



Assessment of the Intercultural Competence within Higher Education: a Rubric Design

M^a Elena Gómez Parra¹, Elisa Pérez Gracia¹, José M. Almodóvar Antequera¹

Abstract

Intercultural competence is one of the keystones within most international higher education curricula design due to a variety of reasons, among which internationalization of tertiary education is one of the most outstanding ones. The assessment of such competence by university teachers is not an easy task. The main goal of this paper is to describe the design of a rubric that could be applied by an array of content higher education teachers who would be interested in assessing their students' intercultural development. The validity of the content of this rubric has followed the Delphi method, according to which the researchers' team set a series of questions that took into account the consensus of experts on intercultural education. Then, comprehension was validated by testing a sample of the instrument on a Spanish cohort of Primary Education students (4th year of Primary Education Teacher Training – Speciality on English). The rubric was refined until it exhibited appropriate adjustments with regard to both content and comprehension validity through Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency settings. The confirmatory factor analysis accomplished confirmed also the dimensions upon which the rubric was finally built.

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to describe the design of an instrument to assess higher education students' intercultural development, whose main goals are: a. To study the validity of content through agreement and consensus of experts on intercultural education through the Delphi method. b. To corroborate the validity of understanding of the instrument by delivery to a sample of 79 university students. c. To analyse the reliability of the questionnaire. And d. To confirm the multidimensionality of the construct according to a Confirmatory Factorial Analysis (CFA). The basis of this proposal are the absence and need of such a questionnaire for higher education. On the one hand, some questionnaires to measure the development of the intercultural competence can be found in the literature among Primary and Secondary students [1,2,3], but the majority of those regarding tertiary education students focus on Intercultural Communicative Competence ICC [4]. Furthermore, the need to measure such competence is nowadays more evident than ever; globalisation, the internationalisation of the university system in the world, and the increase of international conflicts make intercultural being one of the most popular competences in higher education curricula and subject syllabi. On the other hand, the building of an instrument especially adapted for the Spanish system will offer higher rates of validity for a questionnaire which can be implemented in this specific context (being Spanish the language of both the questionnaire and the students).

The interest of assessing IC among tertiary education students coincides with the internationalisation of higher education and the educational goals of the 21st century, which emphasise the necessity to include the principles of Intercultural Education (IE) in the curriculum. Internationalisation is one of the endless consequences of globalisation as it aims to integrate both international and intercultural dimensions of the teaching and researching tasks at universities so as to prepare students to be active citizens and live together within diverse and plural societies [5]. In addition, "internationalization efforts are intended to enable the academic community to have the ability to understand, appreciate, and articulate the reality of interdependence among nations (environmental, economic, cultural, and social), and to prepare, faculty, staff, and students to function in an international and intercultural context... Institutions of higher education have the opportunity and responsibility through teaching and research to increase awareness and understanding of the new and changing phenomena that affect the political, economic, and cultural-multicultural developments within and among nations." [6]

Thus, in this context, IE can be seen as the answer to such needs as it allows to recognise the active presence of a multicultural reality; it proposes a holistic and dynamic approach based on respect and appreciation of cultural diversity and differences. Moreover, the intercultural dimension should not only include students who belong to minority groups but all of them in order to improve their level of sensitivity with cultural pluralism and educate them to peacefully coexist [7,8]. However, IE is nothing new; The World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century in 1998 stated that

¹ University of Cordoba, Spain



tertiary education should incorporate among their missions to “help understand, interpret, preserve, enhance, promote and disseminate national and regional, international and historic cultures in a context of cultural pluralism and diversity.” [9] Therefore, it should be taken into account at curricula planning stages, although IE entails certain complexities when it has to be put into practise. In the case of higher education, and due to the absolute priority of content, the teacher must carefully plan their methodological strategies to implement IE, such as: team work (in which people from different nationalities can be mixed to purposefully learn from each other’s knowledge and working methods, at the same time that they practise foreign language communicative skills); the use of a global and inclusive approach; the creation of spaces and time for these purposes; and the promotion of cooperative learning.

All in all, IE approach also encourages the progression of the Intercultural Competence (IC) among students because it provides students with knowledge about cultural issues (about their own and others’); attitudes that enhance to stay in contact with diverse people; values such as respect, tolerance and solidarity; and skills that enable them: 1. To appreciate and understand others’ points of views; 2. To see the same world from a diverse perspective; 3. To respectfully communicate with members who do not speak the same language trying to get a deeper understanding; and 4. To foster equality in terms of sexual, social status or cultural issues.

2. Method

Participants for the Delphi method were divided into two groups: coordinating and expert groups. The coordinating group members showed a good knowledge of the Delphi method, they were related to intercultural education, and they all were good communicators [10]. The 12 expert group members were selected according to the following characteristics: a. Being an expert on intercultural education. b. Being a University teacher. c. Being an active researcher.

The coordinating group was in charge of formulating the area and the items of the questionnaire as well as of selecting the 12 expert group members and getting their commitment of participation during the preliminary phase. In the exploratory phase, the questionnaire was designed and sent for discussion among the coordinating group, where adjustments were made from qualitative criteria that got the highest consensus. Finally, a second round among the experts validated the questionnaire according to quantitative and qualitative stable criteria. These are Delphi phases followed: 1. Selection of experts. 2. Invitation through an email. 3. Sending of the questionnaire through email as attachment (with an introduction, a sheet for personal data, description of the study and the instructions to fill in the questionnaire, followed by the instrument). 4. Instrument for validation: Likert scale with three categories according to the adequacy or belonging of the item to the dimension under research, together with an open question to collect experts’ qualitative assessment (even the introduction of a new item). A 45-day deadline was set for this task completion. 5. Email monitoring of the process followed by the experts. 6. Receiving of the scales sent by experts. 7. Analysis of the information contained in the Delphi scale. Results were analysed by the coordinating group both quantitative and qualitatively. In the final phase of this process, results were synthesized to build the final version of the instrument, which was then delivered among 79 university students from the fourth year of Primary Education Teacher Training, speciality on English. 8. Results obtained from this sample were analysed and we applied the Cronbach’s alpha in order to test the reliability of the instrument.

The questionnaire was designed from a set of items which were based on different scales and questionnaires to evaluate the intercultural competence for students of Primary and Secondary Education. These items were gathered according to three different dimensions that coincide with the components of IC namely attitudes, knowledge and skills [11]. Items related to attitudes aimed to examine whether students were able to value their own group, the role of interactions among foreigners, the principle of equality of groups and multicentrism. Regarding knowledge, items expected to check if students understood diverse cultural identities, identified differences and similarities among cultures, the influences of race, religion, etc. and the issues that cause social changes. The last dimensions include items which aimed to check students’ skills to critically reflect on specific differences in contexts and challenge discriminatory acts.

The first version was refined to adapt the initial items to the Spanish higher education context. Items were adapted (reformulated or specifically written) to fit into such dimensions. Validity of content was tested according to strategies proved by other authors [12,13]. Experts were asked to assess initial information, the questionnaire, the items, and to write an overall evaluation of each of these by taking into account the degree of understanding and the adequacy of their wording, among other parameters. This procedure offered an optimal level of content validity. Items were assessed according to: a. Appropriateness to our research objective (measured through a Likert scale from 1 to 5); and b. Level

of belonging to each dimension. Values lower than 3 were not considered; values 4 were reformulated, and values near 5 were accepted.

The pilot study was carried out among a sample of 79 Primary Education university teacher students whose speciality was English.

3. Results and Discussion

After this methodological process, the result was an instrument structured by three dimensions (attitudes, knowledge and skills), each of them containing 8 items. Thus, the Cronbach's alpha was analysed to confirm the internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.801$) of the instrument. Therefore, this instrument can be applied to different studies, whose results can be used due to its reliability.

Finally, this study can be followed by translating the tool into other languages and being validated so results can be compared among studies developed in different countries.

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