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Cultural Sensitivity and Emotional Intelligence: Interconnected Competencies for Educators in Diverse English Language Classrooms

Ke Deng [1]*

1. School of Foreign Chinese Language, Guangxi Police College

Abstract

Cultural sensitivity (CS) and emotional intelligence (EI) are essential attributes for educators instructing heterogeneous learners in multicultural settings. This research investigated emotional intelligence and communication skills among English language instructors with differing language proficiencies (monolinguals and multilingual). Participants completed an internet survey, including demographic inquiries about language proficiency, teaching experience, standardized emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills assessments. The results indicated no statistically significant variations in emotional intelligence or cognitive skill levels according to the number of languages spoken. A significant association between language status (monolingual/multilingual) and CS was not identified. A statistically significant positive connection was seen between CS subscales (intercultural communication) and EI subscales, indicating that educators with elevated CS are likely to have enhanced EI. These results suggest that while multilingualism may not independently improve EI or CS, educators who develop cultural sensitivity will likely exhibit increased emotional intelligence, which is essential for creating inclusive and prosperous learning environments. Professional development for educators of different learners should highlight the integration of cultural sensitivity and emotional intelligence training rather than concentrating only on language learning.

Keywords: Cultural Sensitivity, Emotional Intelligence, English Language Teaching, Diverse Learners, Educator Competencies

Introduction

In an age of globalization, classrooms are becoming more diverse, demanding instructors negotiate complex cultural, linguistic, and emotional landscapes [1]. Instructing English to students from diverse cultural origins requires more than just language proficiency; it compels educators to develop CS and emotional intelligence (EI)—skills that empower them to create inclusive, empathic, and successful learning environments [2]. Although prior studies have examined the influence of multilingualism in education, there has been little focus on the intersection of CS and EI within English language teaching (ELT) for heterogeneous learners [3]. This research examines the correlation between cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and language competency among educators, providing insights into the prioritization of these qualities in teacher training programs.

The 21st-century classroom exemplifies global variety. UNESCO estimates that more than 40% of students globally are educated in a language distinct from their native tongue, with English being the predominant second language taught [4]. This linguistic variety often coincides with cultural variability, necessitating educators to address language difficulties and varying value systems, communication methods, and learning preferences [5]. A teacher in a multicultural classroom may face pupils from collectivist cultures, emphasizing collective cohesion, and those from individualist cultures, encouraging personal accomplishment [6]. These dynamics highlight the need for educators to cultivate CS, characterized as the ability to "recognize, respect, and adapt to cultural differences" [7], and EI, described as the capability to "perceive, manage, and respond to emotions in oneself and others" [8].

Global migratory patterns exacerbate this variety. In the European Union, 34% of school-aged children had a migrant background. However, in the United States, it is anticipated that nearly 50% of public school pupils will belong to minority ethnic groups by 2030 [9]. These demographic changes compel educators to reevaluate teaching approaches. Conventional "one-size-fits-all" methodologies jeopardize including learners whose cultural paradigms diverge from prevailing standards [10]. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), a pedagogical approach connecting students' living experiences with academic information, has become a viable alternative [11].

Nonetheless, the efficacy of CRT depends on educators' cultural sensitivity and emotional intelligence—attributes that are little explored in English Language Teaching research [12].

Cultural awareness has become fundamental to successful teaching in multicultural environments. Based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity [13], CS entails advancing from ethnocentric phases (such as denial or defence of cultural disparities) to ethno-relative phases (such as acceptance or adaptation). In English Language Teaching, Cultural Sensitivity empowers educators to develop a culturally sensitive curriculum, eliminate cultural stereotypes, and provide a classroom environment where all learners feel esteemed [14]. For instance, educators may integrate literature from students' cultural backgrounds into English instruction or modify communication methods to conform to students' cultural standards [15]. Research indicates that culturally responsive teaching methods are associated with enhanced student involvement, academic achievement, and intercultural connections [16].

However, computer science transcends mere curricular modifications. It also entails confronting implicit biases—unconscious prejudices that affect conduct towards culturally diverse pupils [17]. Research [18] emphasizes that microaggressions (subtle, often inadvertent discriminatory behaviours) in educational settings may marginalize students. An instructor without cultural sensitivity may misconstrue a student's stillness as disinterested, oblivious that silence denotes respect for authority in many cultures. In contrast, a culturally aware educator might acknowledge this complexity and modify participation tactics, including written comments instead of vocal ones [19]. Despite its significance, cultural studies are seldom included in English Language Teaching training programs, which typically emphasize language proficiency over intercultural competencies [20].

Alongside computer science, emotional intelligence has emerged as an essential educator competency. Foundational research [21] asserts that emotional intelligence encompasses five domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. In varied classrooms, emotional intelligence allows educators to alleviate stress, mediate disputes, and establish connections with kids from different backgrounds [22]. Empathy, an essential subscale of emotional intelligence, is crucial; instructors who understand pupils' cultural and language difficulties are more adept at offering personalized assistance [23]. For example, an educator may alter the course tempo for a refugee student experiencing trauma or adapt feedback to correspond with a learner's cultural interpretation of authority [24].

The significance of emotional intelligence in alleviating educator burnout is substantial. Instructing in many settings often requires managing emotionally intense scenarios, like resolving intercultural disputes or confronting institutional inequalities [25]. Educators with elevated emotional intelligence can manage their emotional reactions, sustain resilience, and exemplify prosocial behaviours for pupils [26]. For instance, an educator who employs self-regulation may reply composedly to a student's culturally based aversion to peer cooperation, using the opportunity to initiate a class debate on diverse communication patterns [27]. Notwithstanding its advantages, emotional intelligence training remains marginal in teacher education since most programs emphasize technical skills such as lesson preparation and assessment design [28].

An enduring belief in education is that multilingual instructors have intrinsic advantages in CS and EI owing to their exposure to many cultures and communication frameworks [29]. Research [30] indicates that multilingual persons have enhanced cognitive flexibility and intercultural adaptation. For example, a teacher proficient in Spanish and Arabic may inherently grasp the difficulties of code-switching or the cultural importance of honorifics in student interactions [31]. In contrast, some research contends that language competency alone does not ensure cultural or emotional competence; instead, targeted instruction and firsthand intercultural experiences are more reliable indicators [32]. A monolingual educator with comprehensive cross-cultural training may exhibit more cultural sensitivity than a multilingual counterpart without such preparation [33].

This discourse illustrates broader conflicts in English Language Teaching. Although multilingualism is often esteemed, it may obscure the structural injustices vulnerable learners encounter [34]. A teacher's proficiency in numerous languages does not automatically enable them to confront systemic racism or socioeconomic gaps inside the classroom. Moreover, the expectation for educators to be "perfectly multilingual" might exacerbate impostor syndrome, especially among non-native English-speaking instructors [35]. Consequently, the correlation between

language competency and educator abilities necessitates a detailed analysis emphasizing instructional empathy rather than superficial verbal representation [36].

This study examines the interplay between CS, EI, and language proficiency among English language educators. Specifically, it addresses three research questions:

1. Do monolingual and multilingual educators differ significantly in their levels of CS and EI?
2. Is there a correlation between CS subscales and EI subscales?
3. How can findings inform teacher training programs for diverse ELT contexts?

Method and Materials

The research used a mixed-methods approach to examine cultural sensitivity (CS) and emotional intelligence (EI) among English language instructors in China, with participants sourced from three linguistically varied metropolitan areas: Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. These cities were chosen for their diverse populations and significant concentration of educational institutions, guaranteeing a representative sample of monolingual and multilingual instructors. A total of 95 participants were recruited by convenience sampling, consisting of 70.5% females and 29.5% males, aged 19 to 68 years (M = 27.3, SD = 8.2). The cohort included 15 monolingual educators competent only in Mandarin and 80 multilingual educators fluent in Mandarin plus at least one other language, including English (100%), Japanese (28%), or French (15%). Recruitment targeted pre-service and in-service educators from Peking University, Fudan University, and Sun Yat-sen University, alongside foreign schools and multilingual institutions, achieving a composition of 61% Chinese citizens and 39% international residents.

The research used a computerized informed consent form in Mandarin and English, outlining the study's aims, confidentiality measures, and participants' rights. The poll consisted of three consecutive portions conducted on Wenjuanxing, a platform according to China's data security standards. The first portion gathered demographic and linguistic background data, including self-assessed language competency measured on the CEFR scale (A1–C2) and a question identifying Third Culture Kids (TCKs) [37]. The second segment evaluated emotional intelligence via the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form (TEIQue-SF) [35], a 30-item tool validated for Chinese populations, whereby participants scored statements such as "I can adapt to new situations quickly" on a 7-point Likert scale. The final segment assessed cultural sensitivity using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) [38], with 24 questions spanning subscales including Interaction Engagement and Respect for Cultural Differences, translated into Mandarin for language equivalent.

Results

The research investigated the relationship between cultural sensitivity and emotional intelligence among English language teachers in China, concentrating on three linguistically varied metropolitan centres: Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. The study included 95 educators (84.2% multilingual, 15.8% monolingual) recruited from universities and bilingual institutions, including pre-service and in-service instructors.

The first hypothesis was that bilingual instructors would have elevated emotional intelligence levels compared to monolingual individuals. Emotional intelligence was evaluated using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form (TEIQue-SF), which assesses four subscales: well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability. Table 1 indicates that the mean scores for multilinguals were somewhat superior to monolinguals' scores across most subscales (sociability: M-multilingual= 4.9 vs M-monolingual= 4.58). Independent samples t-tests indicated no statistically significant differences between the groups on any emotional intelligence subscale ($p > 0.05$ for all comparisons), denying the hypothesis.

The second hypothesis stated that multilingual instructors will have elevated levels of CS. CS was assessed using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), which includes five subscales: interaction involvement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction pleasure, and interaction attention. Table 2 demonstrates that multilingual individuals had somewhat superior scores compared to monolingual individuals on subscales

such as interaction confidence (M-multilingual= 3.89 vs. M-monolingual= 3.58) and interaction pleasure (M-multilingual= 4.36 vs. M-monolingual= 4.12). Nevertheless, t-tests again revealed no significant differences between groups ($p > 0.05$), indicating that multilingualism alone does not improve CS.

A series of Pearson correlations examined the link between CS and EI subscales (Table 3). Significant relationships were observed, especially between interaction confidence (CS) and sociability (EI) ($r(86) = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), as well as between interaction engagement (CS) and well-being (EI) ($r(85) = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$). The only non-significant connection was between emotionality (EI) and interaction pleasure (CS). Educators with stronger cultural sensitivity regularly exhibited enhanced emotional intelligence levels, underscoring its interrelation in multicultural teaching environments.

Significantly, 60% of participants were active educators, primarily employed in foreign schools or colleges with culturally heterogeneous student populations. Qualitative feedback indicated that instructors with formal computer science training—irrespective of language proficiency—exhibited enhanced confidence in addressing cross-cultural disputes, consistent with the quantitative correlation results.

Although multilingualism did not explicitly forecast elevated emotional intelligence (EI) or coping skills (CS), the strong correlations between the subscales of CS and EI highlight their interrelation. These findings underscore the need for professional development initiatives in China's English Language Teaching industry to include Cultural Sensitivity and Emotional Intelligence training rather than focusing just on language competency.

Table 1: Emotional Intelligence Subscale Scores for Monolingual and Multilingual Educators

Subscale	Monolingual (n=15)	Multilingual (n=80)
Well-being	$M = 5.48$, $SD = 1.21$	$M = 5.75$, $SD = 0.95$
Self-control	$M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.81$	$M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.02$
Emotionality	$M = 5.25$, $SD = 0.89$	$M = 5.47$, $SD = 0.77$
Sociability	$M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.65$	$M = 4.95$, $SD = 0.88$

Note: Higher scores indicate higher emotional intelligence. No significant differences were found between groups ($p > 0.05$ for all subscales).

Table 2: Cultural Sensitivity Subscale Scores for Monolingual and Multilingual Educators

Subscale	Monolingual (n=15)	Multilingual (n=80)
Interaction Engagement	$M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.49$	$M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.43$
Respect for Cultural Differences	$M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.42$	$M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.44$
Interaction Confidence	$M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.75$	$M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.76$
Interaction Enjoyment	$M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.60$	$M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.68$
Interaction Attentiveness	$M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.57$	$M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.61$

Note: Higher scores indicate higher cultural sensitivity. No significant differences were found between groups ($p > 0.05$ for all subscales).

Table 3: Correlations Between Cultural Sensitivity and Emotional Intelligence Subscales

Cultural Sensitivity Subscales	Well-being	Self-control	Emotionality	Sociability
Interaction Engagement	$r(93) = 0.39^{**}$	$r(93) = 0.35^{**}$	$r(93) = 0.33^{**}$	$r(93) = 0.28^{*}$
Respect for Cultural Differences	$r(93) = 0.27^{*}$	$r(93) = 0.30^{**}$	$r(93) = 0.29^{*}$	$r(93) = 0.24^{*}$
Interaction Confidence	$r(93) = 0.48^{**}$	$r(93) = 0.45^{**}$	$r(93) = 0.30^{**}$	$r(93) = 0.44^{**}$
Interaction Enjoyment	$r(93) = 0.29^{*}$	$r(93) = 0.33^{**}$	*n.s.*	$r(93) = 0.31^{**}$
Interaction Attentiveness	$r(93) = 0.31^{**}$	$r(93) = 0.26^{*}$	$r(93) = 0.27^{*}$	$r(93) = 0.29^{*}$

Notes: *n.s.* = Not statistically significant, *: $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

This research examined the relationship between cultural sensitivity (CS), emotional intelligence (EI), and language competency among English language teachers in metropolitan centres of China, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Contrary to the hypothesis, no statistically significant differences were found between monolingual and multilingual instructors' emotional intelligence or coping skills levels. Strong positive correlations were identified between the CS and EI subscales, indicating that educators with more incredible CS—regardless of language proficiency—also had higher EI. These results challenge assumptions common in earlier Western-centric research, which often associate multilingualism directly with improved emotional intelligence and cognitive skills. This study highlights that, although previous research suggests language learning enhances intercultural competence, multilingualism does not ensure cultural or emotional adaptability in China, where English is frequently taught as a practical skill rather than a means of cultural connection. The competence of educators in communication skills (CS) and emotional intelligence (EI) may rely more on deliberate pedagogical training than on passive linguistic exposure, as indicated by the robust correlation between interaction confidence (a CS subscale) and sociability (an EI subscale), likely developed through organized intercultural experiences such as cross-regional teaching exchanges.

The influence of globalization on computer science education in China is intricate since instructors' familiarity with diversity may stem from internal elements such as instructing ethnically varied classes or participating in foreign curricula rather than from extensive travel. Nonetheless, the study's inability to assess factors like home cultural contacts or institutional training programs constrains understanding of these processes. Methodological limitations further mitigate the results, including sample imbalance (only 15 monolinguals), survey design limits (partial replies owing to length), and language accessibility gaps (excluding regional languages such as Cantonese or Uyghur). Furthermore, unmeasured factors, such as participation in CS/EI workshops or exposure to ethnic minority cultures, may have affected results.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the robust relationships between CS and EI underscore the need for China's English Language Teaching (ELT) industry to emphasize integrated professional development. Teacher training programs must include CS-EI modules—such as bias-awareness seminars and empathy-enhancing role-plays—into their curriculum while promoting collaborative networks between urban and rural educators to improve cross-cultural interaction. Adopting frameworks such as Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence, which prioritizes cultural and emotional adaptation rather than only linguistic precision, may enhance educators' capacity to manage heterogeneous classes. Subsequent studies must enlist more significant, balanced cohorts from various parts of China, including measurements for domestic cultural exposure, and translate surveys into regional dialects to guarantee inclusion. Examining the influence of institutional regulations, such as compulsory computer science coursework, on educator competencies may enhance teaching practices.

Conclusion

Given the global and local diversities reflected in China's classrooms, it is essential to cultivate cultural sensitivity and emotional intelligence in educators. Although multilingualism is advantageous, it is not a comprehensive solution for intercultural difficulties. Comprehensive investments in holistic teacher development—anchored in empathy, cultural humility, and reflective practice—will enhance educators' ability to create inclusive learning environments. These initiatives might improve English Language Teaching results and foster communal cohesion in an increasingly linked world.

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