

# The impact of intercultural competencies in the society's education index and how it affects productivity

## El impacto de las competencias interculturales en el índice de educación de la sociedad y cómo afecta la productividad

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#### ABSTRACT:

Intercultural competencies is, without a doubt, one of the most influential and essential factors that clout a society nowadays, being a pillar for education and therefore their overall development. The main objective of this paper is to point out the importance of this tool in society and how much it can truly influence every single aspect of it, improving or worsening the quality of life an individual can receive. This particular research paper was made by obtaining information from different data bases and already existing statistical investigations. The results were used to prove that a country's education index has tight correlation with its productivity and HDI score: the more educated a population is, the more achievements it has reached in social, cultural and economical aspects and therefore the higher their human development index is. It's also worth acknowledging the relevance of the quality of education that's been given and how this can be managed in a positive way. More studies should be made regarding how an investment in an educational approach reform is necessary in order to improve a country's general development.

**Keywords:** Education index, productivity, education system, culture, intercultural competencies

#### RESUMEN:

Las competencias interculturales son, sin duda, uno de los factores esenciales que influyen en una sociedad hoy en día, siendo un pilar para su educación y, por lo tanto, para su desarrollo general. El objetivo principal de este documento es señalar la importancia de esta herramienta en la sociedad y cuánto puede influir realmente en cada aspecto de la misma, mejorando o empeorando la calidad de vida que un individuo pueda recibir. Este documento de investigación en particular se realizó mediante la obtención de información de diferentes bases de datos e investigaciones estadísticas ya existentes. Los resultados se utilizaron para demostrar que el índice de educación de un país se encuentra estrechamente relacionado con su productividad y la calificación de IDH: mientras más educada es una población, mayores logros ha alcanzado en aspectos sociales, culturales y económicos; por lo tanto, su índice de desarrollo humano es más alto. También vale la pena reconocer la relevancia de la calidad de educación que se imparte y cómo esta puede ser gestionada de manera positiva. Se deben realizar más estudios sobre la existente necesidad de inversiones en reformas del enfoque educativo para mejorar el desarrollo general de un país.

**Palabras clave:** Índice educativo, productividad,

# 1. Introduction

Education is known as the main base of any society because without it, civilization simply would not exist. Education can have many context, but it's possible to see it as the learning of theory and skills in order to apply them in a specific field. There is a strong connection between an individual's education level and how much it influences in the impact he or she will have on a society: for someone to provide a service and therefore make a contribution to a corporation, this person needs to have learnt a certain skill that can be put to use, and the growth of this input depends mainly on earning additional abilities; a process that happens slowly and gradually over time and experience (Schultz, 1971). This is what is known as human capital: the value a person has thanks to his/her knowledge to contribute in order to benefit any association.

This contribution can be acquired or improved by human capital investment, which focuses on education and training. Then, the student will apply his new found skills to make a positive input in the corporation, therefore justifying the investment that was made in learning (Becker, 1962). Every country has a founding which they distribute for different aims, including their education index, which is part of the human development capital. In 1990, the United Nations Development Program posted a new approach: the HDI (Human Development Index), this new form of measurement has three subdivisions: 1) Life expectancy, 2) Adult literacy and 3) GNI (Gross National Income) per capita, determining the kind of lifestyle that a country's residents lead. As it has been regarded, these three points are related and based on education.

It can be concluded that for a country to have a high score in the human developed index, the population needs to be educated (Sagar, & Najam, 1998). The education index can be measured from 0 to 350 points, though not one country achieves this perfect score; based on the amount of time and resources that have been dedicated to educating the population, including primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Countries with the highest scores include western Europe, North America and Affluent Asia, followed by South America and leaving behind Africa and eastern Asia countries (Laurent, 2013). The new focus is in humans and how they could be the main players for the increase of progress; having faith in their learning of skills and abilities, according to their different aptitudes. This appeal for humans opens many doors and opportunities for invention and innovation in every field, always having education, knowledge and human capacity as a base for productivity (Neumayer, 2001).

The connection between education and productivity is simple: the more educated people are, the more they will produce. Populations with an average education index lower than 200 tend to have lower productivity as well; it rarely increases. However, it's important to point out that while education is an extremely important factor in a country's productivity, it isn't the only one (Laurent, 2013). The productivity a laborer provides is based on the performance they have on a company and how much this contributes in a positive way. Nowadays, training and education are seen as a priority to have a better life style which is why a "return to education" phenomenon has hit associations all over the world. An emphasis has been made on how learning never truly stops; and many workers who already have their professional degrees are forced to do more training and learn new methods every day.

The schooling and skills standards are higher than ever and many people find themselves struggling to reach them (Prais, 1995). The contribution of schooling to worker productivity has been found in multiple studies and it has been assumed that this is due to a higher cognitive development in people who have had a higher level of education. So, as workers have improved cognitive abilities, they manage this knowledge and apply it to their jobs, producing better results in general (Gintis, 1971). Therefore, the quality of the education that people receive is essential for a higher productivity rate, and the only way to achieve the desired quality is through a functioning education system.

The education system varies according to the country: most developed countries usually present a better quality system for its students, while underdeveloped ones, specially Africa and India, still struggle in primary education. It wasn't until this last century that the education system started becoming more inclusive, diverse and molding to students' specific needs. The education system has focused on the basic human rights, reconstructing itself and changing towards a new model of education. The system has gone from being a general education scheme, to new, different methods that should assist students better. The new system's main aim is to have students learn in a better way, not sticking to theory but actually focusing on practice, so they can apply their knowledge in their daily-life, specially the professional fields (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). The educating system seeks for people to actually learn how to use what they know and contribute in their respective work field and therefore increase productivity. Another factor to be considered is how much the culture and tradition of said population can influence a society's overall productivity.

According to Masemann (2003), culture refers to the traditions, values and ideas that individuals within a society share, which means that this concept includes an infinite group of aspects such as mentality and language, having a huge impact on how they work as a social group. Therefore, it is possible to assume that culture can determine how a person thinks and acts; through a learning process. Many experts agree that education is in fact, a cultural process, in which people learn the different aspects that will define them as part of a social group. Education aims to teach skills, values, science and any other kind of knowledge that will contribute to this process of socialization and how everyone that will form part of it will think and behave (Bennett, 2009). Each culture has its own beliefs and costumes, different from the rest, which can have cultural conflicts as a result, and, in today's world, it's inevitable that all these cultures interact with each other. The only way to avoid all these issues is through the understanding of diversity, and this is where intercultural education becomes an essential part of the education system (Navas Rios, 2016).

This new educating approach seeks to solve the problems that take place in today's multicultural society, including inequality, violation of human rights and racism. Then, education can truly become a cultural learning process in which diversity is respected and appreciated, reaching everyone, with no discrimination for their cultural beliefs (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013). At this point, it is essential to emphasize an important aspect that positively affects the education role in many contexts, which is an intercultural competency. Intercultural competence is therefore a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one, either singly or together with others, to: – understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself; – respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people; – establish positive and constructive relationships with such people; – understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural "difference". Several aspects of intercultural competence warrant further comment. First, intercultural competence does not involve abandoning one's own cultural identifications or affiliations, nor does it require individuals to adopt the cultural practices, beliefs, discourses or values of other cultures. Intercultural competence instead involves being open to, curious about and interested in people who have other cultural affiliations, and the ability to understand and interpret their practices, beliefs, discourses and values.

Intercultural competence enables people to interact and co-operate effectively and appropriately in situations where cultural "otherness" and "difference" are salient. It also enables people to act as "media-tors" among people of different cultures, and to interpret and explain different perspectives. That said, encounters with people from other cultural orientations can be a source of personal development and enrichment if their perspectives are integrated into one's own sense of self.

Intercultural encounters have now become an everyday occurrence for large numbers of people in many countries. Such high levels of physical and virtual intercultural contact have the potential to lead to self-enrichment and benefit, since encountering otherness, or what is perceived to be different, provides an opportunity for learning from, with and about each

other and about oneself. To benefit from diversity, it is vital that discrimination, inequalities and structural disadvantages are tackled, to ensure that all are able to enjoy genuine equality of opportunity and to participate in intercultural encounters and dialogue on an equal footing. It is also vital that people's intercultural competence is developed in order to enable them to understand, appreciate and respect each other across cultural differences, and to enable them to contribute actively to societies that benefit from diversity.

Developing intercultural competence through education is a powerful tool for achieving intercultural understanding, appreciation and respect. It can help people to develop the competence which they need for engaging in meaningful intercultural dialogue and for living in harmony with those who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from themselves. This document has presented a conceptual framework for intercultural competence, as well as the pedagogical principles upon which its development can be enhanced, a framework that may be deployed within informal, non-formal and formal educational settings. This approach moves away from assumptions around formal schooling as the (only) key to social change, and acknowledges the role and significance of all three types of education. It thus recognizes that the development of intercultural competence is a responsibility of both individuals and institutions, and that its pursuit is an ongoing, complex and dynamic process across our lifespan as learners.

The successful development of intercultural competence, and the realization of the social vision upon which it is based, relies crucially upon the commitment and support of a wide range of stakeholders, including politicians, policy makers, education and training professionals, religious, spiritual and community leaders, parents and careers, and of course learners themselves. To enable the development of intercultural competence through education writ large, the committed support of all these stakeholders is required. This document aims at inspiring such support.

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## **2. Methodology**

This paper is conceptual, based on information found in different articles of various data bases. The main source for this investigation was Clint Laurent's book, "Tomorrow's world: a look at the demographic and socio-economic structure of the world in 2032"; which was found on the online library Ebrary. Additionally, a literature search was performed in the following data bases nber, books google, semantics scholar, proquest, taylor and francis online, JSTOR, Penn State University data, science direct (academia) and Eric, ed gov. There were around fifty articles regarding education and its connection to intercultural competences and productivity, in the mentioned data bases, but only twenty three of them were used for this specific research.

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## **3. Conclusion/Recommendation**

Education is constantly improving, changing and expanding; during the last decades, thanks to the new conditions provided by technology and globalization, learning has become a global process, having a huge impact on aspects such as global competition, characterized by its huge diversity. The new working generation is an intercultural one, having people from other countries, cultures and beliefs, working as a unit and taking advantage of the knowledges that others can offer. The most common example of one of the perks of this new situation is multilingual education, which refers to schooling in the mother tongue but also learning additional languages and therefore upgrading students' instructive process. Thanks to this new educational approach, the human capital has increased its value immensely and having a positive effect on the professional fields, therefore, creating better academically and skilled employees, that could make the work force stronger (Stier, 2009). Intercultural competencies have become a starting point for any kind of work relationship, in order to achieve a common goal that they have grown to share, humans need to constantly be cooperating and learning with each other.

This environment seeks to avoid seeing each's cultural differences as an inconvenience, and instead using them as a strength. The current social context has created a demand for intercultural competencies, a new holistic approach that focuses on the possibilities behind

an intercultural society, leaving behind racism, stereotypes and any other kind of discrimination (Lloyd, 2010). By doing this, a good work environment can be achieved, having a positive effect on the development of any particular objective, and this can only be done through the education of a society.

Although they are diverse, it's evident that the agents that have been regarded in this research have one particular aspect in common: Education can be used as a tool in order to manage them appropriately and even end up taking advantage of these different global and social particular situations. Education is the most powerful weapon any society can carry, because it can prevent and manage different social phenomena.

Education has the capacity to not only change a population's way of thinking, but also how they act and manage this acquired knowledge in their every day life. However, for this tool to work effectively, it needs to be polished and emphasize in the issues regarding the quality, demand and excusing that exists, particularly in developing countries (Bergmann, 1996). So, intercultural competencies and productivity depend not only on education, but on the quality of it. All these changes that have appeared through the last century aren't necessarily a negative factor, but if it isn't handled correctly and in a responsible way, it will have many repercussions that can't be dealt with easily. Intercultural education is essential, because many people don't have the access to education and learning programs that others have; creating a clear sense of inequality that privileges certain cultural groups, while others are completely neglected and seem unable to improve their general quality of life. To conclude, righteous education, through the exercising of cognitive abilities, impacts how a worker develops, having an input in any type of field that they are part of and eventually increasing productivity (Glewwe, 2002).

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