

Intercultural interaction modulating implicit attitudes towards disability and cultural competence in higher education

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Abstract

People with disabilities (PWD) are increasingly recognized as one of the most overlooked potentials in the labor market. More and more disability inclusion strategies appear and evolve in the workplaces. Nevertheless, employees with disabilities in the work environment are still faced challenges of explicit and implicit biases. Especially, comparison with positive explicit attitude due to social expectation, implicit attitudes towards disability tend to be negatively tied with charity, inability and distrust. This present article originally proposes intercultural interaction as the solution to modulate implicit and emotional attitudes towards disability. Besides, this article highlights that intercultural interactions between people with and without disabilities could promote individual cultural knowledge. It is underlined the importance to involve schemes of cultural competences and intercultural interactions into higher education to facilitate more inclusive work environment.

Keywords: *Implicit attitudes; people with disability; intercultural interaction; cultural competence; higher education.*

1. Introduction

According to the World Report on Disability (World Health Organization, 2022), more than 16% of global population live with disability and majority of people with disability (PWD) potentially function effectively as workforce. Disability inclusion in workplace has been growingly highlighted by government policies and organizational initiatives in the last decade. However, stereotype and biases towards disability remaining as formidable obstacles which hinder the effective cooperation and interaction between employees with and without disabilities in the workplace (Bonaccio, Connelly and colleagues, 2019).

Explicit and implicit attitudes and towards disability predict the willingness and effectiveness of intercultural interactions between these two social groups. Explicit attitudes refer to more deliberative or intended response which vastly rely on motivationally and cognitively controlled factors. Comparatively, implicit attitudes can be characterized as the automatic association which individuals hold between an object/event with evaluation and it coincide with automatic emotional attitudes (Rudman, 2004) . Implicit attitudes better than explicit attitudes dominantly foretell individual behaviors, especially when it comes to the immoral issues like the attitudes towards disability. Comparison with universally positive explicit attitude towards disability, implicit attitudes towards employee with disabilities tend to be negatively tied with charity, inability and distrust. Empirical evidence has presented that traditional implicit attitudes towards disability negatively comprise pity, dependence and marginalization and hinder the appropriate treatment and rehabilitation for people with disabilities. This effectively explains the phenomenon that non-disabled employees feel stressed and discomfort when actually interacting with disabled employees, even though they identify not to discriminate against disabled employees. Extant study in Russia underlined that in spite of three-quarters of the respondents holding positive attitudes towards disability, only one quarter feel ready to interact with individuals with disabilities, and lack of interactive experience as the main reason raises fear to cooperate (Volosnikovaa & Efimovab, 2016). It is crucial for scholars and practitioners to further investigate individual implicit attitudes towards disability and its potential solutions.

It has been widely addressed that implicit attitudes primarily stem from affective experience and cultural biases. For instance, pleasant interactive experience with partners with disabilities leads to positive implicit attitudes towards disability. Evidence has emphasized the two-way correlation between affective experience with implicit attitudes (Songa, Slabbinck, Vermeir & Russo, 2019). Moreover, cultural milieu and biases towards individuals from different cultural background are highly related to implicit attitudes. The influence of cultural milieu on implicit attitudes offers the possibility that intercultural interaction experience may foster the positive implicit attitudes towards another sub-culture and culture. Besides, it has been shown that training regarding knowledge of disabilities significantly promote the positive attitudes towards disability (Packer, Iwasiw and

colleagues, 2000). Cultural knowledge refers to the knowledge which could allow a better grasp of the internal logic and modal behavior of the other culture, and the basic understanding for the behavior. This type of knowledge helps for adapting to the new culture (Thomas and colleagues, 2008). Cultural intelligence serves as the cognition facet of cultural intelligence, which is considered as the crucial competence for adapting and functioning in intercultural situations. It is reasonable to consider that individual with more cultural knowledge will be more adaptive and tolerant with other cultures and diverse contexts.

Therefore, this article hypothesizes:

1. 2. Interaction with people with disabilities correlates with individual implicit attitudes towards disability.
2. Intercultural interaction with people with disability correlates tot cultural knowledge about disability.
3. Individual cultural knowledge about disability correlates to implicit attitudes towards disability.

2. Method

It is arduous to collect implicit attitudes of individual by subjective self-report. Building on literature, Implicit Association Test (IAT) have been applied to investigate implicit attitudes. This article conducted the online survey via Google form among 112 university students (19-27 y, 50 male, 62 female, all physically able) from Ural Federal University (Yekaterinburg, Russia) and Institute of International Economic Relations (Moscow, Russia) in November and December, 2022. The survey totally comprises 4 questions about intercultural interactions, 6 questions about cultural knowledge and some questions about individual demographics of participants such as age, gander, education, work experience and position. 4 questions about intercultural interactions embodying 1) “do you have abroad experience”; 2) “do you speak second language”; 3) “frequency of cross-cultural interaction”; 4) “frequency of interaction with people with disabilities”. Questions about cultural knowledge are based on Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) (Ang, Van Dyne and colleagues, 2007) with seven-dimensional Likert form, including 1) “I know the legal and economic system of the other cultures”; 2) “I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages”; 3) “I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures”; 4) “I know the marriage systems of other cultures”; 5) “I know the arts and crafts of other cultures”; 6) “I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures”. Furthermore, this article applied Harvard Implicit Association Test about Disability and collected results of every participants.

3. Result

Through analysis via IBM SPSS Statistics 26, this article lists the correlations among intercultural interaction, cultural knowledge and implicit attitudes toward disability in the Table 1 as follows. Results support hypotheses of the article, intercultural interactions with people with disability positively correlate with implicit attitudes towards disability, as well, individual cultural knowledge about disability positively correlates to implicit attitude towards disability.

Table 1. Correlations among Intercultural interaction, cultural knowledge and implicit attitude.

Coefficient	Intercultural interaction	Cultural knowledge	Implicit attitude
Intercultural interaction	-	0.518*(0.031)	0.619**(0.007)
Cultural knowledge	0.518*(0.031)	-	0.213*(0.046)
Implicit attitude	0.619**(0.007)	0.213*(0.046)	-

Note: * indicates significance at 0.05 level; ** indicates significance at 0.01 level.

4. Discussion

According to results, negative implicit attitudes towards disability still commonly exist. While, this article proposes the new solution that intercultural interactions with disabled people and cultural knowledge about disability could improve implicit attitudes towards disability among students in the universities. The stereotypes towards people with disabilities represent the misunderstanding between different social and cultural groups. People with and without disabilities could be considered as two different cultural groups, which are provided with distinct traits and behavioral patterns. Thus, effective interaction between these two groups requires cultural competence. Both practical intercultural interaction and theoretical cultural knowledge could mitigate the stereotype and bias towards people with disabilities, and hold more positive attitudes towards the disabled in the daily study and work. The positive attitudes will let individuals more recognize and appreciate competencies of people with disabilities, which will lead real disability inclusion and productive cooperation between these two groups.

Current findings suggest the inclusion of cultural competencies into higher education. It has been highlighted that interactions with people with disabilities could ease negative implicit attitudes of individuals. In the university, it is crucial to provide opportunities of inclusive programs or events to enhance interactions between people with and without disabilities. As well, cultural competency-based schemes and programs should also be paid more attention

to develop students' cultural knowledge of disability and accordingly foster the better cooperation between employees with and without disabilities in the later work environment. More future research are needed to investigate detailed interculturally interactive and cultural competency-based schemes in the higher education.

Furthermore, this present study proposes the professional training program about cultural knowledge into inclusive employment, which will help the two cultural groups understand better about each other and ready for co-work. Except training program, events or activities involving intercultural interactions could also be concerned as the method for inclusive employment. Different kinds of interactions like work-related interaction and social interaction could be offered by workplaces in the way of training, regular workshop, team game, group travel, amusement event and so on. But it may be influenced by types of disabilities and degree of disabilities of individuals. For instance, for employees with blindness, organizational weekly reading day could be considered to involve employees without disabilities to learn books for the blind. More additional studies are needed to investigate the effective invention method for inclusive employment and education.

Lastly, this present article has several limitations. First, small sample has been collected by this article. Investigations for larger sample are required. Second, the implicit association test- attitudes towards disability is not adapted enough in Russia. More future studies are needed for checking its adaptation in Russia and with different social groups. Third, the questionnaire for intercultural interaction are self-developed, and it may be with more risks for reliability than standard scales. Forth, this study did not conduct the correlation with demographics factors, such as gender, education and work experience. These factors may impact for the correlations among intercultural interactions, cultural knowledge and individual implicit attitudes towards disabilities.

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