Developing a measurement tool for intercultural competence

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Abstract

Intercultural competence (IC) is an important quality of graduates in higher education (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Sercu, 2004) and a skill that is highly valued by employers (Lovell, et al., 2015; Jones, 2013; Bird, Mendenhall & Stevens, 2010; Matveev & Milter, 2004). IC evaluates the competence of an individual to adapt to the new environment, culture and people. Intercultural competence is a very important component of communicative competence in the maritime context where effective communication plays a vital role in ensuring safe shipping. The maritime industry as a whole, and maritime education and training institutions in particular, have made great efforts to improve the intercultural competence of maritime professionals with an aim to reduce maritime incidences caused by communication failures. IC has been identified as a critical component of effective communication on board ships where the presence of multicultural seafarers is a norm. The increasing number of studies in recent years investigating the education and training needs of seafarers on intercultural competence calls for the development of a common standard to measure the attainment of cross cultural competence among nautical students and maritime professionals. This paper intends to comprehensively review the existing literature on IC as the first step to develop a common standard on intercultural competence taking consideration of the requirements set by the International Maritime Organisation, the needs of employers, and challenges faced by those working in cross-cultural environment.

The dimension of IC consists of three main aspects including cognitive, affective and behavioural. All these dimensions are concentrated on individual thoughts, feelings and action in the social context. The review form the literature reveals that the main components in IC are intercultural attitudes, intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills and intercultural awareness. Intercultural attitudes is a basic interaction between communities, intercultural knowledge is secondary knowledge on how people see a person from different perspectives. Skills emphasis the ability to acquire new knowledge and finally the awareness reflects in-depth understanding on cognition, skills and attitudes. Combination of these components is to produce several of outcomes including flexibility, adaptability, develop an effective and appropriate behaviour and communication skills.

Ruben’s (1976, 1979, 1986) Behavioural Approach, European Multidimensional Models (Byram, 1997), Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model, A Culture-Generic Approach (Sinicrope et al., 2007), Anxiety management, An integrative system’s theory and Identity negotiation are the main theoretical framework to conceptualised and measure the IC. All these models emphasise skills and abilities of individuals to undergo in developing the abilities of IC.

There are three assessment tools including indirect, direct and mixed assessment tools to observed, understood and accessed skills and abilities. Behavioural Assessment Scale for
Intercultural Competence (BASIC), Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI), Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI), Global Competency and Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) and Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) are main indirect assessments tools for IC. On the other hand, performance assessment, portfolio assessment and interviews are key tools for direct and combined assessment tools. The literature indicated that implementation of direct and combined methods provided comprehensive results on IC assessment.

Linguistic competence plays a key role to determine the effectiveness of IC application. IC is considered as a lifelong process and there is no rigid point at which one becomes fully interculturally competence. Therefore, awareness of the culture difference, effective culture learning, knowledgeable about the elements in the culture, self-adaptation to new culture and understanding key strategies to be acculturated with the host culture are some of important steps for IC development.

REFERENCES


