

Original Article: Scale for the Self-Assessment of Cultural Competence. A Tool for the Promotion of Mental Resilience and Inclusion in Young Children

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ABSTRACT

The literature consistently emphasizes the significance of primary formal education in addressing social inequalities, fostering inclusivity, reducing stereotypes, and promoting critical thinking regarding discrimination, violence, and prejudice. However, the lack of specialized undergraduate studies for teachers raises questions about their cultural competence and their ability to effectively teach and cultivate appropriate attitudes and values. This research aimed to evaluate the cultural competence skills of preschool teachers, explore social inequalities, and develop an intervention plan. A quantitative study was conducted, involving the translation and validation of a cultural competence measurement scale, which was then administered to preschool teachers. The survey included 532 participants, consisting of 500 women and 32 men, with 27 individuals having received training or postgraduate specialization in intercultural education. Data analysis was performed using SPSS (v. 28). The study revealed that teachers possess a high level of knowledge in cultural matters and demonstrate good cultural awareness; however, their cultural abilities are limited. The survey results provide valuable insights for ongoing intervention design. In conclusion, while preschool teachers exhibit satisfactory theoretical knowledge of cultural work, weaknesses are identified in the acquisition of skills, attitudes, and behaviors.

Introduction

The multiculturalism that has emerged in Western societies has created new challenges for managing diversity and promoting the inclusion of vulnerable groups within a larger social context [1, 2]. These challenges include addressing issues of discrimination, inequality, and social exclusion that arise from cultural differences

and power dynamics. Moreover, it is crucial to develop policies and practices that not only recognize the value of diversity, but also actively work towards creating equal opportunities and fostering social cohesion among all members of society. In the field of education, there is an imperative to ensure access and support for refugees, immigrants, and individuals representing diverse backgrounds [3]. This includes providing

language support programs, cultural sensitivity training for educators, and creating inclusive curriculum that reflects the experiences and contributions of diverse populations. In addition, it is important to address systemic barriers such as discrimination and bias that can hinder the educational attainment and social integration of marginalized groups. By addressing these issues, we can strive towards a more equitable and inclusive education system that benefits all individuals, regardless of their cultural background or immigration status. Intercultural education, in turn, aims to foster acceptance of cultural differences, respect, and equality [4]. Studies on diversity encourage the acceptance of diverse perspectives, cultural values, and everyday practices [5, 6]. Interculturality is experienced from an early age, with current research highlighting its role in cultivating a digitally enhanced learning environment that caters to students' needs holistically with a multicultural approach [2]. Cultural competence, according to Barrett (2021), is the capacity to interact ethically and successfully in both personal and professional intercultural settings. It calls for awareness of one's own cultural values as well as openness to other cultures and the ability to work across cultural divides (États-Unis, 2010).

The lack of cultural competence among teachers often results in long-term negative effects and societal inequalities [4]. Based on these research insights, the present study aims to investigate the cultural competence of preschool teachers. Previous studies have examined the correlation between cultural competence, educational level, and work experience [1,7] as well as the significance of non-verbal (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions) and verbal (e.g., tone, intensity) communication for successful student-teacher interactions [8].

However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific cultural competence of preschool teachers and how it impacts their interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the relationship between cultural competence and effective student-teacher interactions in the preschool setting. Furthermore, it will also examine any potential differences in cultural competence based on

factors such as educational level and work experience. Research frequently highlights the need to strengthen the role of intercultural mediators and provide further training for preschool teachers [9]. However, there is a research gap regarding culturally weighted tools in the Greek language and limited data specific to the Greek context. Moreover, weaknesses have been observed among preschool teachers during the pandemic crisis, leading to educational deficits for students from culturally diverse backgrounds [10]. The Transcultural Self-Efficacy Tool (TSET), which consists of 83 items to assess knowledge, practices, and emotional backgrounds [8], is one of many scientific tools used to evaluate the cultural competence of healthcare professionals.

However, there has been little application of these tools to preschool teachers, particularly in heterogeneous learning environments, and none has been done in the Greek language to date. This gap in research highlights the need for a study that examines the cultural competence of preschool teachers in diverse learning environments, specifically in Greece. Understanding the level of cultural competence among preschool teachers is crucial for promoting inclusive and effective education for all students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Moreover, conducting such a study in the Greek language would provide valuable insights into the specific challenges and opportunities faced by preschool teachers in Greece when it comes to culturally diverse classrooms.

Material and methods

This study's aim was to evaluate preschool teachers in Greece and Cyprus for their cultural competency. Specifically, the study aimed to examine the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of preschool teachers in both countries regarding cultural competence and their ability to self-assess it systematically. A self-assessment questionnaire was designed and distributed to collect data on the self-reported levels of cultural competence among preschool teachers.

Sample

The study was conducted between October 2021 and January 2022 among 532 preschool teachers in Greece and Cyprus using convenience sampling. The sample of the study was 575 preschool teachers in the two countries. However, there were 532 valid and comprehensive responses. This step was performed with the participants' written consent, who confirmed their desire to take part while also being made aware that their data would be protected by the anonymity that this specific tool offers. The Frederick University Ethics Committee approved the study (Table 1).

The research tool

The Multicultural Society of Central Vancouver Island created the Cultural Competence Assessment Questionnaire to evaluate cultural competence. This scale measures awareness, knowledge, and skills in three main categories. The Youth rating is indicated at the end of each section and is defined as "Never" (not at all), "Sometimes" (good), "Often" (fairly good), and "Always" (excellent). Questions about how to deal with otherness, self-awareness, a person's willingness to share his culture and engage in a process of cultural change, and the person's perception of discomfort when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds are all included in the first category of cultural awareness. It also raises issues with the presumptions people who are attempting to comprehend the culture of another cultural group make, such as questions about challenging stereotypes and reflecting on how culture influences personal judgment, behaviour, and acceptance, as well as potential ambiguity, curiosity, and awareness. Questions about making amends, assessing knowledge, and inquiries about cultural differences and

their significance to an individual are all included in the second group of questions that examine cultural knowledge. Likewise, it asks about cultural awareness, interest in lifelong learning, knowledge of history, knowledge of the effects of racism, sexism, homophobia, and knowledge of boundaries. Questions about adaptability to diversity, active support for those on the diversity spectrum, and intercultural communication skills are included in the third and final section of the list of skills. In addition, it documents the person's active participation in procedures that foster political experiences as well as their search for learning opportunities. Respect for diversity, the use of political principles, appropriate tactics, and adaptability are some of the necessary elements recorded to compose a more complete picture of the individual's cultural competence.

Ethical issues

The Frederick University Bioethics Committee and the organization's scientific director provided information on ethical issues, and participants' written informed consent was obtained. Anyone could opt out at any time, and everyone was aware of their rights throughout the process. Because the data was collected anonymously, the participants' identities and personal information were protected. All data were kept on university property and used only for the requirements of this study.

Results and Discussion

575 preschool teachers were given the survey tool, and 532 of them gave accurate and comprehensive responses. The majority of participants (93.6%) were preschool teachers, and their average age was between 31 and 50. Only 2% of them have taken cultural studies training courses or have a related specialization.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Sex	n	%
Men	32	6.4 %
Women	500	93.6 %
Age		
22-30	80	15%
31-50	415	78%
50+	37	7%
Qualifications		
BSc.	484	90.7%
MSc.	47	9%
PhD.	1	0.3%
Expertise in CC		
Yes	10	2%
No	522	98%

Because they either didn't answer all the questions on the research instrument or withdrew despite having agreed to participate, 43 of the original participants were disqualified from the process. They admitted when questioned directly that the questionnaire was not the reason they gave up; rather, it was their lengthy workdays. The majority of participants (27, or 9%) had MSc. Degree in educational science; the minority (one, or 0.3%) had PhD. Degree. All participants had BSc. Degree. Only 10 of them (2%) had gone to a pertinent seminar or had a comparable experience, even though 521 of them (98%) had prior work experience working with multicultural students. The demographic characteristics are listed in [Table 1](#).

A statistical measurement of the reliability of the research instrument

The internal consistency of the research tool was evaluated using the Cronbach Alpha index. The questionnaire has three thematic sections with ten items each, as indicated in Table 3. The Cronbach Alpha value was found to be 0.78 overall for the three thematic sections, indicating a high level of internal consistency. In particular, its importance for all questions

Skills were 0.712, knowledge was 0.811, and awareness was 0.821. The Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society's Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist had 30 total items, which were broken up into three thematic sections of 10. A1 (91%), A2 (93.3%), and A5 (89.3%) had higher response rates of over 80% in the selection "Always or Excellent," while items A4 (66.6%), A7 (67%), A8 (68.6%), and A9 (77%) were between 60 and 75%. The first thematic section, which examined the participants' level of cultural awareness, also revealed higher response rates of over 80% in the selection "Always or Excellent".

The highest percentages above 80% in the second thematic section, which assesses knowledge of cultural topics, were concentrated in the response category "often or fairly well" in items B1 (95%) and B5 (84%). The majority of responses in the third thematic section of the skills test ranged from "Sometimes/Good" (B9-C10) at 60-75%. All the results are detailed in Table 2.

The results of the study are summarized in the following table for each data query. Due to many research tools, only the most indicative and interesting ones are presented. More specifically, to the question of whether the participants recognize their discomfort when

faced with differences in race, color, religion, sexual orientation, language, and nationality. A significant percentage of 66.6% answered that it does not enter the recognition process and works spontaneously. Correspondingly, high percentages answered "Only Sometimes or Agree" to the items if they knew where possible stereotypes may have come from if they recognized some of their behaviors as stigmatizing, and if they were curious to learn about other cultures. Likewise, in the questions

about whether they actively and practically support possible threats to people who fall on the spectrum of otherness, whether they are adaptive, and whether they enjoy diversity, the percentages were again very high in the negative response.

Table 2 presents the percentages for all the answers. The goal of the self-rating scale is that all answers are or tend to be "always" or "strongly" agreeable.

Table 2. Results

Items	Never; not at all; disagree		Sometimes, I agree		Often/ Quite agree		Always or strongly agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
A1	0	0%	12	2.3%	35	6.7%	485	91%
A'2	0	0%	5	1%	30	5.7%	497	93.3%
A3!	0!	0%!	17!	3.3%!	452!	85%!	63!	11.7%
A4!	2!	0.3%!	355!	66.6%!	135!	25.3%!	40!	7.7%!
A5!	0!	0%	2!	0.3%	55!	10.3%	475!	89.3%
A6!	0!	0%!	5!	1%!	477	89.7%	50!	9.3%
A7!	0!	0%!	351!	66%	158!	29.7%	23!	4.3%
A8!	0!	0%!	365!	68.6%	137!	25.7%	30!	5.7%
A9!	0!	0%!	410	77%	97!	18.3%	25!	4.7%
A10!	147	27.6%	140!	26.3%	177!	33.3%	68!	12.7%
B1!	0!	0%	5!	1%!	505	95%!	22!	4%!
B2!	0!	0%!	11!	2%!	408	76.7%	113	21.3%
B3!	0!	0%!	14!	2.7%	30!	5.7%!	488!	91.7%
B4!	0	0%!	11!	2%!	33!	6.3%!	488!	91.7%
B5!	0!	0%!	11!	2%!	447	84%!	74!	14%!
B6!	4!	0.7%!	17!	3.3%!	350!	65.7%	161!	30.3%
B7!	15!	2.7%!	53!	10%!	335!	63%!	129!	24.3%
B8!	17!	3.3 %!	12!	2.3%!	361!	67.7%	142!	26.7%
B9	8!	1.7%!	436!	81.6 %	53!	10%!	35!	6.7%!
B10	16!	3%!	355	66.7%	35!	6.7%!	126!	23.7%
C1!	7!	1.3%!	359!	67.7%	82!	15.3%	84!	15.7%
C2!	7!	1.3%!	370!	69.7%	49!	9%!	106!	20%!
C 3	7	1.3%	396	74.3%	55	10.3%	74	14%
C4	12	2.3%	350	65.7%	131	24.7%	39	7.3%
C5	4	0.7%	352	66.3%	121	22.7%	55	10.3%
C6	4	0.7%	393	74%	131	24.7%	4	0.7%
C7	2	0.3%	399	75%	129	24.3%	2	0.3%
C8	5	1%	410	77%	110	20.7%	7	1.3%
C 9	12	2.3%	346	65%	119	22.3%	55	10.3%
C 10	2	0.3%	363	68%	145	27.3%	22	4.3%

Discussion

The research team undertook the translation and validation of the research tool in the Greek language in light of the lack of research tools and self-assessment scales of cultural competence as well as the limited study in the

preschool population. The research was then conducted using the no w-Greek-language questionnaire. The translation and validation process involved a rigorous methodology to ensure the accuracy and cultural appropriateness of the

questionnaire in Greek context. This included pilot testing with a sample of preschool teachers and parents to assess its clarity and comprehensibility. The research team then proceeded to administer the finalized Greek-language questionnaire to a diverse sample of preschool children to examine their levels of cultural competence.

Because this self-assessment checklist was made into a digital questionnaire, it was easier to get responses from a sufficient number of diverse samples, including people with a range of cultural, educational, and professional experiences, leading to a better understanding. Google Forms and Survey Monkeys were found to be the two most widely used programs for posting questionnaires on the Internet [11].

These platforms allowed for easy distribution of the self-assessment checklist to a large and diverse audience, ensuring a wide range of perspectives were included in the study. Furthermore, the use of digital questionnaires eliminated the need for manual data entry, saving time and reducing errors in data collection and analysis. Because there are no restrictions on creating a questionnaire for this specific use, Google Forms was chosen between the two applications. The main benefits of using Google Forms to publish an electronic questionnaire are how simple it is to create and design a questionnaire without the researcher needing any programming knowledge [12].

Moreover, Google Forms offers a wide range of customizable templates and question types, making it easy to tailor the questionnaire to specific research needs. Furthermore, the platform allows for seamless data collection and analysis, as responses are automatically recorded and can be easily exported for further analysis. The original instrument was already a reliable one because its values averaged 0.73. The Cronbach Alpha value after it was translated into Greek was 0.78, demonstrating both the internal consistency of the new questionnaire and the minimal change in internal consistency from the original.

This indicates that the translation process did not significantly affect the reliability of the questionnaire. These findings suggest that the translated version of the questionnaire can be

confidently used in Greek-speaking populations for research purposes. The survey's findings revealed very high percentages of cultural competence, which makes it interesting to add qualitative data to the survey because perceptions of what constitutes cultural competence frequently diverge from reality or what is requested. Except for the effect of gender on the set of skill questions ($p = 0.177$), the research also revealed that there were statistically significant differences between gender, awareness, and knowledge. Men performed worse than women in terms of awareness and knowledge of culturally relevant health-related topics (17.3 3.2) ($p = 0.004$). These findings suggest that gender may play a role in shaping individuals' understanding and awareness of cultural competence. It would be valuable to further explore the reasons behind these differences and consider how they can be addressed in training and education programs. Similar outcomes have been seen in the validation of comparable English tools. In contrast, women's mean values for skills and cultural competence were higher than men's (18.8 6.2) ($p .001$) (29.8 4.1). Higher values (41.0 5.5) were displayed by preschool teachers who had previously received training in cultural competence abilities.

Conclusion

Following extensive investigation, which included a pilot test, statistical analysis, and consultation with the scientific team, we came to the conclusion that the created self-assessment tool for cultural competence is reliable and beneficial for preschool teachers. This high-quality version closely aligns with the original form, although minor refinements may further enhance its effectiveness. These refinements could include incorporating additional cultural scenarios or providing more specific guidance on how to address cultural differences in the classroom. Furthermore, the tool could benefit from input and feedback from preschool teachers who have experience working with diverse student populations. The research results are highly encouraging, demonstrating a solid foundation for the development of cultural competence among

preschool teachers. However, it is important to acknowledge some limitations identified by the research team. Firstly, expanding the sample size will strengthen the validity of the tool and ensure its consistent high performance. In addition, conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of the tool on preschool teachers' cultural competence would provide valuable insights. Furthermore, concerning the perspectives of other stakeholders such as parents and administrators could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the tool's effectiveness in promoting cultural competence in early childhood education. Moreover, ongoing testing and retesting over time are necessary to validate its long-term reliability. Lastly, it is worth noting that the Greek literature currently lacks extensive research on the self-assessment of cultural competence. However, by enriching the tool with new data, we can enhance its value and contribute to the existing knowledge in this area.

Furthermore, conducting a cross-cultural validation of the tool will help establish its applicability in different cultural contexts. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural competence and allow for comparisons across diverse populations. Additionally, incorporating feedback from experts in the field and stakeholders will further enhance the tool's credibility and ensure its relevance in real-world settings.

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