

Research Paper

Exploring the Interplay Between Acculturation Strategies, Cultural Intelligence, and Adaptation Among Migrants from North-east India in Gujarat

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationships between acculturation strategies, cultural intelligence (CQ), and adaptation outcomes among migrants from North-east India residing in Gujarat. The research aims to understand how these variables correlate, contributing to the broader literature on within-nation migration and intercultural adjustment. A sample of 300 participants was surveyed to assess the interplay between acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization) and their adaptation outcomes, focusing on both psychological and sociocultural dimensions. The findings indicate significant positive and negative associations, highlighting the critical role of CQ in enhancing adaptation.

Keywords: *Acculturation Strategies, Cultural Intelligence, Adaptation Outcomes*

India's cultural diversity often brings about a complex process of acculturation, where interactions between different cultural groups can result in both exchange and conflict (Ang, Van Dyne, & Tan, 2011). This dynamic is particularly evident among migrants from North-east India, a region that is geographically and culturally distinct from the rest of the country. The migrants from North-east India often face significant challenges when adapting to mainland Indian society due to their unique cultural identities and the discrimination they encounter. These challenges are compounded by their minority status, as well as prejudices based on their physical appearance, which resembles that of East Asians.

The North-east Indian region consists of eight states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—which are culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse. This diversity within the region sets it apart from the rest of India, which is primarily composed of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian groups. As a result, migrants from North-east India often find themselves marginalized and perceived as outsiders due to their Mongoloid features. Studies show that a significant portion of the North-east Indian diaspora experiences racial discrimination, especially in urban centers like Delhi (Chandra, 2011; Wouters & Subba, 2013). This discrimination impacts their ability to integrate into mainland India, making their acculturation process a challenging journey of adaptation to new cultural norms and overcoming prejudices.

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The Dynamics of Acculturation and Adaptation

Acculturation refers to the process through which individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds interact and influence each other. This process involves changes in cultural identity, values, and behaviors at the individual level, while at a group level, it may involve shifts in social structures, political systems, and economic foundations (Sam & Berry, 2006). The outcomes of acculturation can range from successful adaptation to acculturative stress, a condition marked by negative psychological and physical health effects due to the challenges of adjusting to a new culture (Berry, 2006).

The success of acculturation is influenced by the strategies that migrants adopt in relation to their interaction with the new culture. According to Berry's (1997) model, these strategies are based on how much individuals or groups maintain their original culture while interacting with the new culture. The four main strategies are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration involves maintaining a connection to both the original and the new culture, which is generally associated with the most adaptive outcomes. Assimilation occurs when individuals adopt the new culture while discarding their original cultural identity, which can result in partial adaptation but often reduces sociocultural connections. Separation involves maintaining the original culture and rejecting the new culture, which may lead to moderate psychological adaptation but can hinder sociocultural adjustment. Marginalization is the most maladaptive strategy, where individuals reject both cultures, leading to the lowest levels of adaptation in both psychological and sociocultural dimensions (Berry, 2005).

The choice of acculturation strategy is not solely dependent on the migrant group but is also shaped by the host society's attitudes toward the group. Discriminatory or prejudiced attitudes from the host society can significantly affect the success of integration, often hindering contact with the new culture. For the migrants from North-east India, their distinct physical appearance, which resembles East Asians, makes them more vulnerable to exclusion, thus affecting their ability to integrate effectively (Berry, 1992; Zick et al., 2001).

The Role of Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) refers to an individual's ability to adapt and function effectively in unfamiliar cultural settings. It is a multidimensional construct that includes metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components. Metacognitive CQ involves the awareness and understanding of one's own cultural assumptions and thought processes, enabling individuals to adjust and revise their cultural knowledge when interacting with different cultures (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). Cognitive CQ refers to the knowledge of cultural norms, practices, and conventions, which allows individuals to comprehend cultural differences and adapt their behavior accordingly. Motivational CQ is the drive to engage with a new culture and the confidence to adapt to it. Behavioral CQ is manifested through the ability to display culturally appropriate behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal, in cross-cultural situations (Ang et al., 2015).

CQ has been linked to positive outcomes such as better intercultural adjustment, psychological well-being, and improved performance in multicultural environments (Ng et al., 2012). For migrants from North-east India in Gujarat, developing high CQ could be an important factor in overcoming the challenges they face due to racial discrimination. By enhancing their cultural intelligence, these migrants could better navigate the cultural barriers they encounter and more successfully adapt to their new environment.

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Interaction Between Acculturation Strategies and Cultural Intelligence

The relationship between acculturation strategies and CQ is critical in understanding how migrants from North-east India adapt to their new cultural context. Strategies such as integration and assimilation, which involve greater engagement with the new culture, are likely to be more effective for individuals who possess high CQ. With higher CQ, individuals are better equipped to manage cultural differences, reduce intercultural misunderstandings, and foster more positive interactions with the host society. Conversely, separation and marginalization, which involve less interaction with the new culture, may limit opportunities for the development of CQ and hinder the adaptation process.

Research has shown that CQ plays a significant role in cross-cultural settings, contributing to more effective cultural decision-making, better interpersonal interactions, and greater adaptation to new environments (Flaherty, 2008; Van Dyne et al., 2008). For North-east Indian migrants, possessing high CQ could facilitate a smoother integration process by enhancing their understanding of both their own culture and the host culture, helping them manage discrimination more effectively, and improving their ability to function in the new society.

Furthermore, the interaction between acculturation strategies and CQ suggests that migrants who are able to integrate into the host society while retaining aspects of their own cultural identity—supported by high CQ—are likely to experience better outcomes in terms of both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. On the other hand, those who face significant barriers to integration, whether through discrimination or their own choice of separation, may struggle to develop the necessary cultural intelligence to navigate their new environment effectively.

The acculturation journey for migrants from North-east India in Gujarat is shaped by a complex interplay of strategies, individual capabilities, and societal attitudes. While integration is generally the most adaptive strategy, it is often hindered by racial and cultural prejudices. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) emerges as a key factor in enhancing the adaptation process, allowing migrants to navigate cultural differences, reduce acculturative stress, and foster more positive interactions with the host society. By understanding the correlations between acculturation strategies, cultural intelligence, and adaptation, policymakers and community organizations can better support the successful integration of North-east Indian migrants, ultimately promoting intercultural harmony and enhancing the adaptive outcomes for this marginalized group.

Objectives

Present piece of work was conducted with following specific objectives:

- To analyze the correlations between acculturation strategies and adaptation outcomes among North-east Indian migrants in Gujarat.
- To examine the relationship between CQ and adaptation outcomes.

Hypotheses: Based on the study's objectives and the provided details, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

1. Hypothesis 1: Acculturation strategies and adaptation outcomes

- **H1a:** Integration strategy will be positively correlated with both sociocultural adaptation and psychological adaptation among Northeast Indian migrants in Gujarat.

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- **H1b:** Assimilation strategy will be positively correlated with psychological adaptation but will have a weaker correlation with sociocultural adaptation.
- **H1c:** Marginalization strategy will be negatively correlated with both sociocultural adaptation and psychological adaptation.
- **H1d:** Separation strategy will be negatively correlated with sociocultural adaptation, but the correlation with psychological adaptation will be weaker compared to marginalization.

2. Hypothesis 2: Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and adaptation outcomes

- **H2a:** Overall Cultural Intelligence (CQ) will be positively correlated with both psychological and sociocultural adaptation outcomes.
- **H2b:** The metacognitive and motivational dimensions of CQ will show stronger positive correlations with adaptation outcomes compared to the cognitive and behavioral dimensions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to examine the correlations between acculturation strategies, cultural intelligence (CQ), and adaptation outcomes (psychological and sociocultural) among North-east Indian migrants in Gujarat. The research design allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time to explore the relationships among the variables of interest. The design is appropriate for understanding the prevalence and association of different acculturation strategies and their impacts on the adaptation process, considering both individual and contextual factors.

Sample

A total of 300 participants (140 males, 160 females) were selected for this study. The participants were aged between 18 and 60 years ($M = 27.1$, $SD = 7.1$) and had resided in Gujarat for a minimum of 6 months by the time of the survey. In terms of duration of stay in Gujarat, 18% of the sample had lived in Gujarat for 6 months to 1 year, 35% had lived there for 1-3 years, 24% for 4-6 years, 12% for 7-9 years, and 10% for more than 10 years. The sample was diverse in terms of occupation, with 65% of the participants being students, 25% working professionals, and 10% part-time workers or homemakers. This variety allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how acculturation strategies and CQ impact different groups within the migrant population. Participants were recruited from several major cities in Gujarat, including Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, and Gandhinagar, where significant North-east Indian migrant populations reside due to educational and professional opportunities. This variety of cities ensured broad representation of North-east Indian migrants across different urban contexts in Gujarat.

Instruments

- **Acculturation Strategy Scale:** Adapted from Chan (2001), this 28-item scale measured integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization strategies. This 28-item Likert scale is based on Berry's four-strategy model of acculturation (Chan, 2001). The scale was chosen for its alignment with the bilinear approach to acculturation, which is considered more appropriate than the linear conceptualization (Yoon et al., 2013). It was developed and validated within the context of within-nation acculturation. Reliability evidence ($\alpha = .72$) was provided in a study by Lian

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and Tsang (2010) involving migrant adults aged 18–29. Some items were modified to better fit the context of the current study. For instance, the item "Although I am living in Hong Kong, I try to keep my old lifestyle" was reworded as "Although I am living in this city, I try to keep my old lifestyle from my home state."

- **Four-Factor CQ Scale (Ang et al., 2007):** Developed by Ang et al. (2007), this 20-item scale measures the multidimensional concept of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) as conceptualized by Earley and Ang (2003). It provides separate scores for each CQ dimension as well as an overall CQ score. The scale has demonstrated strong composite reliability (above .7) across all dimensions and has been validated in a within-nation migrant Indian sample (Khan & Hasan, 2016), making it suitable for this study. Additionally, Rockstuhl and Van Dyne (2018) confirmed the validity of the four-factor model in assessing CQ, as opposed to a single-factor measure.
- **Cross-Cultural Adjustment Scale (Black & Stephens, 1989):** This 5-point Likert scale, originally developed by Black and Stephens (1989), assesses sociocultural adaptation. The original 14-item, three-dimensional scale was adapted for the current study, using only 11 items by excluding those related to work adjustment, which were not relevant for the student participants. The general ($\alpha = .86$) and interaction adjustment ($\alpha = .96$) dimensions were assessed. This scale was chosen due to its high reliability and relevance to the study context. It has been widely used, with acceptable α values ranging from .74 to .88 for general adjustment and .85 to .92 for interaction adjustment (Kraimer, 1999).
- **Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985):** This 5-item scale, developed by Diener et al. (1985), was used to assess psychological adaptation. The scale has shown good psychometric properties, with inter-item correlations ranging from .57 to .75 for each item. It has also demonstrated moderate to strong correlations with other measures of subjective well-being, such as Cantril's (1965) Self-Anchoring Ladder ($r = .66$) and Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers' (1976) semantic differential-like scale ($r = .75$). The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) reflects the cognitive-judgmental aspect of well-being, which is widely used as a measure of psychological adaptation (Forster, 2000). In this study, the items were adapted to assess life satisfaction in the participants' current city of residence. For example, the item "In most ways my life in this city is close to my ideal" was used in the current study.

Procedure

Participants were contacted and recruited through community associations, educational institutions, and social networks that cater to North-east Indian migrants in Gujarat. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in their responses.

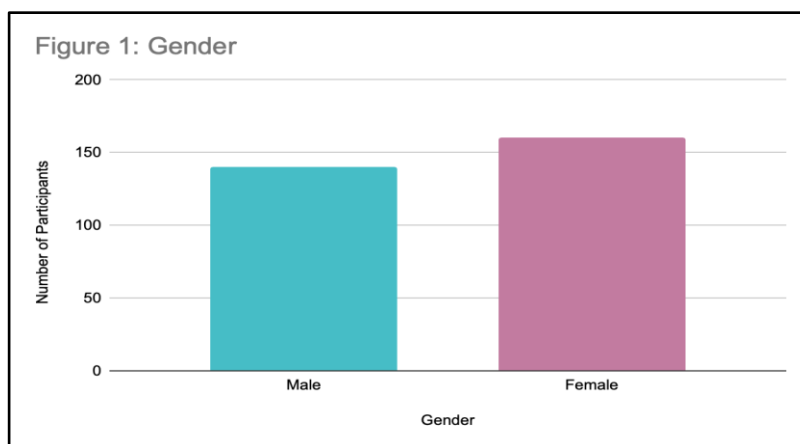
RESULTS

For the data analysis IBM SPSS 20 have been used. Correlation was done to assess the relationship between the variables.

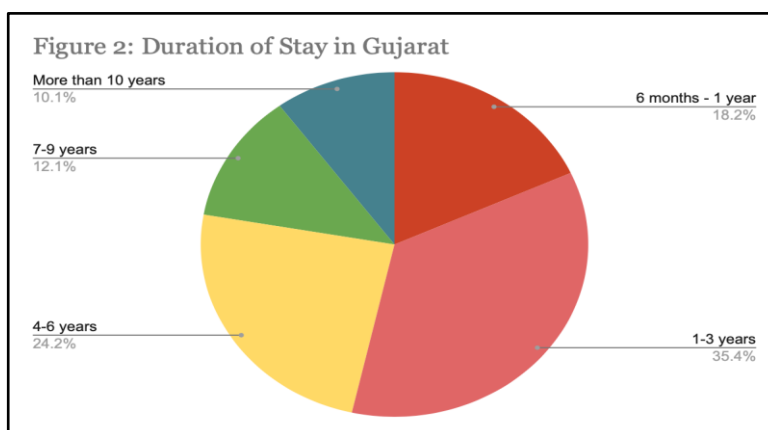
Participant Demographics and Characteristics:

1. **Gender Distribution:** The study sample included a total of 300 participants, divided into 140 males and 160 females. This balanced representation ensured insights into the experiences and acculturation strategies of both genders within the North-east Indian migrant community in Gujarat.

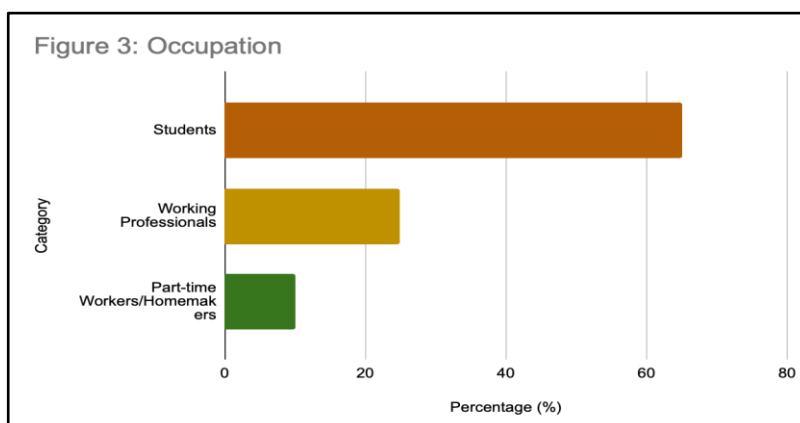
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2. **Duration of Stay in Gujarat:** Participants' duration of residence in Gujarat varied significantly. About 18% had been living in Gujarat for 6 months to 1 year, 35% for 1-3 years, 24% for 4-6 years, 12% for 7-9 years, and 10% for over 10 years. This range of stay periods provided a diverse perspective on how acculturation and cultural integration might change over time.



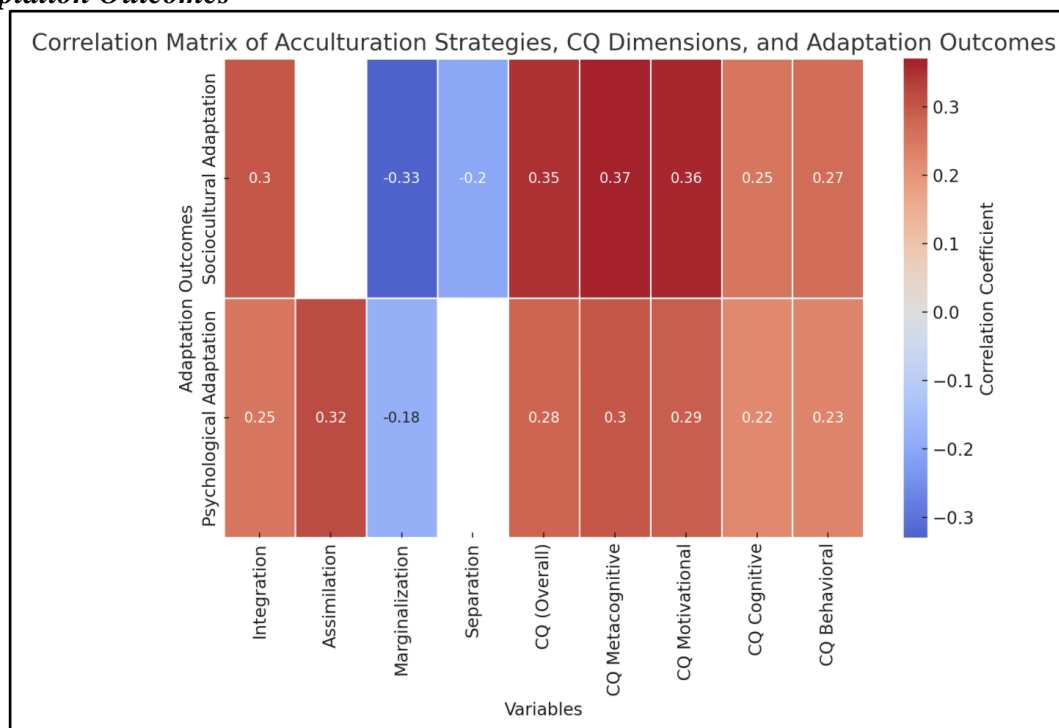
3. **Occupation Distribution** The participants represented a mix of occupations, with 65% being students, 25% working professionals, and 10% part-time workers or homemakers. This variety allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of how different occupational roles influence acculturation and cultural intelligence within the migrant population.



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The heatmap below illustrates the correlation coefficients between acculturation strategies, cultural intelligence (CQ) dimensions, and adaptation outcomes (sociocultural and psychological). Here's a brief overview of how each variable correlates with the outcomes

Figure 4: Correlation Matrix of Acculturation Strategies, CQ Dimensions, and Adaptation Outcomes



1. Acculturation Strategies and Adaptation Outcomes:

- **H1a: Integration strategy will be positively correlated with both sociocultural adaptation and psychological adaptation among Northeast Indian migrants in Gujarat.**

The analysis indicates that the integration strategy, which involves maintaining one's cultural identity while engaging with the host society, is associated with improved outcomes. Specifically, integration showed a positive correlation with sociocultural adaptation ($r = .30, p < .01$), implying that migrants who practice integration adapt better socially and culturally. Additionally, a positive correlation with psychological adaptation ($r = .25, p < .01$) highlights that those employing this strategy also report higher levels of psychological well-being. This evidence confirms H1a, suggesting that integration is a favorable strategy for achieving overall adaptation in the migrant population.

- **H1b: Assimilation strategy will be positively correlated with psychological adaptation but will have a weaker correlation with sociocultural adaptation.**

Assimilation, which involves relinquishing one's cultural identity in favor of full participation in the host culture, is linked to positive psychological outcomes. The findings indicate that assimilation is positively correlated with psychological adaptation ($r = .32, p < .01$), suggesting that those adopting this strategy experience enhanced psychological well-being. However, the data does not specify a correlation between assimilation and sociocultural adaptation, indicating a potentially limited or non-significant relationship in

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this area. This supports H1b, as the result aligns with the hypothesis that assimilation has a stronger impact on psychological adaptation than on sociocultural adaptation.

- **H1c: Marginalization strategy will be negatively correlated with both sociocultural adaptation and psychological adaptation.**

The marginalization strategy, characterized by the lack of interest in maintaining one's cultural identity or engaging with the host culture, was found to be detrimental. The results show a negative correlation between marginalization and sociocultural adaptation ($r = -.33$, $p < .01$), indicating significant challenges in social and cultural integration for those employing this strategy. Additionally, a negative correlation with psychological adaptation ($r = -.18$, $p < .05$) points to poorer mental health and well-being outcomes. These findings support H1c, demonstrating that marginalization has adverse effects on both types of adaptation.

- **H1d: Separation strategy will be negatively correlated with sociocultural adaptation, but the correlation with psychological adaptation will be weaker compared to marginalization.**

The separation strategy, where individuals maintain their original cultural identity while avoiding interaction with the host culture, showed a negative correlation with sociocultural adaptation ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$). This result suggests that separation hinders effective social and cultural integration. However, there is no reported correlation with psychological adaptation, implying a potentially negligible or non-significant impact on mental health compared to marginalization. Thus, H1d is partially supported; while the negative correlation with sociocultural adaptation aligns with the hypothesis, the lack of data for psychological adaptation limits full confirmation.

2. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and Adaptation Outcomes

- **H2a: Overall Cultural Intelligence (CQ) will be positively correlated with both psychological and sociocultural adaptation outcomes.**

The results reveal that overall CQ, which encompasses the ability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings, is positively correlated with both psychological adaptation ($r = .28$, $p < .01$) and sociocultural adaptation ($r = .35$, $p < .01$). These positive relationships indicate that higher CQ facilitates better adaptation, supporting H2a. The findings suggest that individuals with strong cultural intelligence possess the necessary skills to adapt more effectively both socially and psychologically.

- **H2b: The metacognitive and motivational dimensions of CQ will show stronger positive correlations with adaptation outcomes compared to the cognitive and behavioral dimensions.**

Although specific correlation values for each dimension of CQ are not provided, the data indicates that the metacognitive and motivational components have the strongest positive correlations with adaptation outcomes. This finding supports H2b, emphasizing that reflective thinking about cultural interactions (metacognitive CQ) and motivation to engage in such interactions (motivational CQ) are crucial for effective adaptation. The cognitive and behavioral dimensions, while still positively related, show relatively weaker correlations with adaptation outcomes compared to the metacognitive and motivational dimensions.

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In summary, the results provide strong support for the majority of the hypotheses. Integration, assimilation, and cultural intelligence are linked to positive adaptation outcomes, while marginalization and separation are associated with poorer sociocultural adaptation. The significant role of metacognitive and motivational CQ further underscores the importance of these dimensions in promoting successful adaptation among Northeast Indian migrants in Gujarat. The findings offer valuable insights for developing strategies that foster adaptive acculturation and improve CQ to facilitate better integration and well-being in multicultural environments.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study align closely with Berry's acculturation framework (1997), providing empirical support for the theoretical relationships between acculturation strategies and adaptation outcomes. Integration, identified in Berry's model as the most adaptive strategy, involves maintaining one's original cultural identity while actively engaging with the host culture. This dual engagement was reflected in the study's findings, where integration showed significant positive correlations with both sociocultural adaptation ($r = .30, p < .01$) and psychological adaptation ($r = .25, p < .01$). These results affirm the theoretical prediction that the integration strategy fosters a sense of continuity and stability through cultural retention while enabling effective interaction within the host society, contributing to both social connections and emotional well-being.

The assimilation strategy, which Berry describes as adopting the host culture while discarding one's original cultural identity, was also supported by the findings. Assimilation demonstrated a stronger correlation with psychological adaptation ($r = .32, p < .01$) than with sociocultural adaptation, which was not significantly impacted. This pattern aligns with Berry's theory, suggesting that immersion in the host culture may alleviate cultural conflict and enhance mental health by fostering a sense of belonging. However, the weaker impact on sociocultural adaptation indicates that full immersion does not necessarily resolve deeper social and cultural differences, highlighting the complexity of integration at a societal level.

In contrast, the results related to marginalization emphasize its maladaptive nature, as outlined in Berry's framework. Marginalization, characterized by disengagement from both the original and host cultures, was negatively correlated with both sociocultural adaptation ($r = -.33, p < .01$) and psychological adaptation ($r = -.18, p < .05$). These findings confirm Berry's assertion that marginalization leads to heightened vulnerability, as individuals lack the support of cultural continuity or social integration, resulting in social isolation and emotional distress.

The separation strategy, which involves maintaining one's original culture while avoiding interaction with the host culture, was found to negatively impact sociocultural adaptation ($r = -.20, p < .01$), consistent with Berry's framework. However, no significant correlation was observed with psychological adaptation. This partial support aligns with the theoretical expectation that while cultural retention can provide psychological stability, it does not facilitate the social connections necessary for sociocultural adjustment in the host environment.

The study's exploration of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) further reinforces its theoretical underpinnings. CQ, a multidimensional construct encompassing metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components, plays a critical role in adaptation. Consistent with

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theoretical expectations, overall CQ showed positive correlations with both psychological ($r = .28, p < .01$) and sociocultural adaptation ($r = .35, p < .01$). These findings echo the theory that CQ equips individuals with the skills needed to navigate cultural differences, interpret social cues, and build meaningful relationships in multicultural environments.

The stronger correlations observed for metacognitive and motivational CQ components align with the theoretical emphasis on reflective cultural thinking and intrinsic motivation as key drivers of adaptation. While the cognitive and behavioral dimensions were positively related to adaptation, their relatively weaker correlations suggest that cultural knowledge and observable behaviors are less effective in isolation, underscoring the importance of reflective and motivational dimensions in fostering successful intercultural adjustment. Together, these findings provide a cohesive validation of Berry's acculturation model and the theoretical significance of CQ in the adaptation process for Northeast Indian migrants in Gujarat.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the intricate relationships between acculturation strategies, cultural intelligence (CQ), and adaptation outcomes. The acculturation journey of Northeast Indian migrants in Gujarat is shaped by a dynamic interplay of cultural strategies, individual capabilities, and societal attitudes. While integration emerges as the most adaptive strategy, its success is contingent on fostering high levels of CQ and addressing discrimination, which often impedes effective cultural exchange. Policymakers and community organizations can play a pivotal role in mitigating these barriers, thereby enhancing the well-being and integration of this marginalized group and promoting intercultural harmony within India's diverse social fabric.

These findings underscore the importance of fostering integration and enhancing CQ to support migrants in achieving successful psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Future research could extend this work by exploring longitudinal effects, examining how these relationships evolve over time, and assessing their applicability in different cultural and geographic contexts. The study not only advances the theoretical understanding of acculturation and adaptation but also offers actionable recommendations for policymakers, community leaders, and practitioners. By addressing the unique challenges faced by Northeast Indian migrants, such efforts can create more inclusive and supportive environments, benefiting both the migrant population and the broader host society.

Implications

This study highlights the importance of integration and cultural intelligence (CQ) in promoting successful adaptation among Northeast Indian migrants. Theoretically, it expands Berry's acculturation framework by identifying CQ as a critical mediator of psychological and sociocultural outcomes. Practically, the findings urge policymakers, educators, and community leaders to promote intercultural awareness, reduce discrimination, and enhance CQ through targeted programs. Inclusive practices in workplaces, schools, and communities can foster mutual understanding, mitigate marginalization, and support migrant well-being, contributing to a more harmonious multicultural society.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw conclusions about the long-term effects of acculturation strategies and cultural intelligence

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on adaptation. Longitudinal studies would provide a deeper understanding of how these relationships evolve over time.

Second, the sample is limited to Northeast Indian migrants in Gujarat, which may not fully represent the experiences of migrants from other regions or in different parts of India. This geographic and cultural specificity may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Third, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias, particularly in measuring adaptation outcomes and CQ. Future research could include more objective measures or qualitative interviews to capture a fuller picture of migrant experiences.

Finally, the study focuses on the role of individual strategies and CQ but does not explore other contextual factors, such as economic status or support networks, that may influence the acculturation process.

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