How Has the Acquisition of Cultural Awareness Assisted Local Teachers Facilitate the Learning

Process of Latin American Students?

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Abstract

Cross-cultural leadership studies have contributed to the understanding of how cultures around the world do businesses, negotiate, and perform. In order to develop multicultural awareness, there is a need to integrate the early studies of cross-cultural leadership with the most recent ones. Multicultural awareness is also constructed through developing cultural competencies and cultural intelligence. Cultural intelligence plays a significant role in cross-cultural leadership as it contributes to an understanding of how people from different cultures behave from a position of equality. Understanding and reflecting on one's own culture is imperative to activate the process of cross-cultural awareness. Teachers are leaders who share a vision, facilitate processes and guide students to achieve their goals. Teachers of multicultural backgrounds, particularly Latin America, can benefit from the acquisition of cultural awareness to contribute to a more effective teaching and learning experience. A mixed-method design is proposed to answer the following research question: How Has the Acquisition of Cultural Awareness Assisted Local Teachers Facilitate the Learning Process of Latin American Students?

Keywords: teaching, multicultural leadership, cultural intelligence, mixed-method

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How Has the Acquisition of Cultural Awareness Assisted Local Teachers Facilitate the Learning

Process of Latin American Students?

Globalization has created a need to understand how cultural differences and similarities

impact leadership performance. Globalization has also created a need for leaders to develop

cross-cultural awareness (Northouse, 2013). Cross-cultural leadership studies have contributed to

the understanding of how people from different nations interact, do businesses, negotiate, and

perform. In order to develop cross- cultural awareness, there is a need to integrate the early

studies of cross-cultural leadership with the most recent ones. Cross-cultural awareness is also

constructed through developing cultural competencies and cultural intelligence. Cultural

intelligence plays a significant role in cross-cultural leadership as it contributes to an

understanding of how people from different cultures behave from a position of equality-

understanding other cultures and civilizations with empathy (Livermore, 2010). The author of

this paper agrees with Warren (2016) who perceives teachers as classroom leaders as they share a

vision and guide students to achieve their goals. Teachers who understand and reflect on their

own culture activate the process of cross-cultural awareness. Research by Chin-Yin, Indiatsi and

Wong (2016) shows that the number of learners whose first language is not English and whose

cultural backgrounds come from different societies is on the rise. This paper begins by discussing

the importance of developing cultural awareness in multicultural classrooms with a focus on

Latin American students. Then, the paper provides a literature review on multicultural leadership,

cross- cultural awareness, and cultural intelligence for teachers as multicultural leaders. Next, the

paper discusses the best research design for the proposal research question, as well the strengths

and weaknesses of the method.

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The author of this paper suggests the following research question for a mixed-method study: *How Has the Acquisition of Cultural Awareness Assisted Local Teachers Facilitate the Learning Process of Latin American Students?* This author aims to investigate how cultural awareness has assisted teachers, who teach English for adults from different cultural backgrounds (particularly Latin America), in the teaching- learning process. Li (2013) states that there is a general agreement in research that culture plays a critical role in culturally and linguistically diverse students' learning and social integration in the host country. Additionally, the author argues that there are different strategies that teachers can develop in order to help students. One of the strategies refers to the ability and willingness a teacher can develop in order to become aware of cultural differences. The author of this paper agrees with the findings of Li (2013) who explains that teachers can become cultural workers by enhancing their cultural awareness: "teachers also need to have the skills to incorporate the multiple cultural perspectives into their curriculum, anticipate and adjust for students' different communication and learning styles and abilities, and accept and value cultural differences in their classroom" (p. 140). There is a need for teachers as classroom leaders to develop cultural awareness for classroom effectiveness. McCalman (2014) argues that cultural differences when ignored in classroom can discourage the learning process and most teachers don't receive proper training to work with students whose first language and culture are different from their own. For the purposes of this paper, the term culture is defined as "the learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people" (Northouse, 2013, p. 428). According to Ferraro and Briody (2013) there are many ways to learn culture: through comparison with different scenarios, direct experience, discussions, case studies, trainings, etc. Leaders who have a desire to learn about their own cultures and other cultures gain an advantage to lead a cross-cultural

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setting successfully. Cross-cultural awareness can take place when one views other cultural

values in relation to his or her own.

Cross-Cultural Awareness

Northouse (2013) discusses that culture can be learned. Adler and Bartholomew (as cited

in Northouse, 2013) affirm that there are five essential cross-cultural competencies: 1) leaders

need to understand business, political, and cultural environments globally; 2) leaders need to

learn different aspects of different cultures- from gastronomy to technologies; 3) leaders need to

learn how to work with people from different countries concurrently; 4) leaders need to learn

how to communicate with other cultures; 5) leaders need to learn how to live with people from

different cultures from a position of equality. Yamazaki and Kayes (2004) discuss that

cross-cultural learning is possible. The authors conducted a study on competencies for a

successful expatriate adaptation and separated competencies in a learning skill dimension: 1)

interpersonal; 2) information; 3) analytic; 4) action and 5) adaptive. The interpersonal dimension,

for instance, has two competencies: building relationships and valuing people from different

cultures. The authors also explain that it is possible to gain strength in those competencies by

establishing contact with people from different cultures and engaging in open conversations and

conclude that the communication ability is an exercise that needs to be practiced frequently in

order to achieve the full potential of learning skill dimension. Understanding own and other's

mood and emotions helps one to learn how to manage stress which is a very important factor in

adaptive dimension. Knowledge of verbal and nonverbal communications of other cultures is

also an important skill to develop cross-cultural awareness. McCalman (2014) conducted a study

on ESL American teachers in multicultural classrooms and how they can be facilitators in the

learning process if they are cultural sensitive. The author states that "it is important to note that

the new wave of immigrants to the United States is coming from collectivistic societies (Latin

American, Asia). Teachers with intercultural competence skills will quickly realize this and

incorporate the experiences of these cultures into their teaching repertoire" (McCalman, 2014, p.

80); the findings on that study confirm that cross-cultural or intercultural competencies should be

assessed so differences and similarities can be learned. The teachers participated in an

intercultural communication class where they discussed cultural diversity, cognitive aspects of

different cultures, and how students learn differently. Despite the recognition that it is not

possible to learn everything about all cultures, the main objective of the study was to prove that

teachers (as classroom leaders) can become cultural sensitive and find the best ways to lead a

cultural diverse scenario.

Connerley and Pedersen (2005) state that there is a need to understand both similarities

and differences when it comes to culture. The authors also affirm that there is a need to accept

cultural complexity. The authors state that "multiculturalism presents us with a paradox because

it requires us to look at how we are the same and how we are different at the very same time"

(Connerley & Pedersen, 2005, p. 22). This author agrees with Connerley and Pedersen (2005)

regarding culture complexity. The authors explain that culture balance is dynamic, and they

provide the reader with ten examples of essential aspects of leading in a multicultural context.

Three of the most important aspects, in this author's opinion, are: 1) identifying positive

implications in a negative experience; 2) avoiding simplistic solutions to complex problems; 3)

avoiding stereotyping of others. Multicultural perspectives are dynamic for each person, place,

and time.

Connerley and Pedersen (2005) also discuss the importance of understanding cultural

frameworks. Hofstede (as cited in Connerley & Pedersen, 2005) conducted a large- scale study

of IBM, which employed people from different cultures. Through the use of extensive amounts

of questionnaire data, Hofstede was able to rank the cultures along 6 dimensions: individualism-

collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity- femininity, long-term vs. short-

term orientation. Cross- cultural researches on leadership were influenced by the early studies of

Hofstede, but since then several patterns of cultural values have been suggested. One of the most

recent studies was carried out by GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior

Effectiveness) researchers who collected data from managers representing 951 organizations in

62 national cultures. According to Ferraro and Briody (2013), the first dimension to understand

cross-cultural interactions is the individual- collective dimension. Some cultures focus on the

individual over the group, others focus on the interests of the group above their own.

Understanding how individualism-collectivism play out in different cultures is important to

understand cross-cultural leadership performance. Individual- oriented cultures value task

completion, autonomy and independence, success as an own ability and they perceive individuals

as major units of social perception. Collective- oriented cultures value relationships,

interdependence, group achievements and strong connections to a few groups. They perceive

groups as units of social perception (Ferraro & Briody, 2013).

The second dimension to understand how cross-cultural interactions work is the

equality-hierarchy dimension. Ferraro and Briody (2013) divide this dimension in two

categories: egalitarian cultures and hierarchical cultures. The authors note that this dimension

helps businesspeople understand about power, formality, delegation of authority, among others.

The decision- making process, for instance, takes longer in egalitarian cultures where all levels

are asked for feedback. The authors also note that gender egalitarianism is also an important

aspect of cultural dimensions. Sweden, for instance, is considered to be one of the most gender-

egalitarian countries where women and men share power and influence equally. A leader who

belongs to a gender- egalitarian culture and is leading a cross-cultural setting with the presence

of hierarchical cultures should understand how power and influence are perceived differently.

The third dimension in cross- cultural interactions is the change orientation dimension. Hofstede

and GLOBE researchers used the phrase *uncertainty avoidance* to "refer to the lack of tolerance

for ambiguity and the need for formal rules and high-level organizational structure" (Ferraro &

Briody, 2013, p. 41); this dimension focuses on change-embracing cultures and change-fearing

cultures or low to high uncertainty avoidance. Characteristics of change-embracing cultures

include: differences are tolerated, more risk taking, hope for success and willingness to change

employer. Characteristics of change-fearing cultures include: differences are considered

dangerous and initiative of subordinates is discouraged, less risk taking, loyalty to employer and

fear of failure. As stated previously, globalization has created the need for cross-cultural

awareness for leaders who have accepted the challenge of leading cross- cultural diversity. For

instance, leaders at specific occasions will have to learn how to make decisions in a setting with

risks and uncertainty (Ferraro & Briody, 2013).

The last dimension explained by Ferraro and Briody (2013) is the time orientation

dimension. Different cultures deal with time in different ways. Some cultures value punctuality

and rigid schedules. Others value social relationships and flexibility. Different cultures perceive

benefits based on time orientation: "people from future oriented societies believe that is far more

important to trade off short-term gains in the present for more long-term benefits in the future"

(Ferraro & Briody, 2013, p. 34). In addition to Hofstede's research, Connerley and Pedersen

(2005) provide the reader with other studies about cultural dimensions. Trompenaars and

Hampden- Turner (as cited in Connerley & Pedersen, 2005) for instance, cite the dimension

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neutral versus affective. Individuals in a neutral culture hide their feelings while maintaining a

cool self- control. In an affective culture, individuals express their thoughts openly while using

gestures and dramatic expressions. This author agrees with the findings of Ferraro and Briody

(2013) who state that state that managers or leaders should avoid overreliance on cultural

generalizations. The dimensions should be analyzed, studied and considered. But other variables

such as education, biology or experience might affect behaviors as well.

The Importance of Cultural Intelligence for Teachers as Multicultural Leaders

The concept cultural intelligence, or simply CQ, was firstly introduced in 1986 with the

Sternberg and Detter- man's multiple intelligences framework (Ersoy, 2014). Many approaches

to cross-cultural leadership are either too simplistic or far too extreme. One does not cover the

aspects of cross-cultural leadership by simply being nice or avoiding certain taboos but one does

not have to become a cross-cultural expert to become a cross-cultural leader according to

Livermore (2010); the author defines cultural intelligence as "the capability to function

effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational cultures" (p. 4). Cultural intelligence is

needed in different situations; it helps leaders, for instance, to address the challenge of recruiting

and retaining cross-cultural talent. Livermore (2010) also states that other intercultural

approaches are significant to address the theme cross-cultural leadership but cultural intelligence

presents several advantages over them, such as: 1) CQ is a meta-framework rooted in strong

research and it has been tested across multiple cultures, samples and times; 2) the concept is

aligned to the study of multiple intelligences research; 3) the approach also considers a leader's

personal interests, strategic thinking that aligned with sociological differences in cultural

behaviors and values from other approaches can successfully address cultural interactions; 4) the

approach emphasizes that any leader can enhance his or her cultural dimensions through training

and experience and 5) the approach focuses on developing an overall repertoire of cultural

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understanding. Ersoy (2014) conducted a qualitative study on cross-cultural leadership through detailed and substantial interviews with six Western expatriate managers and thirteen local Turkish managers who represent top and middle-level executives working in a hotel operating in Turkey. The author of the study observed that cultural intelligence played a significant role in cross-cultural leadership effectiveness. Ersoy (2014) states that "most expatriate managers emphasized the importance of a deep understanding of Turkish culture and cultural differences" (p. 6102); they demonstrated cross-cultural awareness thorough the in-depth interviews. In the behavioral perspective, the managers cited enthusiasm, balance and flexibility as relevant characteristics to adapt to new cultures. Most of them were exposed to trainings and previous cross-cultural experiences that allowed them to develop cross-cultural awareness. "Cultural awareness is the foundation of communication and it involves the ability of becoming aware of cultural values, beliefs and perceptions" (Ersoy, 2014, p. 6105). The ability to adapt effectively to cross-cultural settings can be optimized by following a four-step cycle of CQ (cultural intelligence) exemplified by Livermore (2010): CQ Drive- the motivation for the assignment; CQ Knowledge- cultural information needed to fulfill the assignment; CQ Strategy- what the plan is for the initiative and CQ Action- behaviors and competencies needed to adapt to the initiative effectively.

Mixed-Method Design

The method of research that this author suggests to answer *How Has the Acquisition of Cultural Awareness Assisted Local Teachers Facilitate the Learning Process of Latin American Students?* is the use of mixed-method design. In *Strategies for smooth and effective cross-cultural online collaborative learnin*g, Junfeng, Kinshuk, Huiju, Sue-Jen and Ronghuai (2014) propose a cross-cultural online collaborative learning utilizing web 2.0 technologies to enhance cross- cultural competencies. The authors designed a pilot study between the West and

the East to assess if international exposure could impact students' understanding of another culture. American and Chinese students participated in the pilot study. The study revealed that Chinese and American students were interested in each other's culture, their attitudes to cross-cultural online collaborative learning were positive, and culture had an influence on learning methods. The authors used a mixed method research approach using questionnaire, interview and content analysis. A questionnaire was developed based on the evaluation methods for cross-cultural collaborative learning. The quantitative data was collected from different close-ended questions of the questionnaire. The authors also utilized open-ended questions and focus group interviews. Creswell (2014) describes two kinds of data collection: open and closed-ended. Open-ended data collection is qualitative while closed-ended data collection is quantitative. The author emphasizes that both forms are important to analyze an occurrence and a researcher should integrate, merge, connect or embed the data. The author also notes that mixed-methods research is time consuming to implement.

The author of this paper wants to use closed- ended questions, open-ended questions, and focus groups interviews to assess the role of cultural awareness among local ESL teachers. In order to assess the cultural intelligence level among teachers and also among students, this author wants to utilize a survey research design. In *The Cultural Intelligence Level Among International Students In Jordanian Universities* (Al-Jarrah, 2016), the author discusses the level of cultural intelligence among international students. Al-Jarrah (2016) conducted the study through two important questions: 1) What is the level of cultural intelligence among international students in Jordan's universities? 2) How does international students' cultural intelligence differ by gender and by nationality? The author worked with international students from the United States, Korea, the European Union, China, and Malaysia. The findings of the study suggest that

openness to experience is a necessary personality characteristic that is related to a person's capability to function effectively in diverse cultural settings (CQ). With regards to the methodology, Al-Jarrah (2016) utilized a survey research design. The study sample consisted of 169 male and female students from various nationalities selected from students enrolled in teaching Arabic for non-native speakers' program in the language centers of the University of Jordan and Yarmouk University. In order to measure cultural intelligence, the researcher used 20-item scale, developed by Yordonova (as cited in Al-Jarrah, 2016) and cultural intelligence (CQ), composed of four parts: meta-cognition CQ, motivational CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral (CQ). The quantitative study was efficient to show if cultural intelligence among international students would vary or not. According to Creswell (2014), a survey design provides a quantitative numeric description of trends, attitudes, opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population. "The survey research design showed the most effective research method of data collection that can be generalized to a larger population, as well as being time and cost effective" (Al-Jarrah, 2016, p. 28). Al-Jarrah (2016) recognizes the limitations of a quantitative study and adds that a qualitative research would be beneficial for future studies. Quantitative researches do not offer a way to explore an academic question rigorously as qualitative researches do (Salkind, 2012).

The role of cultural intelligence in cross-cultural leadership effectiveness: A qualitative study in the hospitality industry (Ersoy, 2014) provides the reader with the benefits of a qualitative study about cultural intelligence. The study revealed that cultural intelligence played a significant role in cross-cultural leadership effectiveness. With regards to the methodology, Ersoy (2014) conducted a qualitative study on cross-cultural leadership through detailed and substantial interviews with six Western expatriate managers (2 Spanish, 2 Dutch, 2 Italian) and thirteen local

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Turkish managers who represent top and middle-level executives working in a hotel operating in

Turkey. In order to determine the impact of cultural intelligence in cross-cultural leadership

effectiveness, the author used ethnographic analysis. The participants expressed their perceptions

of the keys of successful leadership in the cross-cultural context and responded to an open ended

questionnaire. Some of the questions relating to the expatriate managers were: 1) Could you

define some typical cultural differences between Turkish culture and your own culture? 2) As an

experienced administrator, what do you suggest for young manager candidates about living and

working in a foreign culture? 3) What are the challenges that you faced in the process of cultural

adaptation process? Some of the questions relating to the Turkish Department managers were: 1)

Is there any ease of working with an expatriate manager? 2) To what extent is the attitude of your

expatriate managers towards your culture important? 3) Do your expatriates managers

understand Turkish culture? (Ersoy, 2014). The participants were asked to give as much detail as

possible.

The qualitative methodology presents several strengths. One of them refers to the ability

a researcher has to ask open-ended questions so the participants can provide the researcher with

important details. Through the questions mentioned above, the researcher could determine the

effectiveness of cultural intelligence in cross-cultural leadership. Additionally, the author of the

article in question used an ethnographic analysis. Salkind (2012) cites several advantages in this

analysis. One of the advantages is the naturalistic orientation: researchers actually take up

residence in the culture being studied and become participant-observers. There are also

limitations in the study in question. Ersoy (2014) recognizes some of them: "to get more reliable

statistical results, larger samples are required thus future researches which will be held in this

area may include the regions which are important in terms of numbers of expatriate managers

outside Istanbul" (p. 6106). According to Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin (2009), "interviews have

the potential for bias to occur in relation to how the interview is conducted, how the interviewees

are selected and if and how the interviewer has influenced the interview process" (p. 312). The

authors state that in order to reduce bias in the interviewing process, the interviewer must prepare

well before the interview. Salkind (2012) also cites the importance of practicing to increase

confidence and mastery of the questions for a smoother interview process; additionally, the

author states that interviewers must remain objective and ensure that "the questions neither lead

nor put respondents in a position where few alternatives are open" (p. 203). In order to reduce

bias, a researcher must remain objective, but at the same time, he or she must create a human

connection with the informant. In order to obtain the best data, the interviewer must treat the

interviewee with respect and understanding; the interviewee must feel that his or her

participation is important. Preparing well for the interview is also an important step for an

effective data collection.

The author of this paper also wants to use focus groups interviews to assess the role of

cultural awareness in multicultural classrooms. Scott and Garner (2014) argue that focus group

method "explores the malleability of individual beliefs in interaction with others, a type of data

that interviews could not reveal" (p. 300). The authors explain fourteen important steps to

conduct the process successfully. One of the steps refers to the ability a researcher must have to

set up the interview guide that can move from simple questions to complex topics. Kellmereit

(2015) states that "the research method of focus groups enables the researcher, without

pressuring the participants to make decisions, to examine what and how they think and why they

think in a special way about the issue of importance" (p. 49). Salkind (2012) explains that a

focus group is a gathering of people who are being moderated by a member of a research team;

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the setting in which the focus group takes place should be neutral so the participants feel

comfortable to expose their opinions. Focus groups have four major functions: gather

information, generate insight, determine how group members reach decisions, and encourage

group interaction (Salkind, 2012). This author believes that one can study and learn about

perceptions of local Latin American students and local teachers of ESL (English as a Second

Language) who teach primarily adult Latin American learners, for instance, by gathering

different people to discuss specific topics. An interaction with participants from different local

schools could help this author investigate characteristics of cultural awareness acquisition in

teachers or needs of Latin American students that are not met in classrooms due to cultural

dimensions differences; the focus group can also help this author to assess if any difficulties that

teachers of Latin American learners might have occur because of cross-cultural differences.

Focus group methodology is incredibly difficult to execute, but with the use of neutrality and

right questions, a researcher can obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest (Scott & Garner,

2014). Focus groups are a good way of getting an idea of how members of a particular

community feel about a particular topic and what can be done to improve the situation

(Schermerhorn, Osborn, Uhl-Bien, & Hunt, 2012); the research question of this author invites the

use of focus group method as it involves interaction between students and teachers and focuses

on specific topics such as importance of understanding other cultures, characteristics of Latin

American students, learning process, etc. Chin-Yin, Indiatsi and Wong (2016) suggest some

discussion topics for a qualitative research study with a focus on ESL (English as a second

language) teachers; this author believes the topics can be suitable for a focus group discussion

with local teachers who teach multicultural classrooms, particularly Latin American students:1)

how prepared the teachers feel to create culturally inclusive learning materials; 2) how prepared

they feel to distinguish culturally- appropriate behavior from misbehavior; 3) how prepared they

feel to assess different learning strategies for different cultures.

Final Considerations

This paper aimed to explore the importance of cross-cultural leadership studies,

cross-culture competencies and cultural intelligence to develop cross-cultural awareness in

multicultural classrooms with a focus on Latin American students as the new wave of students

who come to the US is mainly from collectivist societies such as Latin America. The author of

this paper perceives teachers as classroom leaders as they share a vision and guide students to

achieve their goals. Teachers can become cultural sensitive by changing the mindset,

implementing strategies and learning new dimensions. This paper focused on demonstrating the

role of cultural intelligence in cross-cultural leadership and why teaching a cross-cultural

scenario requires cross-cultural awareness. In the past three decades, many studies have focused

on identifying dimensions of culture such as the GLOBE studies and the studies of Hofstede. The

GLOBE studies offer a strong body of findings as they help leaders to understand how cultures

around the world view leadership and how the dimensions help leaders to change their behavior

when leading cross-culturally. Although cross-cultural studies have criticisms, they mainly offer

valuable information about the unique ways culture influences the leadership process.

Cross-cultural leadership studies are relevant to understand how different cultures present

different leadership styles. Understanding, for instance, how one's own culture works in order to

understand others, is an exercise to enhance cross-cultural competency. There are, however,

some important considerations to make when learning other cultures: leaders should avoid

overreliance on cultural generalizations, leaders should learn about other cultures and live with

them from a position of equality, leaders should be aware of different possible behaviors within

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the same culture. Cultural intelligence can be learned; when leaders activate their CQ, they are

able to better understand their own culture and other cultures. Leaders become more adaptive as

they use different strategies in different cultural situations. Understanding one's own culture,

cross- culture dimensions, cross-culture competencies and activating culture intelligence through

different aspects (reading, planning, engaging, learning, experiencing) can help teachers to

develop cross- cultural awareness and be more effective facilitators in the learning process of

students from different cultural backgrounds. The research question proposed by this author *How

Has the Acquisition of Cultural Awareness Assisted Local Teachers Facilitate the Learning

Process of Latin American Students?* can help school communities identify some pitfalls in the

learning process in multicultural classrooms with a focus on collectivist societies (particularly

Latin America). The methodology proposed by this author is the use of mixed-method design

with a focus on closed- ended questions, open-ended questions, and focus groups interviews. The

primary goal, according to this author, is to develop cultural sensitivity to better address students'

needs and expectations and guide them to accomplish their goals. This author also believes it is

important that students can learn the culture of the country they are pursuing their studies in;

however, the focus of this paper was to formulate a research question that addresses cultural

awareness for teachers as classroom leaders so they can facilitate students' learning.

Additionally, this author agrees with Livermore (2010) who states that cultural awareness can

give important contributions to the world such as economic sustainability and world peace.

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