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Exploring cultural intelligence development methods for Indonesian business school students

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ABSTRACT

As workplaces become more international, the capacity to function effectively across cultures has become a core competency for business graduates. Cultural intelligence, a person's capability to function well in culturally diverse settings, has therefore become an important learning outcome for business schools. Yet most existing studies concentrate on classroom-based interventions and pay limited attention to how cultural intelligence can be developed beyond formal instruction. This study explores the methods through which business school students can develop cultural intelligence. Using a qualitative design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen informants: lecturers experienced in cross-cultural or international business teaching, students who had taken cross-cultural courses or training, and members of business school management. The findings indicate that cultural intelligence can be cultivated across three levels, namely the individual, classroom, and institutional levels, and that the methods at each level operate through two underlying functions: building cultural knowledge and providing intercultural experience, with the latter being further distinguished into direct and indirect forms. The study contributes a functional classification of cultural intelligence development methods that can guide educators and institutions in selecting approaches that fit their objectives and resource constraints. It also highlights the individual and institutional levels, which have received little attention in prior research, as legitimate sites of cultural intelligence development.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the literature by mapping the full range of methods for developing students' cultural intelligence and classifying them by function. It offers insights into the individual and institutional levels, which prior research has overlooked, and enhances our understanding of how cultural intelligence can be cultivated beyond the classroom.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to work in a multicultural environment has become a crucial competency, particularly in the fields of business and management. Today's economy increasingly demands that professionals collaborate, negotiate, and build relationships with people across borders. Because of this, business schools have a responsibility to prepare their

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students to perform well in culturally diverse work settings. Therefore, developing students' cultural intelligence has become an important educational concern (Haikuo, 2025).

Cultural intelligence, commonly abbreviated as CQ, which denotes a person's "cultural quotient," refers to a person's capability to function effectively in intercultural situations (Earley & Ang, 2003). When individuals function in a multicultural environment, their performance can largely be explained by their level of CQ (Tripathi, Kaurav, & Singh, 2024). The relevance of this competency is especially clear in Indonesia. With its large population and rapidly expanding economy, Indonesia is an attractive market for foreign companies. Graduates of Indonesian business schools therefore have opportunities to work in multinational firms and interact with various people across the globe.

This phenomenon demands that business schools develop students who are globally competitive, not only in technical skills but also in their capacity to work alongside people from other cultures (Bhattacharya & Chawla, 2026). Understanding how CQ development can be achieved is an important question. While a substantial body of research has examined the CQ development process, little attention has been paid to the wider range of activities available to students and institutions, including what students might pursue on their own initiative and what universities can offer beyond the curriculum.

Thus, the research objective is to explore the methods that can be used to develop business school students' CQ. In particular, this study seeks to map the broader landscape of methods and to examine the relationships among them. Specifically, the study addresses two questions: (1) What methods are suitable for developing students' CQ? and (2) What are the strengths and limitations of these methods, including how they relate to the different dimensions of CQ? In doing so, the study aims to provide business schools with a clearer and more comprehensive guide for designing CQ development initiatives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Cultural intelligence has become a growing and significant concept within the international business literature. The construct was developed by Earley and Ang (2003), who defined it as a person's ability to adapt and perform appropriately in any intercultural situation. The construct was originally considered as a way of understanding the factors that determine an individual's success in adjusting to unfamiliar cultural settings (Earley & Ang, 2003). Because the early definitions were somewhat broad, subsequent scholarship has sought to develop a shared understanding of this multidimensional concept (Thomas, 2006).

Conceptually, CQ was built upon the broader notion of intelligence advanced by Sternberg and Grigorenko (2006). Even so, although some scholars have treated general cognitive ability and CQ as equivalent, Ang et al. (2007) argued that the two are quite distinct, since general cognitive ability centres on a person's intellectual capacity, whereas CQ extends beyond intelligence to encompass intercultural capabilities (Ang et al., 2007). CQ is also seen as an extension of emotional intelligence: it addresses what emotional intelligence does not fully cover, namely the challenge of coping with people in unfamiliar cultural settings (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004).

While these distinctions imply that CQ is connected to personality traits, the construct is concerned with more than the individual level; it focuses specifically on intercultural exchange (Eisenberg et al., 2013). This emphasis is reflected in the argument of Ang et al. (2007) that a person's lived experiences in intercultural situations shape their behavioral appropriateness, which in turn is closely tied to the development of their CQ. In other words, CQ is not a fixed endowment but a capability that can be developed through exposure and reflection.

Several scholars have attempted to define and establish the elements that constitute CQ. In their early formulation, Earley and Mosakowski (2004) proposed that CQ comprises three sources: the cognitive (head), the physical (body), and the emotional or motivational (heart). The cognitive aspect refers to the process of learning the beliefs and customs of other cultures and understanding how to adjust to them. The physical aspect relates to how individuals act and behave in new cultural settings.

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Building on this initial conceptualisation, Earley and Ang (2003) refined CQ into a multidimensional framework comprising four interrelated dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. The metacognitive dimension is the process of acquiring and making sense of knowledge about new cultures (Earley & Ang, 2003). The cognitive dimension refers to a person's knowledge, including the legal system, economic situation, and social interaction practices of various cultures, knowledge that is typically obtained through educational or personal experience (Earley & Ang, 2003). When an individual is able to draw on this cultural knowledge in a way that fuels their eagerness to engage with a new cultural situation, the third, motivational dimension, comes into play; adapting to an unfamiliar setting requires this kind of motivation (Earley & Ang, 2003). Finally, the behavioral dimension represents a person's ability to display adaptive communication skills and behaviors appropriate to the cultural context (Earley & Ang, 2003).

These four dimensions are closely connected, and CQ cannot be fully realised if any one of them is missing (Rockstuhl & van Dyne, 2018; Tripathi et al., 2024). A person may hold a great deal of cultural knowledge yet fail to use it because they lack the motivation to engage, and, in the same way, strong motivation without enough knowledge or behavioral flexibility tends to produce limited results (Ang et al., 2007; Rockstuhl & van Dyne, 2018). Among the four, the behavioral dimension carries particular weight because it acts as the means through which the other three are put into practice: appropriate action is what allows metacognitive awareness, cognitive knowledge, and motivational drive to be turned into effective intercultural performance (Ang et al., 2007; Rockstuhl & van Dyne, 2018).

Beyond its conceptual structure, CQ has drawn scholarly attention because of what it predicts. A growing body of evidence links higher CQ to a range of valued outcomes, including better cultural judgement and decision-making, smoother cross-cultural adjustment, and stronger task performance in international roles (Ang et al., 2007; Rockstuhl & van Dyne, 2018; Tripathi et al., 2024). This is also what distinguishes CQ from broader constructs such as general intelligence, since CQ is specific to intercultural settings (Ang et al., 2007; Rockstuhl & van Dyne, 2018) and, unlike fixed traits, it can be learned and developed (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Iskhakova, Bradly, Whiting, & Lu, 2022).

2.2. Developing Cultural Intelligence

Another important aspect of the CQ literature is the idea that CQ is not a fixed construct but can be developed through learning and experience (Earley & Ang, 2003; Eisenberg et al., 2013). The idea is consistent with experiential learning theory, which suggests that learning happens when real experience is turned into knowledge through reflection and experimentation (Kolb, 1984). For this reason, many approaches to developing CQ rely on giving learners structured opportunities to encounter, process, and reflect on cultural differences. These approaches in the previous studies can be grouped into several categories, each with its own evidence base and limitations.

The first approach is structured cross-cultural learning, typically delivered as a course, module, or workshop. The results of this approach for the development of CQ are mostly positive. Eisenberg et al. (2013), in a multi-country study, found that combining experiential and classroom-based methods significantly increased overall, metacognitive, and cognitive CQ. MacNab (2012) similarly reported that an experientially oriented CQ education program produced a measurable increase across the CQ dimensions. Such findings indicate that purposefully designed instruction can have a significant impact on CQ, although outcomes may depend on other factors.

A second, frequently studied approach is international exposure through travel and mobility. This category includes short visits as well as longer exchange or study-abroad programs. The findings on short visits, however, are varied. Several studies show improvements in almost all CQ dimensions, but others suggest that some dimensions respond less to brief exposure (Gustomo, Putranto, Ghazali, & Nuraeni, 2018; Iskhakova et al., 2022). On the other hand, longer stays through exchange programs seem to produce more consistent results. One likely reason is that a longer period abroad gives students more chances to experience and reflect (Chao, Takeuchi, & Farh, 2017).

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Therefore, this literature suggests that the cultural distance of the destination and the duration strongly shape how much CQ can be developed.

A third approach relies on technology-based and virtual methods. Global virtual teams, pioneered as a CQ development tool by Erez et al. (2013), allow students to collaborate with peers in other countries without the cost of travel, and several studies confirm that such online global interaction can significantly develop participants' CQ (Erez et al., 2013; Presbitero & Toledano, 2018). Additionally, virtual exchange and online international collaboration have shown similar results (Hackett et al., 2023). However, the outcomes are not uniform. Kirste and Holtbrügge (2019) found only a slight improvement from experiential learning delivered through digital platforms, suggesting that the design of technology-based methods matters as much as the technology itself.

A fourth approach uses cultural simulation and role-play to recreate intercultural experiences in a controlled setting. Bücker and Korzilius (2015) found that the Ecotonos simulation game produced significant gains in motivational, metacognitive, and behavioral CQ, although the cognitive dimension was less responsive to this approach. However, when simulation and role-play are combined with lecturing and discussion, it has been reported that this combination affects all CQ dimensions positively (Kostic Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2019). Nonetheless, the results still vary. Fischer's (2011) study, using a simulation game with behavior-modification sessions, reported a decline in metacognitive and cognitive CQ and non-significant changes in the rest of CQ components. This variability indicates that the effectiveness of simulation depends substantially on how the activity is designed.

Based on the discussion above, it can be established that CQ is developable and that a variety of methods can contribute to its development. However, there are two limitations. First, most of the attention in the literature focuses on formal interventions such as training courses, mobility programmes, simulations, and virtual collaborations. Second, the evidence is fragmented across methods, making it difficult for educators to compare options or to understand which methods are most effective. Therefore, this study tries to fill that gap by looking at the whole range of CQ development methods. The need for this is also raised in recent reviews, which ask for a clearer picture of how intercultural competence develops across different educational settings and stages (Hang & Zhang, 2023).

What emerges from these four streams of research is a common pattern. The success of these approaches seems to depend on how structured courses, mobility, technology-mediated collaboration, and simulation are designed and facilitated, rather than on the methods themselves. Programs work best when they give students real experience, clear structure, and time to reflect. Meanwhile, these approaches achieve little when exposure is short, passive, or unguided. The four CQ dimensions also respond in different ways. Methods built around knowledge tend to strengthen the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions, while the motivational and behavioral dimensions require some form of immersive experience. This varied response helps explain why studies of single methods often report mixed results.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach to address the research objectives. A qualitative design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under examination namely, how CQ is developed. The approach focuses on exploring experiences, perceptions, and insights that a quantitative design would be unlikely to capture, and it allows the study to draw on a range of perspectives from people directly involved in cross-cultural education.

To collect the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen informants from diverse backgrounds. The informants were affiliated with several Indonesian business schools, namely Institut Teknologi Bandung, Bina Nusantara University, Parahyangan University, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, and the University of Indonesia. The informants comprised lecturers with experience teaching cross-cultural or international business courses, students who had taken cross-cultural courses or training, and members of business school management. This variety of informant types was intended to ensure that the data reflected multiple points of view on CQ

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development, including those who design and deliver instruction, those who experience it as learners, and those responsible for institutional strategy. Informants were selected purposively based on the established criteria and their involvement in cross-cultural education. Lecturers contributed an instructional perspective grounded in the practical experience of designing and delivering cross-cultural and international business courses; students offered a learner's view of which activities they had found valuable; and members of management spoke to the strategic and resource considerations that shape what an institution can do. The number of informants was determined based on the point at which data saturation was achieved, which occurred with the 14th informant.

The semi-structured format also allowed the interviewer to gain an in-depth understanding while remaining responsive to the issues that informants raised spontaneously during the interview. The interview questions concentrated on identifying which methods are suitable for developing Indonesian business school students' CQ, together with the advantages and disadvantages of those methods. Informants were also asked how each method relates to the development of the different CQ dimensions. Verbal consent was obtained from all informants prior to the interviews. The interviews were then recorded and subsequently transcribed. Manual coding was carried out on the transcripts to ensure that the coding remained closely aligned with the research objectives. Coding proceeded by identifying words and phrases that indicated a method of developing CQ; the coded segments were then grouped according to the similarity of the methods they described. Besides identifying methods, the analysis also examined the strengths and weaknesses of each method and its relationship with the CQ dimensions. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, an audit trail of codes and emerging categories was maintained and reviewed iteratively against the data, and the diversity of informant roles provided a degree of triangulation across perspectives.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The interview data revealed that CQ can be developed at three levels: individual, classroom, and institutional. Each of these three levels operates through two basic functions: building cultural knowledge and providing students with intercultural experience. At the individual level, the focus is on strategies that students may pursue independently. The classroom level concerns techniques embedded in cross-cultural courses or training, while the institutional level focuses on the broader programmes that a business school or university can provide to expose students to intercultural experiences. Each level is elaborated on in the sections below.

4.1. Individual Level

At the individual level, students can take a number of actions on their own initiative, which fall into two categories: gaining experience and acquiring knowledge. The methods that emerged from the interviews are described below.

4.1.1. Engaging in Multicultural Activities

Students can immerse themselves in multicultural activities such as taking part in international competitions, learning other languages, forming friendships with people from other countries, and joining international organizations. Through these activities, students are expected to acquire knowledge about other cultures and gain experience interacting in a culturally diverse environment. However, a limitation of this method is that the intercultural interaction it generates can be shallow because many of these activities tend not to be structured by design. As one student put it, "In addition, as students, we can also actively participate in organizational activities that involve different cultural backgrounds" (Informant 7).

4.1.2. Seeking Consultation

Another option is to consult a cross-cultural expert, either to obtain advice and guidance on how to develop their CQ or to discuss their own intercultural experiences. The strength of this method is that it allows students to develop

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CQ in a more focused and deliberate way. For one lecturer, the most important factor is sustained guidance: "It's important to consistently receive feedback from instructors or mentors. Students can ask for advice, receive guidance, or periodically evaluate their knowledge and experiences. This way, students continue to receive support and guidance on their self-learning journey" (Informant 5). The main difficulty of this method is access: finding an expert who is willing and able to act as a consultant is not always easy.

4.1.3. Reading

Reading is a further avenue for individual development, provided that the material contains cross-cultural content, whether in its language or its subject matter. In that case, nonfiction is generally preferable to fiction because narrative fiction can lead students to focus on the story rather than on the cultural knowledge it contains. In practice, however, students rarely draw such sharp lines between media. As one student reflected, "In my opinion, the way I adapt to different cultures is by watching movies and reading novels. This helps me become more sensitive to diverse cultures" (Informant 9). Through reading, students are expected to build their understanding of other cultures. The drawback is that the understanding gained may be incomplete without guidance to help students interpret what they read.

4.1.4. Travelling Abroad

Of all the individual-level methods, travelling abroad is regarded as the most effective means of developing CQ through experience. By placing students directly in another cultural setting, it exposes them firsthand to every dimension of CQ and nurtures all of them simultaneously. Even trips not designed for learning can count, as one lecturer argued: "While some people might travel to another country with their parents, it can also be considered a cultural immersion experience. I always encourage them to have international experiences" (Informant 13). The method nonetheless carries several substantial drawbacks. It is costly and becomes more expensive with the length of the stay, so only a minority of students can afford it. Its effectiveness also depends on the purpose of the trip. When travelling is undertaken for tourism, it tends to limit meaningful contact with local people. Besides, the duration of the visit matters as well, since longer stays generally provide richer experiences but come with greater costs.

4.1.5. Watching

Much like reading, watching films and videos can enhance students' CQ, and contemporary technology has made cross-cultural content remarkably accessible. One student described this from experience: "If you approach it independently, I agree with the idea that watching movies, for example, can provide insight into American culture, which I gained from those movies" (Informant 6). However, this method shares the same weakness as reading, as it still requires guidance to focus on learning instead of mere entertainment. Moreover, the content of the films also matters, as it determines the effectiveness of the learning process. Watching only fictional films for enjoyment will limit the learning students gain.

4.2. Classroom Level

The classroom level offers the widest range of methods, encompassing both knowledge-building and experience-based techniques. The experiential methods are divided into direct and indirect forms. The methods identified in the interviews are described as follows.

4.2.1. Student Interaction

Interaction among students, whether through group work, debates, sharing sessions, or discussions, is considered to have a positive impact on CQ. Such interaction allows students to exchange knowledge and to learn from one another's behavior, thereby strengthening all dimensions of CQ. The value was captured by one lecturer: "This debate

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method helps them to understand better, for example, why an opinion is dominant in Indonesia, which may be related to cultural conservatism, but will be different when seen from the perspective of another country" (Informant 5). The method can only be productive, however, when the students involved come from diverse cultural backgrounds. It also depends on clear instructions, so that students understand what is expected of them during each interaction.

4.2.2. Indirect Experience

Indirect experiential methods give students a sense of what it is like to interact in a multicultural environment without requiring them to be immersed in the real world. Methods in this category include case studies, which convey intercultural interaction from another person's perspective. They also include role-play, in which students take on the persona of a particular individual, and simulation, which makes students feel as though they are in a multicultural situation. As one lecturer described, "We also implement various activities in the classroom, such as role plays which often take the form of negotiation simulations" (Informant 1). The main advantage of these methods is that they allow students to practice how to act in particular situations at minimal risk, encouraging them to explore a range of possibilities. However, their main weakness is the authenticity of the multicultural environments they provide, since the scenarios are bounded by a specific, predetermined context that does not fully replicate the complexity of a real multicultural environment.

4.2.3. Coaching

In the coaching method, the instructor provides feedback and guidance to students regarding their cross-cultural experiences. As one programme management informant explained, "The program sends representatives to visit the locations directly, coach and discuss with students in their environments abroad" (Informant 2). This approach helps students reflect on what they have experienced and offers support in resolving any intercultural difficulties they encounter. Its effectiveness, however, depends heavily on the students' own experience and on their ability to articulate it. Students with little prior cross-cultural experience are unlikely to benefit as much as those with plenty of experience, since there is limited material on which the coaching can draw. Moreover, the quality of the coach also matters, since their knowledge and experience may affect the effectiveness of the process.

4.2.4. Lecturing

Lecturing is a one-way method in which the lecturer conveys cross-cultural knowledge to students. As one lecturer noted, "Of course, if we talk about courses, there will definitely be teaching methods, such as lectures or seminars, used to explain various aspects" (Informant 1). As a one-way method for conveying cross-cultural knowledge, it is considered effective in strengthening the cognitive dimension because it delivers structured knowledge supported by clear references. However, its effectiveness is highly dependent on the lecturer's ability to organise and present the material, as well as the lecturer's experience. Lecturers with multicultural experience are regarded as more capable of explaining the content vividly. Without these qualities, lecturing risks becoming ineffective and boring.

4.2.5. Interview

The interview method requires students to interview people from other cultures or individuals involved in international business. The aim is for students to exchange knowledge with the interviewee and observe how that person communicates. Such interactions can yield valuable experiences, as reflected in one student's account: "My experience during an interview with an interviewee from abroad made me really feel and know the person's true nature, such as how they think, talk, or even engage in casual conversation" (Informant 7). The method has many contingencies, since its effectiveness is shaped by several factors, such as the selection of an appropriate interviewee with relevant intercultural knowledge and experience; the communication skills of both the interviewee and the

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students; the interviewee's willingness to share their knowledge and experience; and the quality of the interview guidelines, including the questions asked and the manner in which the interview is conducted.

4.2.6. Presentation

The presentation method asks students to research a topic related to cross-cultural issues and then present their work to the class. It is considered effective in enhancing students' metacognitive and cognitive capabilities because, in the course of preparing a presentation, students must not only gather cross-cultural knowledge but also analyse their findings. As one lecturer acknowledged, "Nevertheless, at least through presentation these issues aim to bring awareness to students" (Informant 5). The method can also raise motivation when the class is highly diverse. Its effectiveness, however, depends heavily on students' motivation and on their ability to prepare and deliver an effective presentation.

4.2.7. Project

Projects require students to address real-world problems, and the way a project is structured shapes its contribution to CQ development, regardless of whether its subject matter is explicitly cross-cultural. However, there are several aspects that need to be considered. As one lecturer shared: "We design the learning with a project-based approach that involves direct interaction with strangers" (Informant 11). Therefore, the first aspect is that projects should be undertaken in groups, which encourages interaction. Ideally, the group should comprise members from a variety of cultures so that students learn to interact within a multicultural team. Second, projects may be carried out in virtual or traditional teams, with the consideration that virtual teams widen the range of potential collaborators from different countries but can involve relatively limited interaction, whereas traditional teams are more constrained in their diversity but tend to generate more intensive interaction. Third, the duration of the project is important. It should not be too short, since the benefits are minimal, or too long, since a lengthy duration risks becoming boring and detracting students from interaction. Finally, the complexity of the problem influences effectiveness: problems that are too simple limit interaction, whereas problems that are too complex can cause frustration within the group.

4.2.8. Reading (Supervised)

Like reading at the individual level, reading at the classroom level develops along the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions. The difference lies in classroom reading being more focused because the material students are asked to read is chosen and supervised by the lecturer. Even so, the method's effectiveness still depends on students' motivation and their ability to process and make sense of the knowledge they obtain through reading, which is an imaginative effort, as one management informant observed: "…when watching a movie or reading a book, we mostly observe other people facing the situation, and we have to imagine how we would act in that situation" (Informant 4).

4.2.9. Travelling Abroad (Course-Based)

Similar to the individual level, course-based travel abroad is considered an effective way of developing CQ, since students not only learn to interact with people from other cultures but also have their existing knowledge validated, thereby strengthening both the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions. As one lecturer emphasized, "Field trips have a very significant impact, not only in terms of theoretical application, but also in terms of practical application" (Informant 13).

However, challenges in implementing this method persist due to the significant budget required, and its effectiveness depends on the destination and the duration. The destination should differ culturally from the students' own while remaining safe to visit, while the duration must be long enough to provide a meaningful experience but not so long as to make the trip very costly. On the one hand, the instructions given to students about their activities

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abroad also shape the experience. Providing clear guidance about what students should do, combined with sufficient freedom to explore according to their own interests, can help engage the motivational and behavioral dimensions.

4.2.10. Watching (Course-Based)

Classroom-level watching resembles its individual-level counterpart but differs in that the film or video content is more tightly focused. The main weakness, however, is its reliance on student motivation, which can decrease if the content or length of the video fails to hold students' attention. One management informant suggests that: "…watching movies and reading books may have an impact across all dimensions, but it's important to note that students don't always experience them firsthand" (Informant 4). Therefore, debriefing is necessary to guide students and ensure that the learning process takes place.

4.3. Institutional Level

At the institutional level, the role of the business school is essentially that of an enabler that creates channels through which knowledge and, above all, intercultural experience become available to students. The methods identified are described below.

4.3.1. Cultural Events

Business schools can stage cultural events that serve as a platform for students from different cultures to interact. Such events can be combined with other events, such as graduation ceremonies or student admission events. At these events, students can showcase aspects of their respective cultures, such as dances, food, or traditional clothing, and learn about other cultures while interacting with one another. The method requires a diverse student body, however, and may therefore be unsuitable for schools with only a small population of international students. One lecturer illustrated how simple such initiatives can be: "They could organize a cross-cultural gathering in the evening. For example, they could hold a gathering where everyone brings food from their own culture. The program would then, of course, provide the venue and refreshments" (Informant 13).

4.3.2. Double-Degree and Exchange Programmes

One of the most effective ways for students to develop CQ is to experience life in another country. To enable this, business schools can offer international educational programs, such as double-degree and student-exchange programs. One informant shared the following commitment: "Here, we require all students to take a double degree or participate in an exchange program at another university for one year. One year is enough time for them to gain a deep understanding of the local culture" (Informant 2).

These programs give students the opportunity not only to study in another country but also to experience daily life there, thereby developing all dimensions of CQ. Combining such programs with scholarships would also extend the opportunity to a wider range of students. However, implementation is challenging, as the institution must maintain strong networks with foreign universities to establish these partnerships and must also be prepared to host inbound international students in return.

4.3.3. Student Training

Business schools can provide multicultural training to their students, ideally as part of a co-curriculum that equips them with knowledge of how to work and interact with people from other cultures. As one informant noted, "In terms of soft skills, we have programmes that equip students with enhanced soft skills. One of these is communication skills, including cross-cultural communication. This is a skill our students must possess" (Informant 12). Making such training compulsory is recommended, as it would give graduates an additional competitive edge

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through stronger CQ. Because the training is part of the co-curriculum, the institution must allocate dedicated funding to deliver it.

4.3.4. Summer Schools

Summer schools offer an alternative means of attracting international students while giving domestic students the opportunity to interact and develop their CQ. One management informant described hosting "events like summer school, where students from different cultures come together to work together to solve problems" (Informant 2). Like double-degree and exchange programmes, they provide experience in interacting with people from other cultures. Their shorter duration, however, means that students sometimes concentrate on the structured activities of the summer school itself rather than on experiencing everyday life in the host country, which can limit the depth of intercultural exposure.

4.4. Discussion

The findings make three primary contributions, each tied to one of the three levels. The first relates to the individual level. Although this level has not been examined extensively in prior research, the interviews suggest that it is a valid and meaningful site of CQ development. Students can build cultural knowledge independently by reading suitable books and watching foreign films or videos, and they can gain intercultural experience by engaging in multicultural activities such as competitions, student organisations, and cross-border friendships, or by travelling abroad. This is consistent with recent evidence that students with prior international exposure tend to record higher CQ and that this earlier experience will help them in further CQ development (Iskhakova et al., 2022). It also fits the finding that informal cultural exposure can develop CQ and provide material for students to discuss with others (Haikuo, 2025). Furthermore, CQ can also be developed through real-world experience rather than through formal teaching alone (Teixeira & Klein, 2024).

Schools can also support this individual development in several ways. These include recommending suitable readings and films, offering consultations for students who wish to discuss their experiences further, and providing support, such as assistance for students who participate in international competitions or organizations. However, the limitation of individual-level development is that, because it lacks a structured process and any mechanism of enforcement, it depends heavily on each student's own motivation.

The second contribution concerns the classroom level, where CQ can be developed through structured class activities. The findings separate methods that build knowledge from those that provide experience, and they further divide experiential methods into direct forms, such as interviewing people from other cultures, undertaking field trips, or collaborating on international projects, and indirect forms, such as case studies, role-play, and simulation (Hackett et al., 2023; Teixeira & Klein, 2024). This grouping offers educators a practical aid for choosing methods under real-world limits of cost, classroom space, and facilities, particularly where low-cost options such as online projects are needed. The findings also support the recommendation that knowledge-oriented and experience-oriented methods be combined, so that students both understand cultural differences and have the chance to engage with them, which is consistent with evidence that mixed approaches tend to work better than single methods (Hackett et al., 2023; Teixeira & Klein, 2024). A more recent study also revealed that structured online collaboration with peers abroad, a low-cost classroom alternative to travel, can improve students' intercultural competence (Hackett et al., 2023). At the same time, recent studies caution that such methods only work when teachers design well-facilitated, interactive tasks with a diverse set of students, since exposure without active facilitation tends to produce weak results (Hackett et al., 2023; Haikuo, 2025).

CQ development can also happen at the institutional level, which, like the individual level, has received little attention in previous studies. The findings suggest the institution's role is supportive rather than instructional, since business schools can help develop students' CQ mainly by preparing the channels, such as cultural events, exchange

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and double-degree programmes, summer schools, and cross-cultural training, through which students can access intercultural knowledge and experience (Bulut Şahin, Köylü, & Soulé, 2026; Iskhakova et al., 2022). This is in line with the existing literature, which shows that institution-level activities ranging from cultural events to mentoring schemes can build intercultural competence even for most students who never go abroad (Bulut Şahin et al., 2026; Hackett et al., 2023). The weakness common to these initiatives is that they cannot be carried out uniformly by every business school, especially in the context of Indonesia, since they typically require extensive institutional networks and considerable financial resources.

A further pattern worth drawing out concerns how the two underlying functions relate to the dimensions of CQ. Knowledge-building methods such as lecturing, supervised reading, and presentations mostly affect the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions by equipping students with cultural knowledge and interpretive skills. In contrast, experience-based strategies address motivational and behavioral factors. Students can develop the motivation to interact in cross-cultural contexts, as well as an understanding of communication styles and behaviors, through actual or simulated multicultural environments. This is consistent with meta-analytic evidence that motivational CQ, or the desire to engage with other cultures, is the dimension most strongly associated with cross-cultural adjustment (Tripathi et al., 2024), as well as with the finding that cultural exposure and communication reinforce each other over time (Haikuo, 2025). Meanwhile, direct experience, such as travel or international projects, tends to activate all CQ dimensions, which is why it is sometimes referred to as the most effective means of development (Gustomo et al., 2018; Ott & Iskhakova, 2019).

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the development of student CQ is not confined to classroom learning. It can occur at the individual level, which has rarely received attention, and it can be supported at the institutional level through the structures provided by a university.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to explore how business school students can develop cultural intelligence, a competency that has become increasingly important for graduates entering the culturally diverse workforce. Through semi-structured interviews with lecturers, students, and business school administrators, the study found that CQ development can occur at three levels: individual, classroom, and institutional. The methods at each level operate through two underlying functions: building cultural knowledge and providing intercultural experience, with the latter further divided into direct and indirect learning.

The study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it widens the scope of CQ development beyond classroom interventions, showing that the individual and institutional levels also matter for developing CQ, despite receiving comparatively little attention. At the individual level, students can take the initiative, and institutions can support that initiative through recommendations, consultation, and additional resources. At the institutional level, business schools play an enabling role by providing channels such as cultural events, exchange programmes, double-degree programmes, summer schools, and cross-cultural training. The second contribution is the classification of CQ development methods according to whether they build knowledge or provide experience. This classification gives educators a practical tool for selecting methods that fit their objectives and constraints, and it highlights the value of combining knowledge-oriented and experience-oriented approaches for comprehensive development. For business schools, the practical implication is that they can further enhance students' CQ development by supporting individual learning, expanding international networks, and securing funding for intercultural activities.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study identifies the available methods and their perceived strengths and weaknesses, but it does not measure their comparative effectiveness, and the findings are based on the perceptions of a relatively small group of informants in a single national context. Future research could therefore examine the relative effectiveness of different methods, ideally through longitudinal or experimental designs, and test the proposed three-level framework across other institutional and cultural settings. Establishing which methods are

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most effective in developing each dimension of CQ would give business schools the evidence they need to design CQ-development initiatives with far greater precision and help ensure that graduates are genuinely equipped for the realities of an increasingly multicultural working world.

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