

Cultural Intelligence in Global Educational Leadership: A Systematic Review

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Abstract - Globalization in education has heightened the complexity of educational leadership in multicultural contexts, requiring educational leaders to possess cross-cultural adaptive capabilities. One key competency gaining increasing attention is cultural intelligence. However, empirical and conceptual studies on cultural intelligence in global educational leadership remain scattered and lack comprehensive synthesis. This study aims to analyze and synthesize research findings on the role of cultural intelligence in global educational leadership through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. Literature searches were conducted in reputable international databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar, covering publications from 2010 to 2026. Articles meeting inclusion criteria were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by PRISMA guidelines. The review findings indicate that cultural intelligence plays a significant role in enhancing educational leadership effectiveness, particularly in implementing culturally responsive leadership, managing diversity, strengthening organizational culture, and improving teacher performance and student academic adaptation. Nevertheless, existing literature still shows fragmentation in studies and a tendency to position cultural intelligence as an individual attribute rather than an integrated leadership capability within global education systems. The novelty of this research lies in positioning cultural intelligence as a core competency of global educational leadership and developing a conceptual synthesis that integrates findings across contexts and regions. This study is expected to enrich the theoretical foundation of global educational leadership and provide practical implications for policy development and programs preparing culturally intelligent educational leaders.

Keywords – cultural intelligence, educational leadership, global education, multicultural education, systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Globalization in education has transformed educational institutions into increasingly multicultural social spaces, characterized by international mobility of students and educators, cultural identity diversity, and demands for cross-national collaboration. In this context, the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) theory developed by Earley and Ang views cultural intelligence as an individual's capability to function effectively in cross-cultural

situations through metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions. However, educational leadership practices in various countries remain predominantly administrative and insufficiently sensitive to cultural dynamics, leading to field-level issues such as cross-cultural miscommunication, weak inclusive policies, and low-quality multicultural school climates. Empirical studies indicate that limitations in educational

leaders' cultural intelligence impact leadership effectiveness, teacher performance, and student academic adaptation in diverse environments[1][2].

Several studies affirm that cultural intelligence plays a strategic role in shaping culturally responsive educational leadership. Yin [3] demonstrates that school administrators' cultural intelligence levels directly correlate with culturally responsive leadership practices and the successful implementation of culture-based leadership programs. Similar findings are reported by Widodo et al.[4], who reveal that school principal leadership based on cultural intelligence significantly influences teacher performance through the mediation of organizational culture and school governance. Nevertheless, existing literature still exhibits conceptual and methodological gaps, where most studies examine cultural intelligence partially—among teachers, students, or general leadership—without comprehensively synthesizing it within the framework of global educational leadership, particularly through systematic review approaches [5]

Addressing these gaps, this study aims to present a systematic review of the role of cultural intelligence in global educational leadership by integrating empirical findings across contexts and regions. The novelty of this research lies in positioning cultural intelligence as a core competency of global educational leadership, as well as developing a conceptual synthesis that links cultural intelligence dimensions to leadership practices, diversity management, and the creation of inclusive and equitable educational climates. Thus, this study not only strengthens the theoretical foundation of global educational leadership but also provides practical implications for policy development and programs preparing educational leaders who are adaptive to global cultural complexities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to:

1. Systematically analyze and synthesize research findings on the role of cultural intelligence in global educational leadership within multicultural education contexts.
2. Identify patterns, mechanisms, and impacts of cultural intelligence on educational leadership effectiveness, diversity management, and institutional performance and inclusivity.
3. Uncover research gaps and formulate conceptual contributions to strengthen the development of theory and practice in cultural intelligence-based global educational leadership.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to comprehensively synthesize empirical and conceptual findings on cultural intelligence in global educational leadership. The SLR approach was selected because it enables researchers to systematically, transparently, and replicably identify patterns, trends, research gaps, and theoretical and practical contributions from prior studies.

Literature Search Procedure

Literature searches were conducted in reputable international scientific databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. Search keywords were combinatorially constructed using Boolean operators, such as: “cultural intelligence” AND “educational leadership”, “global educational leadership”, “multicultural leadership”, and “culturally responsive leadership”. The search process was limited to articles published between 2010 and 2026 to capture the most recent and

relevant developments in global educational leadership.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria encompassed: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles; (2) empirical studies or systematic reviews addressing cultural intelligence and/or educational leadership in multicultural or global contexts; (3) articles in English or Indonesian; and (4) availability of full-text access. Exclusion criteria included conference proceedings, non-academic reports, duplicate articles, and studies not directly relevant to educational leadership contexts.

Article Selection and Data Analysis Process

Article selection was conducted in multiple stages: initial identification, title and abstract screening, full-text eligibility assessment, and final selection. This process adhered to PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) principles to ensure transparency and accuracy in study selection. Selected articles were subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis, grouping findings by major themes such as cultural intelligence dimensions, educational leadership

styles, diversity management, and leadership impacts on educational organizational performance.

Validity and Reliability

To maintain the validity and reliability of the review findings, this study applied source triangulation, quality evaluation of articles based on journal reputation and research methodology, and critical discussion across study findings. Through this approach, the synthesized results are expected to provide an accurate and trustworthy overview of the role of cultural intelligence in global educational leadership.



Research Flowchart Design

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Characteristics of Selected Studies on Cultural Intelligence in Global Educational Leadership

No	Author(s) & Year	Country / Context	Research Design	Sample / Data Source	Focus Area
1	Muadzin & Sunarto (2025) [6]	Indonesia (HE)	Qualitative	University leaders	Ethical & cultural leadership
2	Ifnaldi et al. (2025) [7]	Indonesia	Conceptual	Literature-based	Multicultural educational leadership
3	Putra et al. (2025) [8]	Global	Literature review	Academic articles	Culture-based global leadership

4	Al-Otaibi (2025) [9]	Saudi Arabia	Quantitative	University students	CQ & digital citizenship
5	Sousa (2025) [10]	Global (HE)	Conceptual	Policy & theory	CQ, inclusion & collaboration
6	Soejanto et al. (2024) [11]	Global	Bibliometric	Scopus-indexed articles	Trends in CQ research
7	Aldhaheri (2017) [1]	UAE	Quantitative	Educational leaders	CQ & leadership style
8	Tesfaye et al. (2025) [12]	Ethiopia	Quantitative	Teacher trainees	CQ & academic self-efficacy
9	Katıtaş et al. (2024) [13]	Turkey	SEM	School teachers	CQ & multicultural attitudes
10	Yin (2024) [3]	China	Case study	School administrators	Cultural leadership practices
11	Widodo et al. (2024) [4]	Indonesia	Quantitative	Principals & teachers	CQ-based leadership & performance
12	Živković (2025) [5]	Global	Conceptual review	Prior studies	CQ & leadership evolution
13	Xiaoying et al. (2023) [14]	Global	Systematic review	International students	CQ & academic adaptation
14	Haikuo (2025) [15]	China	Quantitative (SEM)	University students	CQ & multicultural literacy
15	Khemakhem (2026) [16]	USA / Global	Program evaluation	Leadership programs	CQ development effectiveness
16	Abdelkader et al. (2024) [17]	Spain	Case study	Multicultural schools	Leadership in crisis contexts

Table 2. Key Findings and Research Gaps

Theme	Key Findings from Prior Studies	Identified Gaps
Cultural Intelligence (CQ)	CQ enhances leadership effectiveness, inclusion, and adaptation in multicultural settings	CQ often examined as an individual trait, not as a systemic leadership competence
Leadership Practices	High CQ supports culturally responsive and ethical leadership	Limited integration of CQ into global educational leadership frameworks
Organizational Outcomes	CQ-based leadership improves teacher performance and school culture	Mediating mechanisms insufficiently synthesized across studies
Educational Contexts	CQ relevant across schools and higher education	Studies fragmented by region and education level
Methodological Approaches	Growth of quantitative and SEM-based studies	Scarcity of comprehensive systematic reviews focusing on leadership
Global Perspective	Increasing attention to multicultural and global education	Limited integration of Global South perspectives into global theory

1. Cultural Intelligence as Foundation of Global Educational Leadership

Literature synthesis reveals that cultural intelligence (CQ) constitutes a core competency in global educational leadership. Recent studies (Al-Otaibi, 2025; Sousa, 2025; Živković, 2025) [9] [10] [5] affirm that educational leaders with high CQ levels can adaptively, reflectively, and ethically respond to cross-cultural complexities. CQ enables leaders to understand diverse cultural values, norms, and practices, ensuring strategic decisions remain non-ethnocentric but inclusive and contextually appropriate.

In the context of educational globalization, leadership can no longer rely solely on administrative competencies but must integrate cultural intelligence's metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions [5] [2].

2. Relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Educational Leadership Styles

Several studies demonstrate a strong relationship between cultural intelligence and educational leadership style effectiveness. Widodo et al. (2024) [4] prove that principal leadership based on CQ significantly influences teacher performance, mediated by organizational culture and school governance. These findings are reinforced by Reyes et al. (2025) [18] and Yin (2024) [3], who confirm that CQ enhances supervision quality, cross-cultural communication, and culturally responsive leadership practices.

In multicultural education contexts, leaders with high CQ tend to adopt transformational, participative, and ethical leadership styles [6] [8], which align with global education demands rooted in values.

3. Cultural Intelligence and Diversity Management in Education

National and international literature (Ifnaldi et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2025; Uy & Mugadza, 2024) [7] [19] [20] consistently affirms cultural intelligence as a strategic instrument for managing ethnic, religious, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity among students and educators. Case studies and systematic reviews (Queupil et al., 2023; Abdelkader et al., 2024) [21] [17] demonstrate that leaders' failures in diversity management often stem from low cultural sensitivity and understanding.

Conversely, global educational leadership grounded in CQ demonstrably fosters inclusive, equitable, and equality-oriented school climates.

4. Impact of Cultural Intelligence on Teachers and Students

Research findings also indicate indirect impacts of leaders' cultural intelligence on teachers and students. Katıtaş et al. (2024) [13] and Tesfaye et al. (2025) [12] found that teachers' CQ positively correlates with multicultural education attitudes and academic self-efficacy, influenced by policies and school climates shaped by leaders.

In higher and international education contexts, CQ contributes to student academic adaptation, multicultural literacy, and cross-cultural communication skills [14] [15]. This underscores that culturally intelligent global educational leadership generates systemic effects, not only on organizational structures but also on learning quality and psychosocial well-being within school communities.

5. Integration of Ethics, Culture, and Global Leadership

Several Indonesian studies (Muadzin & Sunarto, 2025; Dewi et al., 2025; Fatimah & Martha, 2025) [6] [22] [23] emphasize integrating local ethical and cultural values into global educational leadership. These findings indicate that cultural

intelligence does not operate independently but interconnects with ethical and moral leadership, particularly in values-based multicultural educational institutions.

Thus, effective global educational leadership balances global demands with local wisdom through cultural intelligence.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This systematic literature review confirms that cultural intelligence constitutes a core competency in global educational leadership, particularly within increasingly multicultural and complex educational institutions. Synthesis results demonstrate that educational leaders with high cultural intelligence levels more effectively implement culturally responsive, ethical, and inclusive leadership, positively impacting teacher performance, organizational culture, school governance, and student academic adaptation.

Cultural intelligence strategically assists leaders in managing diversity, minimizing cross-cultural conflicts, and creating equitable and sustainable educational climates. Although research on cultural intelligence and educational leadership continues to evolve, this review reveals existing literature remains fragmented and context-specific. Cultural intelligence is generally examined as an individual characteristic rather than a fully integrated leadership capability within global education systems. Additionally, research synthesizing cross-regional findings and integrating developing country contexts into global educational leadership theoretical frameworks remains limited.

By positioning cultural intelligence as a central element of global educational leadership, this study offers conceptual and practical contributions for theory development, policy formulation, and leadership preparation programs. Findings emphasize integrating cultural intelligence into leadership

training, continuous professional development, and inclusive education policy formulation. Future research should employ longitudinal approaches and mixed methods to explore cultural intelligence development dynamics among educational leaders across diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

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