence, including recognizing, understanding, and regulating emotions. Data collection encompassed students' social behaviors through observations and teacher reports, with academic performance evaluated using students' grade point average (GPA) from school records.

The study also found that the RULER program significantly improved students' emotional intelligence, as evidenced by their increased ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions. In addition, students who participated in the emotional intelligence intervention demonstrated improvements in social behavior, including improved social skills, positive peer interactions, and decreased aggressive behavior. Although the study did not directly affect GPA, the improvements in emotional intelligence and social behavior had a positive impact on students' overall well-being. This experience highlights the potential for incorporating emotional intelligence interventions into educational settings to enhance students' emotional skills and social behaviors. Improved emotional intelligence contributes to a positive and supportive learning environment, fosters better social relationships, and has a potential impact on academic performance. The experiments conducted by Brackett, Rivers, and Salovey offer valuable insights into the potential benefits of incorporating emotional intelligence interventions into education. Such interventions contribute to the holistic development of students by potentially impacting emotional regulation, positive social behavior, and academic success (Brackett et al., 2011).

As previously discussed, cultural sensitivity in education involves recognizing and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. This requires teachers to be aware of their own cultural biases and to create an inclusive space where students from diverse backgrounds feel valued and understood. Emotional intelligence contributes significantly to the development of cultural sensitivity by enhancing educators' ability to empathize with

students from diverse backgrounds. Educators with high emotional intelligence are more likely to adapt their teaching approaches to accommodate cultural variations in learning styles (Crowne, 2009).

Inclusive education acknowledges the existence of diverse learning styles among students. Educators must recognize that individuals have different preferences and strengths in how they absorb, process, and retain information. Emotionally intelligent educators demonstrate remarkable flexibility in their teaching methods, adapting approaches to accommodate different learning styles. By employing multimodal teaching strategies—such as visual aids, hands-on activities, and collaborative projects—they can cater to diverse learning preferences. Teachers with high emotional intelligence can discern the most effective ways to engage students based on their unique learning characteristics. Cultural sensitivity, facilitated by emotional intelligence, encourages collaboration among students from diverse backgrounds. Group projects and collaborative learning experiences become opportunities for students to appreciate the richness of cultural diversity, enhance their interpersonal skills, and prepare themselves for future global collaboration (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Cultural sensitivity fundamentally involves recognizing and respecting students' diverse cultural backgrounds. Educators who develop this sensitivity create an inclusive environment where students feel valued, heard, and understood, thereby paving the way for meaningful cross-cultural collaboration. By enabling educators to empathize with students from diverse backgrounds, emotional intelligence enhances cultural understanding and creates an environment conducive to cross-cultural interaction.

Emotional intelligence helps to mitigate stereotypes and prejudices in educational settings. Educators and students with high emotional intelligence challenge stereotypes by fostering an environment that promotes fairness, equality, and understanding among individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds. Stereotypes and prejudice hinder students' educational experiences, create disparities in achievement, and limit opportunities for certain groups. Emotional intelligence plays a critical role in addressing and reducing these problems (Todorova & Antonova, 2024). Integrating emotional intelligence into education helps students develop skills such as cultural competence, adaptability, and effective communication. These skills are essential for success in a world characterized by diversity and interdependence.

In the ever-evolving educational landscape, the profound implications of emotional intelligence are emerging as a catalyst for positive change, impacting both individuals'

academic performance and their cultural sensitivity in diverse learning environments. This synthesis of emotional intelligence, education, and cultural sensitivity highlights the interconnectedness of emotional well-being, academic success, and the cultivation of inclusive and culturally aware communities. The research reviewed collectively underscores the key role of emotional intelligence in fostering inclusive learning environments. Teachers equipped with high emotional intelligence skills create spaces where students feel valued, understood, and supported. This positive emotional climate sets the stage for academic engagement, social connection, and overall well-being.

Emotional intelligence enables educators to adapt teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles. The flexibility to recognize and respond to individual needs contributes to inclusive educational practices. Multimodal teaching strategies that take emotional elements into account play a crucial role in engaging students from diverse cultural backgrounds and reinforce the idea that effective teaching extends beyond content delivery. Emotional intelligence emerges thus as a key enabler of cultural sensitivity. Educators with high emotional intelligence demonstrate greater empathy, enabling them to navigate cultural contexts and adapt their approaches to accommodate students' diverse emotional experiences. This empathetic engagement contributes to cultural sensitivity that goes beyond superficial awareness, fostering genuine understanding and appreciation for diverse perspectives.

Integrating emotional intelligence into education also plays a crucial role in reducing stereotypes and biases. Educators who actively challenge assumptions and biases create environments where stereotypes are critically examined and addressed. Emotional intelligence serves as a tool to dispel misconceptions, foster open dialogue, and encourage authentic celebration of cultural diversity. Emotional intelligence equips students with essential life skills, preparing them for global citizenship. Developing emotional regulation, empathy, and effective interpersonal skills helps students adapt to diverse cultural contexts. By addressing the emotional dimensions of cross-cultural interaction, students are better prepared to navigate the complexities of a globalized world. While the evidence presented in these studies is compelling, further research is needed to examine the long-term effects of emotional intelligence interventions on both educational outcomes and cultural sensitivity. Moreover, the development of comprehensive frameworks that explicitly integrate emotional intelligence into educational curricula holds promise for enhancing the holistic development of students.

CONCLUSIONS

Emotional intelligence, a synthesis of education and cultural sensitivity, represents a paradigm shift in the way we conceptualize and approach learning environments. The positive impacts of emotional intelligence ripple through the educational landscape, contributes not only to academic success but also to the creation of inclusive communities that celebrate diversity and prepare individuals to thrive in an interconnected world. In a globalized and rapidly changing world, emotional intelligence is key to addressing issues like bullying, social exclusion and mental health in education. As educators, policymakers and researchers continue to get it emotional intelligence the potential for change in education and cultural awareness becomes more and more apparent, so we need curricula and pedagogies that integrate emotional learning alongside academic subjects. By embedding emotional intelligence into education, we give future generations the social and emotional skills to live fulfilling lives, be successful professionals and contribute to a more compassionate and understanding global society.

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