

Cultural Intelligence as a Linguistic Competence: Preparing Future Skills for Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia"

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) as a core linguistic and communicative competence in preparing Saudi society for the demands of Vision 2030, particularly in its goals to enhance global competitiveness, foster societal inclusion, and diversify the economy. As Saudi Arabia welcomes increasing cross-cultural interactions through tourism, international business, and educational exchange, the need for individuals who can effectively communicate and navigate multicultural environments has become essential. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical method based on responses from university staff across disciplines and nationalities. The findings affirm that cultural intelligence, especially when viewed through the lens of language use, intercultural communication, and multilingual awareness, is a vital future skill. This competence enhances mutual understanding, supports peaceful coexistence, and strengthens smart partnerships. The study recommends that educational institutions embed cultural intelligence training into language learning and communication curricula to align with Vision 2030's human capital goals.

Keywords: Cultural intelligence, Linguistic competence, Intercultural communication, Future skills, Saudi Vision 2030, multilingualism.

INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia's **Vision 2030** outlines a transformative plan to position the Kingdom as a global leader in investment, innovation, and cultural diplomacy. Central to this vision is **human capital development**, particularly through equipping individuals with **future-ready skills** such as **linguistic competence and cross-cultural adaptability**. As the Kingdom becomes more globally interconnected, the ability to communicate, collaborate, and coexist across cultures is no longer optional; it is strategic.

One of the most critical future skills in this context is Cultural Intelligence (CQ), understood not just as a psychological trait but as a linguistic and communicative competence. Effective communication across diverse cultures requires more than just fluency in languages—it demands the ability to interpret cultural nuances, adapt communication styles, and build trust in multicultural contexts. Cultural intelligence or Cultural Quotient (CQ) is a term used in education, academic research, general relationships, government and business (Alon, Boulanger, Elston, Galanaki, Martínez de Ibarreta, Meyers & Vélez-Calle 2018). It can be understood as the capability to relate and work across cultures (Herrmann, Call, Hernandez-Lloreda, Hare & Tormasello, 2007). Cultural intelligence (CQ), defined as an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings, is consistent with Schmidt and Hunter's (2000, p. 3). It is very important for individuals to be culturally intelligent to have certain skills such as peace coexistence, integrity, honesty, a strong mastery, sense of emotional display and physical presence (Earley, Ang & Tan 2006).

Cultural Intelligence is a growing future skill that Earley, P.C. and Ang, S (2003:59) defined as "*a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts*". And Peterson, B. (2004:89) defined the term Cultural Intelligence as "*the ability to engage in a set of behaviours that uses skills (i.e., language or interpersonal skills) and qualities (e.g., tolerance of ambiguity, flexibility) that are tuned appropriately to the culture-based values and attitudes of the people with whom one interacts*". It is important to note that culture in this context is not only limited to international cultures; it also includes cultures within nations, such as the culture of the different races and religions or the social groups speaking different languages in a country. Research around Cultural Intelligence or Cultural Quotient (CQ) started in the early 2000s. According to Ang, S. and Van Dyne, L and Tan, M (2011:582-583), Cultural Intelligence was conceived at the turn of the 21st century when Earley and Ang introduced the term in 2003 at a time when globalization and cross-cultural interactions were growing rapidly, and ever since it has been cited in over 60 journals across a variety of disciplines such as sociology, psychology, education, mental health, business, management and the military. According to the Cultural Intelligence Center, CQ can predict: Personal adjustment and adaptability, judgment and decision-making, negotiation effectiveness, trust, idea sharing, and innovation, leadership effectiveness and profitability and cost-savings.

Cultural intelligence can be more effective and will introduce some ideas for organizational leaders as they select employees for international assignments, such as expatriate positions which occur when an individual lives and works outside his or her country of citizenship (Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregersen, 2001; Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997; Reuber & Fischer, 1997; Sambharya, 1996; Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005). Therefore, understanding what an employee could lead to having a higher CQ is one of the basic needs, which in turn should lead to more effectiveness and consequently more production.

This paper focuses on cultural intelligence as a linguistic competence that empowers individuals to engage meaningfully in diverse professional, academic, and social settings. It investigates how CQ, when integrated into language education and professional development, can support Saudi Arabia's educational, economic, and social goals under Vision 2030.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Intelligence as a Linguistic Competence

The traditional view of linguistic competence focuses on grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. However, in a globalized world, linguistic competence must encompass pragmatic and intercultural dimensions. According to Peterson (2004), cultural intelligence involves the ability to use language, interpersonal skills, and flexibility to navigate culturally diverse interactions. This reframes CQ as a holistic communicative skill, closely aligned with the competencies taught in modern language education and intercultural communication programs.

Earley and Ang's (2003) framework of CQ includes metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural components—all of which influence how individuals use language in real-time interactions. For example, a culturally intelligent person can recognise when directness in speech may be perceived as rude or when silence may carry meaning in high-context cultures. These abilities are indispensable in international diplomacy, business negotiations, education, and tourism—all sectors targeted by Vision 2030. CQ is a multidimensional concept involving cross-cultural interactions which result from differences in race, ethnicity, and nationality (Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, Templer & Chandrasekar, 2007).

CQ in Saudi Arabia's Multilingual and Multicultural Context

Saudi Arabia hosts a diverse population working across sectors such as healthcare, education, and engineering. This diversity necessitates linguistic flexibility and intercultural sensitivity, particularly in leadership roles. Vision 2030 emphasises building global citizens and expanding international partnerships—goals that require not just understanding others' languages, but also their cultural communication norms. The skill to interact effectively in a multi-cultural environment is not an easy task mastered by all, yet it is becoming more significant in today's world. Currently, this skill is known as cultural intelligence (Crowne, 2008). Some researchers, such as Earley and Ang (2003), introduce the concept of cultural intelligence (CQ), which is defined as an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings.

By embedding CQ within language education, Saudi institutions can develop graduates who are not only bilingual or multilingual but also interculturally competent communicators—capable of representing the Kingdom abroad and fostering inclusive environments at home.

METHOD

The study applied the descriptive and analytical approach for collecting and analyzing the data, which was taken from Shaqra and King Saud University staff members which including participants from different cultures and nationalities, in addition to Saudi participants who are all specialized in different fields of knowledge.

Participants

The participants of this study were 55 males and females from different countries who represent the various cultures and nationalities in the Saudi community, most of whom are university teachers in different fields of specialisation.

Instruments

The questionnaire employed in this study consisted of 12 items, including statements about cultural intelligence and its role in enhancing Saudi Arabia's Vision. All the items are designed on Likert's Five-point Scale: "*strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree.*"

The questionnaire has been reviewed by five university staff members, and the items have been modified according to their observations.

Table 1. The Likert rating scale.

Likert scale	Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
codes	5	4	3	2	1

Assessing the Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

The reliability and validity of the research tool are calculated according to Cronbach's Alpha Model, which is considered high reliability in similar cases. The 12 items of the questionnaire were noted to have reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.980, which exceeds the minimum recommended standard of 0.70 in social sciences; thus, all the questionnaire items were considered reliable and suitable for the study.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.980	12

Procedures

The data was gathered from university staff members of different nationalities speaking more than one language. Descriptive statistics for all questionnaire items, including percentage, mean, median, standard deviation, range, minimum, and maximum, were examined to understand the overall pattern of the responses. Moreover, the study applied a sample t-test to examine the significance of Cultural Intelligence and its Effect in enhancing Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

Table 3. shows the distribution of the significance difference of the one-sample test.

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
1. The multi-cultural environment does not serve as a tourist attraction.	23.039	54	.000	3.800	3.47	4.13
2. The misinterpretation of the culture led to affecting its image.	16.041	54	.000	2.109	1.85	2.37
3. Diversifying entertainment does not provide opportunities for talented people to excel.	21.000	54	.000	3.436	3.11	3.76
4. Effective interaction in cross-cultural situations can improve the county's image.	16.932	54	.000	1.727	1.52	1.93
5. Acceptance of cultural differences is a major factor in attracting foreign talents.	14.561	54	.000	1.455	1.25	1.65
6. Increasing exposure to the culture and people will introduce a real image of the country's culture.	17.934	54	.000	1.636	1.45	1.82

7. Becoming more aware of our cultural identity leads to the appreciation and respect of other cultures.	17.507	54	.000	1.727	1.53	1.93
8. Knowledge about the culture is not needed when reviving the traditions.	35.683	54	.000	3.982	3.76	4.21
9. Increasing foreign companies' understanding of the national culture results in effective advertising	18.011	54	.000	1.873	1.66	2.08
10. Studying the target market's culture provides no information about whether the product/service provided is acceptable.	21.367	54	.000	3.400	3.08	3.72
11. Stereotyping and lack of knowledge of the target customer's culture do not affect the company's image.	24.517	54	.000	3.873	3.56	4.19
12. Increasing awareness of the national heritage benefits tourism and encourages diversity.	15.863	54	.000	1.691	1.48	1.90

Table 4. The multi-cultural environment does not serve as a tourist attraction.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	5	9.1	9.1	9.1
	agree	4	7.3	7.3	16.4
	neutral	5	9.1	9.1	25.5
	disagree	24	43.6	43.6	69.1
	strongly disagree	17	30.9	30.9	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows that the multicultural environment is attractive, and that the multi-existence and cultural diversity can attract many tourists to the area, which may contribute to creating a good environment for tourists from all over the world.

Table 5. The misinterpretation of the culture led to affecting its image.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	14	25.5	25.5	25.5
	Agree	28	50.9	50.9	76.4
	Neutral	8	14.5	14.5	90.9
	Disagree	3	5.5	5.5	96.4
	Strongly disagree	2	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows that the lack of accuracy in presenting the culture had a negative impact on the country's image, and the need to foster and promote values and figures that represent the country locally and globally to undermine the misinterpretations.

Table 6. Diversifying entertainment does not provide opportunities for talented people to excel.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	5	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Agree	9	16.4	16.4	25.5
	Neutral	7	12.7	12.7	38.2
	Disagree	25	45.5	45.5	83.6
	Strongly disagree	9	16.4	16.4	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 shows that talented people can benefit more when entertainment opportunities are not exclusive to one field or a specific demographic group: thus, achieving the vision's objective of growing Saudi's contribution to arts and culture.

Table 7. Effective interaction in cross-cultural situations can improve the country's image.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	24	43.6	43.6	43.6
	Agree	23	41.8	41.8	85.5
	Neutral	7	12.7	12.7	98.2
	Disagree	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 shows that the importance of making a good impression in cross-cultural interactions by behaving in a way that reflects the true values of the target culture. This will help to attract foreign businesses, talents, and tourists.

Table 8. Acceptance of cultural differences is a major factor in attracting foreign talent.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	35	63.6	63.6	63.6
	Agree	17	30.9	30.9	94.5
	Neutral	2	3.6	3.6	98.2
	Strongly disagree	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 shows that 63.6% of respondents strongly agree that acceptance of cultural differences is a major factor in attracting foreign talent. Whereas 30.9% agree with this item, the value of the t-test is 14.561, which indicates that the respect and acceptance of cultural differences provide a peaceful environment that will encourage foreigners to choose promising destinations. This results in achieving the objective of attracting foreign talent and integrating expatriates into society.

Table 9. Increasing exposure to the culture and people will introduce a real image of the country's culture.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	25	45.5	45.5	45.5
	Agree	26	47.3	47.3	92.7
	Neutral	3	5.5	5.5	98.2
	Disagree	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 supports the idea that increasing exposure to the target culture and its people will result in providing a representation of the real image and help debunk the misinterpretation of the target culture and people, therefore helping in promoting an excellent destination for education, investment, work, and tourism.

Table 10. Becoming more aware of our cultural identity leads to the appreciation and respect of other cultures.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	23	41.8	41.8	41.8
	Agree	25	45.5	45.5	87.3
	Neutral	6	10.9	10.9	98.2
	Disagree	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 10 shows that 45.5% of respondents agree that becoming more aware of our cultural identity leads to the appreciation and respect of other cultures. 41.8% strongly agree that the value of the t-test being (17.507) significantly indicates the importance of understanding one's own culture to be able to appreciate and accept the cultural differences that we are going to encounter as a result of Vision's aspirations to create a multicultural existence and diversity.

Table 11. Knowledge about the culture is not needed when reviving the traditions.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	4	7.3	7.3	7.3
	Neutral	7	12.7	12.7	20.0
	Disagree	30	54.5	54.5	74.5
	Strongly disagree	14	25.5	25.5	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 11 shows that reviving traditions requires knowledge and understanding of the target culture and heritage. The accuracy in reviving traditions can result in promoting the target country as a tourist destination and strengthening the national identity.

Table 12. Increasing foreign companies' understanding of the national culture results in effective advertising

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	17	30.9	30.9	30.9
	Agree	30	54.5	54.5	85.5
	Neutral	7	12.7	12.7	98.2
	Strongly disagree	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 12 shows that 54.5% of respondents agree that increasing foreign companies' understanding of the national culture results in effective advertising. 30.9 strongly agree with this item, the value of the t-test being (18.011), which indicates the importance of understanding the national culture to avoid offending the customers by using stereotypes or inappropriate commercials, such as an understanding that leads to a safe integration of foreign investments in the national market and helps develop and diversify the economy.

Table 13. Studying the target market's culture provides no information about whether the product/service provided is acceptable.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	4	7.3	7.3	7.3
	Agree	11	20.0	20.0	27.3
	Neutral	7	12.7	12.7	40.0
	Disagree	25	45.5	45.5	85.5
	Strongly disagree	8	14.5	14.5	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 13 shows the positive role of studying the target market in providing information, and an understanding of whether the product/service provided is accepted and needed or prohibited. This will help national companies that are looking to transform into regional or global leading companies find the best investment opportunities.

Table 14. Stereotyping and a lack of knowledge of the target customer's culture do not affect the company's image.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	2	3.6	3.6	3.6
	Agree	7	12.7	12.7	16.4
	Neutral	8	14.5	14.5	30.9
	Disagree	17	30.9	30.9	61.8
	Strongly disagree	21	38.2	38.2	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 14 reflects the negative impact of offensive advertising on the company's image and reputation, which can lead to great losses which could be avoided with better cultural understanding and knowledge. When diversifying the economy, this knowledge is needed to ensure the successful integration of foreign companies in the national market.

Table 15.

Increasing awareness of the national heritage benefits tourism and encourages diversity.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	24	43.6	43.6	43.6
	Agree	27	49.1	49.1	92.7
	Neutral	2	3.6	3.6	96.4
	Disagree	1	1.8	1.8	98.2
	Strongly disagree	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Table 15 shows that promoting the national heritage as a global cultural destination can create diversity and benefit tourism by encouraging tourists to explore the rich heritage of the target country, thus achieving the objective of promoting the country as a tourist destination.

RESULTS

1- Cultural intelligence can play a vital role in creating a multilingual-cultural environment that helps in enhancing and achieving Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision.

2- A culturally intelligent society is an important and attractive factor for expatriates and foreign talent experiences that can help to achieve the Vision.

3- Cultural intelligence helps introduce the real image through successful interaction in a multilingual and cross-cultural situations.

4- Cultural intelligence can play an important role in diversifying the economy as well as the integration of the economy regionally and globally.

5- Cultural intelligence is considered as a prominent tool in promoting a global destination through increasing awareness of the national heritage and reviving its traditions.

DISCUSSION

In this article, we argued about the importance of cultural intelligence as a linguistic competence in the context of the strategic planning of countries. The results demonstrate a consistent relationship between cultural intelligence and Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision objectives. These results showed a high level of significance, which indicates that all questionnaire items significantly support the main idea that cultural intelligence can enhance Saudi Arabia's Vision for 2030. The results show that there are some points of strength and weaknesses concerning cultural intelligence and its effect in enhancing the Saudi 2030 Vision. These points must be supported and enhanced via more exposure to Saudi culture and with more interaction with different global cultures. The points of weakness require more attention and focus on international cultural interaction, and more planning to create an effective relationship across cultures. Cultural interaction is needed to solve these problems.

Results demonstrate that cultural intelligence has a great influence on creating mutual understanding among multicultural and multilingual people.

Cultural intelligence should raise awareness in companies and help them better understand that to build a culturally intelligent organisation, it goes beyond recruiting and training culturally intelligent executives. Rather, the companies must invest in creating competitive and structural capabilities that take into consideration potential cultural differences.

We conclude by confirming the importance of cultural intelligence as a basic factor in strategic planning and an imperative step for businesses considering globalization.

CONCLUSION

A few findings emerged from this study. One important result is that cultural intelligence can play a vital role in enhancing the Saudi Vision for 2030 and help to achieve the Vision's objectives more accurately and efficiently in many areas, including education, society. Results also suggest that CQ has important implications for practice – especially for selecting, training and developing a culturally intelligent workforce.

This study confirms that **cultural intelligence, when viewed through the lens of linguistic and intercultural competence**, is a critical future skill for realizing the goals of **Saudi Vision 2030**. As Saudi Arabia embraces globalization across education, business, and tourism, the need for individuals who can communicate effectively across cultures is more pressing than ever.

The findings emphasize that CQ is not purely a cognitive or psychological trait, but a practical communicative skill that should be cultivated through education, particularly language and communication programs. Integrating CQ into curricula will prepare Saudi citizens to navigate multilingual environments, build international partnerships, and contribute meaningfully to a diverse and inclusive society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Integrate Cultural Intelligence into Language Education: Language and communication curricula at all educational levels should include modules on cultural intelligence, pragmatics, and intercultural communication.
2. Train Educators in CQ: Teachers and academic staff should receive training to incorporate CQ into their teaching methodologies, especially in English language and international studies programs.
3. Make CQ a Key Hiring Criterion: Government and private sector jobs, especially those with international or public-facing roles, should assess candidates' cultural intelligence as part of recruitment.
4. Support Multilingualism and Multiculturalism: Promote policies that support learning foreign languages and engaging with diverse cultures, aligning with Vision 2030's goals of global outreach.
5. Develop Smart Partnerships Through Communication: Encourage smart partnerships based on mutual understanding and linguistic competence to foster peace, cooperation, and innovation.

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APPENDICES

Cultural Intelligence as a Linguistic Competence: Preparing Future Skills for Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia

Questionnaire

Name (optional).....

Institute... ..

Sex.....

The information given in response to this questionnaire is strictly confidential and will be under no circumstances be used except for the purpose of this study.

Please put a tick (√) to your answer

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1 The multi-cultural environment does not serve as a tourist attraction.					
2. The misinterpretation of the culture led to affecting its image.					
3. Diversifying entertainment does not provide opportunities for talented people to excel.					
4. Effective interaction in cross-cultural situations can improve the county's image.					
5. Acceptance of cultural differences is a major factor in attracting foreign talents.					
6. Increasing exposure to the culture and people will introduce a real image of the country's culture.					
7. Becoming more aware of our cultural identity leads to the appreciation and respect of other cultures.	\				
8. Knowledge about the culture is not needed when reviving the traditions.					
9. Increasing foreign companies' understanding of the national culture results in effective advertising					
10. Studying the target market's culture provides no information about whether the product/service provided is acceptable. .					
11. Stereotyping and lack of knowledge of the target costumer's culture do not affect the company's image.					
12. Increasing awareness of the national heritage benefits tourism and encourages diversity					