

Does Cross-Cultural Experience Foster Moral Judgment Competence in College Students?

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Research Questions

- Does cross-cultural experience foster moral judgment competence in college students?
- Is there a relationship between a service learning curriculum and moral judgment competence in college students?
- Is there a relationship between religiosity and moral judgment competence in college students?

Moral Judgment Competence

Measured using Lind's Moral Judgment Test (MJT)

Lind's (www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/mut/mjt-intro.htm) Moral Judgment Test (MJT) assesses the capacity to make moral decisions and judgments and to act accordingly. The MJT measures how a person deals with arguments that oppose his or her position on a difficult moral problem. The main score, the C-index, reflects the degree to which judgments about moral arguments are determined by moral reasoning as opposed to opinion agreement. The MJT confronts persons with a moral task, not only an assessment of moral attitudes or values. Persons who show consistency in their judgments of pro and contra arguments receive high competence scores.

C ranges from 1 to 100. C is sometimes graded low (1-9), medium (10 – 29), high (30 – 49) and very high (above 50).

College Population Characteristics

"Eastern Mennonite University is a liberal arts university with an Anabaptist faith tradition committed to preparing globally aware servant leaders for the twenty-first century. Our general education program, called the Global Village Curriculum, highlights cross-cultural learning as a cornerstone of the undergraduate experience."

The university could be characterized as religiously conservative and socially liberal.

Undergraduate students, the population studied, participate in a required cross-cultural program.

Students also participate in required community learning experiences.

A relatively high percentage of graduates work in international community development for relief and service agencies.

More than 75% of EMU faculty have lived and served abroad.

Cross-Cultural Program

The required cross-cultural seminars are faculty led.

Social justice issues are emphasized.

The cross-cultural seminars in the past two years included South Africa, Lithuania, Spain, Germany, Guatemala, Turkey, China, Peru, Vietnam, and India.

Most of the semester-long, and many of the 3-week experiences involve home-stays in the host culture.

Sample Demographic Data

Response rate 26% (180 out of about 700)

No cross-cultural 113

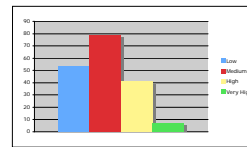
Cross-cultural 67 (low response rate)

Mean age: 21 Males: 60 Females: 120

Moral Judgment Data: C-Scores

Mean: 20.9 (comparable to published US data). Range: 1 - 76

Distribution:

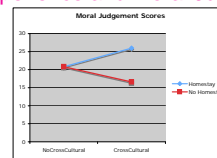


No overall change across years

No difference between males & females or academic majors

Correlation with age insignificant.

Cross-Cultural Experience and Moral Judgment Competence



Problem: relatively small sample of cross-cultural students

While differences are not statistically significant due to low N and high variance, the data does suggest that cross-cultural students with home-stay foster moral judgment competence, while cross-cultural students with no home-stay reduce moral judgment competence, relative to no cross-cultural.

Service Learning and Moral Judgment Competence

Statistically significant correlation between EMU required service learning hours and Moral Judgment Competence, $r = 0.17$ ($p = 0.026$).

No significant correlation between non-EMU community service hours and MJT scores.

Religiosity

I believe there is an almighty God	94%
I believe in life after death	87%
Through the Holy Bible God speaks directly to us	79%
One can be a moral person without believing in God	77%
I am a religious person	36%
I can be OK without religion	21%

Interesting item: I am a religious person

agree N = 65 32%

disagree N = 13 7%

unsure N = 102 57%

Significant item positive correlations with c-scores:

I can be OK without religion $r = 0.25^{**}$

One can be a moral person without believing in God $r = 0.17^*$

Inverse correlation:

Through the Holy Bible God speaks directly to us $r = -0.18^*$

Discussion

Because of low cross-cultural sample size and high variance, no firm conclusions can be made about the relationship between moral judgment scores and participation in a cross-cultural experience. However, there is an indication ($p = .11$) that cross-cultural students with home-stays increase moral judgment scores, while cross-cultural students without home-stays decrease moral judgment scores, relative to no cross-cultural experience.

The cross-cultural findings could be interpreted in light of prior findings (Schillinger, 2006) that students in certain "unfavorable" (with lower opportunities for responsibility-taking) learning environments actually decrease in MJT scores. That scores increase for cross-cultural students with home-stays may indicate a "favorable" learning environment.

There was a significant positive correlation between university required service learning hours and moral judgment scores ($r = .17$), in contrast to no significant correlation between moral judgment scores and community service outside the EMU curriculum.

Moral judgment scores were correlated with self-reported measures of religiosity. The most diagnostic item was "I can be OK without religion" ($r = 0.25$). Overall, higher religiosity scores predict lower c-scores.

The overall pattern of responses to religiosity items indicates some ambivalence about identifying oneself as a religious person. While 94% of respondents believe in God, only 32% agree that they are religious persons.

It seems plausible that the cross-cultural experiences are interacting with religious identity. This needs further research.